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Change and Stasis:

Assessing the Influence of Stereotyping and Intertextuality in British Travelogues of late-Qajar Iran: 1880-1905

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2024

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Abstract

Tropes and stereotypes played a significant role in the mentalities of the British empire, reducing subject populations to a simplistic list of essential characteristics and thereby denigrating their capacity for change or advancement. While Iran was not formally colonised in the 19th Century, the Iranians were still heavily stereotyped, primarily through travel literature which purported to present an accurate impression of the land and its peoples. Iran is also unique in this regard as there was extensive precedence for the characterisation of the Iranians as an archetypal eastern 'Other'. This stemmed from British reception of the Greco-Roman sources which, while poorly understood through the public school system, were venerated as the genesis of white, Western culture, influencing Victorian conceptualisations of empire. Tropes contained in Orientalist literature of the 18th and 19th Centuries expanded upon this view of Iran; with depictions of Iranians characterised by despotism, cruelty, greed, cowardice, deception, and debauched sexuality. Additionally, the anxieties of empire and significant changes within Iran itself further shaped perceptions of Iran in British travelogues. This thesis examines these intersections of stereotyping and their impact upon British perceptions of Iran through close analysis of three influential English travelogues of the late-Qajar period, produced between 1880 and 1905. These are George Nathaniel Curzon's *Persia and the Persian Question*, Edward Granville Browne's *A Year Amongst the Persians*, and Percy Molesworth Sykes' *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia, or Eight Years in Iran.* By gauging these texts' adherence to, and deviation from, pre-existing stereotypes, this research aims to assess their engagement with themes of continuity and change and thus better understand the intertextual origins of contemporary British perceptions of Iran.

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Acknowledgements

This project began with the aim to examine the historical memory of 19th Century British travellers in Iran, and to explore how the travelogues they produced might still exert influence over the framing of cross-cultural encounters. However, with fieldwork in Iran planned for Summer 2020, this was completely disrupted by the global pandemic. The worsening security situation in Iran, coupled with the researcher's status as a dual national, has rendered subsequent fieldwork impossible. As a result, the emphasis of the project shifted to dissecting the act of travel itself, particularly the knowledge frameworks which informed the conceptualisation of the destination, and its inhabitants, before the journey even took place.

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Note on Transliteration, Terms, and Referencing

The presentation of Iranian names and terms in the British travelogues which comprise the core research material of this thesis varies widely, so a standard transliteration has been adopted within the main body of the text (i.e. Isfahan, rather than Esfahan or Ispahan; Bushehr rather than Bushire), while preserving all original transliterations in direct quotations. Iranian names and terms are transliterated in a simple standard form with only essential diacritics for ease of comprehension, as this thesis is primarily an analysis of Anglophone sources.

The terms Iran/Iranian and Persia/Persian have consciously been used interchangeably throughout this thesis, as both appear in the primary sources, along with pejorative terms such as 'Asiatic', 'Oriental' etc., which are presented in single quotation marks when used within the body of the text. All direct quotations and theoretical terms are also presented in single quotation marks.

This thesis employs the Chicago style of referencing appropriate for an interdisciplinary humanities thesis. References are presented as numbered footnotes with a full bibliography presented at the end of the text (pp.330-358). For example: the full bibliographical entry would be, Majd, H., *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ: The Paradox of Modern Iran,* (London, 2009). The initial footnote includes a longer entry, i.e. H. Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ,* (London, 2009), 1. with subsequent citations of the same source presented in a shortened form, i.e. Majd, (2009), 1. Greco-Roman sources are referenced in abbreviated form according to the OCD, with a full reference including the translation used listed on the first page of the bibliography (p.330).

Introduction

Names and the stereotypes associated with them have incredible power to shape expectations and perceptions. When asked to state their first impressions in relation to the words ‘Persia’ and ‘Iran’, the responses of British students are telling. ‘Iran’, the endonym, originating from the Avestan *airyānąm*, largely evokes associations with the Islamic Republic; conjuring images of stern ayatollahs, public executions, fanatically chanting crowds, and *chador*-veiled women. ‘Persia’, the exonym originating from the ancient Greek *Pérsēs* (Πέρσης), itself an adaptation of the Old Persian *Pārsa* transmitted into English via the Latin *Persia*, provokes more varied responses. These range from the obvious “cats and carpets” to more abstract concepts such as “decadence,” “harem” and “oriental.”[1] Both names are laden with their own baggage and their use can, in different contexts, signify political allegiance or generational identity. For example, many Iranians in the diaspora refer to their food, music, and language as Persian, in some instances as an attempt to remain distinct from the pejorative associations with Iran which are widely held in Europe and North America.[2] The sources examined within this thesis also generally use the term. Within contemporary academia on the other hand, Iran/Iranian is predominantly used and has been in use since the late 19th Century, although the association with the related term Aryan has accumulated its own baggage through its use within racial ideology and socio-biology. This thesis consciously employs both terms to undercut the perception of distance between them, and in acknowledgment of the appearance of both in the travelogues which constitute the primary research material of this thesis. The most striking result of questioning British students on their differing reactions to Iran and Persia was the fact that not all were aware that these names refer to the same entity, and that the associations made with both names relied exclusively on stereotypes absorbed from the media and films such as *300* and *Argo*, rather than direct experience or knowledge of Iran, or interactions with actual Iranians.[3]

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[1] S.W. Pieper, ‘Stereotyping Iran in Britain’, PubhD London, presentation, (11. Dec 2017), a short presentation to interdisciplinary doctoral students from across London universities, during which I asked the audience to voice initial reactions to both terms.

[2] H. Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ,* (London, 2009), 161-3.

This disconnect, between expectation and reality, is further underlined by recent events in Iran itself. The killing of Jina Amini by the *Gasht-e Ershad* (morality police) in September 2022 shocked many across Iran. The death of this young Kurdish woman, better known internationally as 'Mahsa', her state-sanctioned name, sparked a wave of protest and outright revolt against the state.[4] British commentators and journalists have struggled to quantify this groundswell of resistance; its leaderless, female-organised, and often minority-ethnic character confounding preconceptions still often rooted in orientalism and misogyny.[5] Coverage of the protests also largely hinged on the question of whether this resistance would 'succeed', namely lead to the overthrow of the Islamic Republic. This has been followed by a palpable loss of media attention when the regime did not fall in a matter of weeks or months. It became apparent that much of the British media possessed only two narratives it could comfortably draw on in relation to Iran: the worst excesses of the theocratic regime, or its imminent collapse, further underlining the shallowness of knowledge and lack of nuance in contemporary perceptions and echoing the British reaction to a much earlier Iranian uprising. When, in 1906, the Qajar Shah Mozaffar ad-Din was faced by then-unprecedented demands for the establishment of a *majlis* (parliament) and limits on royal power, British correspondents reacted with consternation, believing the Iranians a cowed and apathetic people inured to tyranny and interested only in self-preservation.[6] Stereotyped, essentialised, homogenised, and generally superficial British portrayals of Iran have a long provenance of overlooking, discounting, or obscuring change.

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[3] W. Kofler, '300 und eine Nacht: Perser und Griechen als Opfer von Erzählkonventionen bei Herodot und Frank Miller?' in *Herodot und das Persische Weltreich*, R. Rollinger, B. Truschnegg and R. Bichler (eds.), (Wiesbaden, 2011), 164-9; Pieper, (2017).

[4] N. De Hoog and E. Morresi, 'Mapping Iran's Unrest', *The Guardian,* (31. Oct. 2022), accessed 30.11.23.

[5] J. Hanrahan and S. Shalmashi, 'How Jina Mahsa Amini's Murder set Iran's Regime on Fire', *Popular Front* (30. Sept. 2022), accessed 21.05.23.

Stereotyping itself has long functioned as a key ideological tool in the process of colonisation and empire-building. Whether Gael, Native American, African, Indian, Chinese, or Arab, the discourse of the British ruling class relegated them all to a second grade of humanity; passively 'Othering' them and, at times, actively dehumanising them to underscore their own perceived cultural and moral superiority and thus justify imperial hegemony. In the case of Iran, British imperial discourse possessed deeper roots due to the legacy of the ancient Greek and Roman texts which held a privileged position in Victorian British culture and its system of public-school education which produced the ideologues of empire. Edward Said's *Orientalism* described the ancient Greeks as 'the first Orientalists', highlighting consistent efforts to 'Other' the Iranians as evidence that there was commonality between classical and modern patterns of perception.[7] Yet the study of these two orientalising traditions, ancient and imperial, are largely approached as separate, if not unrelated, phenomena. This risks underestimating the impact of classicism on the conceptualisation of empire and perceptions of 'the East' in the Victorian imagination.[8] The Greco-Roman sources were not treated critically, but rather came to symbolise the genesis of European culture and identity. Their popularisation in Europe during the renaissance would go on to inspire neoclassicism and, at its most extreme, manifested itself in the use of the Greco-Roman writers in the self-mythologising of fascist Italy and the Third Reich.[9] These texts appealed to ultra-nationalist and imperialist sentiments in part due to their world view, which placed themselves at the civilised centre of the world and designated peoples out with that linguistic and cultural sphere as ‘barbarians’, primitive by comparison, their very humanity in question.[10]

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[6] G.P. Nash, *Empire to Orient,* (London, 2005), 7.

[7] E.W. Said, *Orientalism,* (London, 1978), 17.

[8] P. Vasunia, 'Hellenism and Empire', *Parallax 9.4,* (2003), 91.

[9] J. Wiesehöfer, 'Achaimeniden in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus' in *Achaemenid History III,* A. Kuhrt and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (eds.), (Leiden, 1988), 3-5.

This distinction proved problematic when the Greeks or Romans encountered the pre-Islamic ‘Persian’ empires; Achaemenid (550-330 BCE), Parthian (247 BCE-224 CE) and Sassanian (224-651 CE), as they were confronted by civilizations with complex hierarchical societies whose military strength, economic power, and administrative structures often outclassed their own.[11] Greek reactions to the Achaemenid empire indeed display a noticeable degree of defensiveness in their assertion of Greek chauvinism.[12] Actively forced to confront the ‘Other’ in the East, these authors reacted with a mixture of fear, condescension, and disgust, mingled with fascination and awe.[13] This gradually evolved into a ‘Manichean’ world view, dividing West from East, lauding the values and ingenuity of the former while demonising the latter as the source of corruption and tyranny. Though the 19th Century context of British travellers engaging with Qajar Iran represented a drastic reversal of this power-dynamic, adherence to a belief in an unbridgeable divide between West and East is also apparent in their travelogues and the wider contemporary discourse. Cannadine criticises this mentality, highlighting how ‘those very categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’… frequently reveal themselves to be unstable and ambiguous; they often prove to be incoherent even in the thick of their confrontations with the implacable foe; and they are held together not so much by shared self-awareness as by the exhortations of leaders… and by some historians, too.’[14] Frantz Fanon similarly pointed to a Manichean worldview, in the context of colonialism, as the ultimate justification for the horrific scale of violence employed by

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[10] P. Georges, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience,* (Baltimore MD, 1994), 37.
[11] B. Lincoln, *Happiness for Mankind,* (Leuven, 2012), xix.
[12] T. Harrison, *Writing Ancient Persia,* (London, 2011), 124.
[13] E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarians,* (Oxford, 1989), 9.
[14] D. Cannadine, *The Undivided Past,* (London, 2013), 8.

European empires; another ‘us or them confrontation’.[15] Additionally, Fanon asserted that a Manichean division affected both sides of this binary: ‘to the theory of the ‘absolute evil of the native’ the theory of the ‘absolute evil of the settler’ replies.’[16] However, with Iran remaining outside direct imperial control in the 19th Century, for the British this ‘confrontation’ often took place through travellers transforming their experiences of encountering the ‘Other’ into travelogues. These would be published upon their return to Britain, marketed to the reading public as tantalising windows onto an alien world.

The process of creating this travelogue literature was far from straightforward, and British travellers in Iran during the reigns of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (r.1848-1896) and his successor Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar (r.1896-1907) were often subject to conflicting influences and challenges. Some travellers cultivated a personal interest in Persian culture, primarily through the appreciation of poetry, literature, and the visual arts. The standard of language learning was generally poor, however, with few travellers able to converse fluently in Persian. This inevitably limited their ability to communicate and build more than superficial relationships, especially with individuals outside the sphere of the Qajar court. Consequently, there is a shallowness displayed across most of these texts in terms of the description of individual Iranians, who often remain voiceless, their personalities reduced to a checklist of tropes. Reception of Iran, and the Iranian ‘Other’, must also be contextualised within the broader trajectory of the British empire during this period. By the end of the 19th Century, Iran had become a key buffer zone in the geopolitical confrontation between the British and Russian empires in Asia.[17] Both sides sought to exert influence over the Shah, though Naser al-Din had some success in playing them off against each other and thus maintained a significant degree of independence.[18] Nonetheless, both he and his successor oversaw increasing reliance on European loans and the granting of ‘concessions’ which represented the steady colonisation of Iran’s economy and infrastructure.

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[15] F. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* (London, 2001), 66.

[16] Fanon, (2001), 73.

[17] A. Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History,* (New Haven CT, 2017), 214-5.

Far from the impression of unassailability projected by British imperial propaganda, which underwent a retrenchment in the 1880s, several violent encounters earlier in the 19th Century temporarily destabilised the expansion of imperial interests and drove a further wedge between occidental and oriental. The disasters of the Anglo-Afghan Wars (1839-42, 1878-80) and the Indian Uprising (1857-8) hardened British attitudes towards Asian peoples generally which was also reflected onto Iran, especially as the Qajars were vaguely suspected of aiding the Uprising.[19] The intensification of missionary efforts in both India and Iran, and the growing influence of scientific racism, further consolidated this; hardening the East-West divide on the basis of creed or race. It is also crucial to acknowledge that Iran itself was undergoing major changes during this period, primarily greater centralisation of the state and engagement with new ideas and technologies. This undoubtedly affected the experience of British travelogue writers and thus coloured their accounts, though the significance and often dialogic nature of change, was frequently overlooked in the process.

The aim of this research is to assess the impact which stereotypes of the Iranians had on the British travelogue writers of the late 19th Century and the discourses on Qajar Iran that they produced in their travelogues, particularly with regards to perceptions of continuity and change. This is significant both because it charts the course of the British conception of ‘the Orient’, of which the Achaemenid Empire was the primary model, and because stereotypes transmitted through European orientalist literature and travelogues continue to subtly shape current perceptions of Iran and Asia more generally.[20] Further, by relying on a rigid and stereotyped perception of the Iranians, British scholarship and indeed foreign policy has consistently failed to anticipate significant developments within Iran. These include the assassination of Naser al-Din (1896), the Constitutional Revolution (1905/6-11), the pivot of Iranian foreign policy towards Germany in the years prior to both World Wars, the rise of Mohammed Mossadegh and attempts to nationalise oil, and even the 1979 Revolution. Anthony Parsons, the British ambassador to Iran, sent his annual review to London in December 1977, warning (though certainly understating) of popular discontent with the Shah and highlighting the signs of growing dissent on the streets.[21] The dismissive response he received from M.S. Weir at the Foreign Office the following February reflects the endurance and blinkering effect of stereotypes. He described the Iranians as 'the epitome of idleness, deceitfulness, corruption, charm and conceit,' and thereby wrote off any prospect of Mohammad Reza Shah being overthrown.[22] Relying upon a stereotyped assessment of Iran not only dehumanises its people but simultaneously leaves those in Britain with a superficial understanding, lacking nuance and discounting the potential for change and agency on the part of the Iranians, both prior to previous revolutions and now.

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[18] A. Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*: *Nasir al-Din Shah and the Iranian Monarchy,* new edition, (London, 2008), 404-5.

[19] W. Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal,* (London, 2006), 124.

Persia and the Greco-Roman Sources

Unquestioning belief in the veracity of the Greco-Roman sources with regards to Persia endured into the 20th Century, although the increasing number of translated ancient Near Eastern texts and archaeological discoveries from within Iran itself, though orchestrated by European scholars, offered new perspectives on a long-stagnant field. The study of ancient

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[20] Kofler, (2011), 166.

[21] M. Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran,* (London, 2019), 103.

[22] FCO 8/3191 of 1978; 24. February 1978.

Iranian art became more popular through major publications by archaeologists Herzfeld and Ghirshman, while comparisons were increasingly made between Greek accounts of Achaemenid history and the indigenous sources, such as the information gleaned from the inscriptions at Bisitun and Naqš-i Rustam. The former were regarded as the 'better' sources, the Achaemenid inscriptions criticised for being formulaic royal propaganda and thus not fit for writing 'real' narrative history. This can still be observed, for example, in J.M. Cook's *The Persians* published in 1983 which, in a discussion of the ancient sources on Persia, dedicated only two paragraphs of a twenty page chapter to the Achaemenid material.[23] This text, and indeed the entire trend of giving the Greco-Roman sources pre-eminence in academic enquiry into ancient Persia, drew backlash from the 'New Achaemenid Historiography', which emerged in the early 1980s. It constituted a radical overhaul of the field by critiquing the validity of the entire Greco-Roman canon and constructing research topics around indigenous Iranian and other ancient Near Eastern sources. Pierre Briant described his aim within this movement as '[to] distinguish the Greek interpretive coating from the Achaemenid nugget of information'[24] while Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg, the organiser of the first Achaemenid History Workshops, characterised the movement as an effort to 'de-Hellenise and de-colonialise Persian history,' mirroring trends taking place across academia in this period.[25] This movement has produced a large amount of valuable historiography, with the analyses of the anti-Persian agenda found in Xenophon or Ctesias by Sancisi-Weerdenburg, and the assessment of developing academic narratives of Achaemenid Persia and the concept of 'Aryan' by J. Wiesehöfer, proving particularly useful for this thesis. Additionally, members of the New Achaemenid Historiography produced extensive material identifying and analysing the tropes relating to the depiction of Persians in the Greco-Roman sources. These encompassed despotism, cruelty, greed and decadence, cowardice, dishonesty, and aberrant norms of sexuality and gender (from a Greek perspective).[26]

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[23] J.M. Cook, *Persian Empire,* (New York NY, 1983), 17-18.

[24] P. Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander,* (Winona Lake I, 2002), 256.

[25] H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, *'Decadence in the Empire or Decadence in the Sources?'* in *Achaemenid History I,* H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (ed.), (Leiden, 1987a), 131.

The trend within the New Achaemenid Historiography, to rehabilitate the reputation of the Achaemenid Empire from the perceived deprecation of the classical sources, however risked presenting an unrealistically positive image instead. Though its excesses were likely exaggerated by the Greco-Roman writers, the Achaemenid Empire was very much the successor of Assyria in terms of authoritarian rule. Though its art and textual propaganda might present a uniform image of harmony, as with all empires it undoubtedly relied upon violent coercion and fear to maintain its power.[27] Since the height of the New Achaemenid Historiography, the discourse on the relationship between the study of Achaemenid Persia and the Greco-Roman sources has become further nuanced. This is typified by T. Harrison's *Writing Ancient Persia* (2011) which attempts to balance utilising the Achaemenid sources to direct avenues of research while not discounting the Greco-Roman sources, but rather handling them critically in conjunction with other resources and mining them for potentially unexplored areas of enquiry.[28] Historians such as L. Llewellyn-Jones, whose *King and Court in Ancient Persia* examines the differing perceptions of Achaemenid monarchy, follows just such an approach, juxtaposing the various source traditions and thereby quantifying the differences between the Greek and Persian views of kingship.[29] E. Bridges *Imagining Xerxes* also provided inspiration for this thesis, as her systematic approach to compiling the tropes attached to Xerxes, across the breadth of the Greco-Roman sources and beyond, demonstrated how stereotypes can effectively be analysed in literature.[30]

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[26] A. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire,* (Abingdon, 2010).
[27] B. Lincoln, *Religion, Empire and Torture,* (Chicago IL, 2007), xi.
[28] Harrison, (2011), 19.
[29] L. Llewellyn-Jones, *King and Court in Ancient Persia,* (Edinburgh, 2013), 151-207.

Learning ancient Greek and Latin has steadily waned in popularity in Britain in the second half of the 20th Century, rendered irrelevant to mainstream education systems as standardised testing became the primary measurement of academic attainment. They are increasingly regarded as the cultural preserve of a small public school elite, and their use is closely tied to the public performance of class.[31] Nonetheless, these texts, or at least the popular perception of them, continue to exert a significant influence on the reception of history and its aesthetic framing. Tom Holland's bestselling *Persian Fire* provides a notable example of this, repackaging the idea of an insurmountable West-East/civilisation-barbarism binary for a wider contemporary audience while compounding tropes of Achaemenid tyranny and decadence.[32] The book's subtitle, *The First World Empire and the Battle for the West*, underlines Holland's attempts to parallel the Greco-Persian wars with the 21st Century 'War on Terror', and ancient Greece with a nascent European 'West'. This is also observable in Neil MacGregor's characterisation of the Athenian-led forces as a 'coalition of the willing'.[33] These are clumsily anachronistic comparisons: the Greeks did not identify as European, let alone 'Western', having more in common culturally with the Near Eastern peoples who comprised the Achaemenid Empire than the ancient inhabitants of Britain. Holland's more recent *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*, in which as an agnostic he argues for the irreducible equation of 'The West' with 'Christendom', demonstrates the tendency of creating ahistorical monoliths, to distinguish white identity from the rest of humanity, has become further consolidated in his writing.[34] The proliferation of this ‘Clash of Civilisations’ narrative in popular histories demonstrates the ability to interweave with contemporary British anxieties around Islam, race, immigration, and terrorism; framing them as facets of an eternal struggle with the East. The prominence which continues to be placed on ancient Greece and Rome as the fountainheads of ‘Western civilisation’ thus maintains an intellectual and cultural barrier to Iran, which remains a monolithic and sinister ‘Other’ to many.

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[30] E. Bridges, *Imagining Xerxes,* (London, 2015), 2-5.

[31] C. Higgins, 'Boris Johnson's love of classics is about just one thing: himself', *The Guardian,* (6. Oct. 2019), accessed 9.11.23; L.E. Wild, 'Class Clown: on Boris Johnson's Virtuosic Misquotation of Homer', *Eidolon,* (11. Mar. 2020), accessed 12.11.23.

[32] T. Holland, *Persian Fire,* (London, 2005), xvii-xxi; 319.

[33] N. MacGregor, *The Guardian,* (12. Oct. 2005), accessed 11.10.23.

Iran and Britain

Edward Said’s *Orientalism,* published in 1978 and cited as a major turning point in the field of ‘Middle Eastern studies’, had markedly less impact on the study of Iran than the Arab world in general, for which two major reasons can be identified. Said focused predominantly on the experience of Arabs under European colonial rule, with only fleeting mentions of Iran or India, thus hampering analysis of potential differences in Western perception between Arabs and Iranians.[35] This renders the work as a whole more difficult to apply to Iran, which did not experience the same form of direct colonial rule as Egypt under the British or Algeria under the French. The concessions system pursued by the European powers in Iran necessitated a different approach and, coupled with the separate and laden perceptions of the Iranians, makes Iran a unique case requiring its own custom assessment.[36] Hamid Dabashi’s *Persophilia* (2015) criticises Said’s approach in *Orientalism* in relation to Iran specifically, arguing that it ignores the dialogical nature of Iranian-European relations which can be observed through the absorption of Persianate influences in Western political theory, philosophy, art, and literature.[37] Ali Ansari is also a proponent of this viewpoint, emphasising the significant influence which Iran has exerted on Britain through the communication of ideas and aesthetics.[38] Said's more wide-ranging *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) explores this more dialogic process, and was utilised in the context of this thesis to examine the literary underpinnings of the concept of the 'Great Game', as mythologised by Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*.[39]

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[34] T. Holland, *Dominion,* (London, 2019), xxviii-xxix.

[35] Said, (1978), 32.

[36] E. Abrahamian, *Modern Iran,* (Cambridge, 2008), 38-9, 47.

[37] H. Dabashi, *Persophilia,* (London, 2015), 5-6, 185.

Orientalism, whilst not tailored to the case of Iran, also inadvertently reinforced the concept of a monolithic clash between East and West, in that it envisions discourse emanating solely from the West. Though hardly Said's intention, this aligned with the views of Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington, and other Pentagon-affiliated neo-Orientalists. Their work continues to 'other' Iranians and Muslims generally and has been used as the 'intellectual' underpinning of military interventions while obscuring the exchange of influences and ideas between cultures.[40] The end of the Cold War also prompted a shift in focus as largely superfluous Kremlinologists, Neo-Conservatives, and military specialists began to reposition Iran as not only a hostile state but the linchpin of the so-called 'Axis of Evil' and, thereby, an equivalent threat to the 'West' as that once posed by the Soviet Union.[41] This intensified following the destruction of the World Trade Centre in 2001, which Robert Fisk asserted reinvigorated the rhetorical binaries of 'West and East', 'liberty and slavery', and 'good and evil.'[42] Two decades of 'War on Terror', along with sanctions, have served only to intensify this binary; leaving Iran and Britain further alienated across a Manichean divide.

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[38] A.M. Ansari, 'Persia in the Western Imagination' in *Anglo-Iranian Relations since 1800,* V. Martin (ed.), (Abingdon, 2005), 8-10.

[39] E.W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* (London, 1993).

[40] S. Huntington, 'Clash of Civilisations', *Foreign Affairs* 71, (1993), 22-49; B. Lewis, *What Went Wrong?* (London, 2002).

[41] Axworthy, (2019), 318.

[42] R. Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation,* (London, 2006), 1036-7.

In the case of Iran, this already occurred following the 1979 revolution, which saw the decline of mainstream Iranian studies in the West, with fear and distrust of the Islamic Republic colouring perceptions of Iran as a whole, especially amongst British and US historians.[43] This is demonstrated by Niall Ferguson's amplification of Iran as the antithesis of Britain and the 'West', and the 'source' of vaguely-defined fanaticism: 'although Anglophone economic and political liberalism remains the most alluring of the world's cultures, it continues to face, as it has since the Iranian revolution, a serious threat from Islamic fundamentalism.'[44] Yet, simultaneously, the revolution prompted Iranian historians to reassess their own history, freed from the mandatory nostalgic lens of the Pahlavi regime as the Islamic Republic asserted a new identity.[45] The revolution effectively created a blank slate for historiography; influencing movements in Western scholarship as well as within Iran and amongst the Iranian diaspora. Prominent Iranian historians such as Abbas Amanat, Homa Katouzian, or Ervand Abrahamian could also be considered products of this reinvigoration which ended the absolute hegemony of Western scholarship, and the sources upon which it had based its interpretation of Iran. The inclusion of Iranian scholarship within this thesis, particularly Abbas Amanat's *Pivot of the Universe* which currently constitutes the most developed inquiry into the reign of Naser al-Din, ensures that Iranian voices and perspectives are heard in the discussion of their own history along with the British perceptions of their culture.[46]

The study of 19th Century British travel literature as a specific avenue for understanding the evolution of concepts such as empire, colonialism, race, and stereotype has also advanced, although again Iran remains an outlier in this regard. Mary Henes' doctoral thesis, *In the Land of Lion and Sun: British travel-writing on Persia, 1890-1940,* is a rare example of specific focus on British travellers in the Iranian context, including some direct analysis of the travelogues of Curzon and Sykes further examined here. Her thesis charts the literary evolution of the British travelogue in this period and is particularly noteworthy for its exploration of 'imperial femininity' and comparison of the writing of men and women; highlighting their differing experiences, imperial roles, and levels of social access within Iran.[47] This prompted further exploration, within this thesis, of Percy Sykes' relationship with his sister Ella, who resided with him in Iran and produced her own travelogue. This research also accepts Henes' two core theses: namely that the production of British travelogue literature of Iran was a highly intertextual experience even for seemingly aesthetically driven and personal accounts, and that the impact and lasting influence of Curzon's *Persia and the Persian Question* has been underestimated by previous scholarship.[48] Henes begins her trajectory of British travel writing with Curzon's travelogue, while this thesis seeks to explore the precedents which influenced his extensive text and were subsequently repackaged by him. By placing Curzon at the inception of a 20th Century tradition rather than the apogee of a Victorian one, the breadth of literature and accumulated stereotype weighing on *Persia and the Persian Question* risks being underestimated. Approaching this subject primarily from the perspective of literary study, as opposed to historical analysis, leads to a potential underplaying of the broader factors of empire and colonialism which were so instrumental to the British perceptions of the 'Other' and the creation of travel literature in this period. Similarly, Henes' thesis largely overlooks the significant changes occurring within Iran itself prior to the Constitutional Revolution, when Iranian intellectuals were confronting 'modernity' and themselves increasingly travelling abroad and recording encounters with the

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[43] C. Rundle, *Reflections on the Iranian Revolution,* (Durham, 2002), 9-12.
[44] N. Ferguson, *Empire,* (London, 2003), 373.
[45] R. Mottahedeh, *Mantle of the Prophet,* (London, 2009), 384.
[46] Amanat, (2008); Amanat, (2017).

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[47] M. Henes, *British Travel-Writing on Persia,* (KCL, 2012), 86.
[48] Henes, (2012), 244-5.

'Other' in their own travelogues. While factors, such as the influence of biblical and especially Greco-Roman texts on the British perception of the Persians, are each acknowledged in a dedicated introductory paragraph, they are somewhat understated.[49] This thesis seeks to build upon Henes' research by more closely analysing and comparing the travelogues of George Curzon, Percy Sykes, and Edward Browne, and to better contextualise and understand their imperial discourses by identifying the sources of stereotype weighing on their perception of Iran and the Iranians.

Methodology and Terms

In selecting British travelogue sources from the late-Qajar period, the aim was to assess a broad range of texts, either in the form of contemporary journals or later accounts of travel, which provide descriptions of first-hand interactions with the peoples of Iran and were published in a mainstream format. As the travellers did not necessarily possess detailed academic knowledge of the country, it is telling to ascertain the extent to which they fell back upon Greco-Roman sources or orientalist literature to attempt to comprehend and classify their experiences. They exhibit the structure of their knowledge framework, thereby providing greater insight into knowledge production in the era of imperial revival and anxiety post-1880. Several British travelogues of Qajar Iran, including those of Charles Wills (1883), Austen Henry Layard (1887) and Isabella Lucy Bird (1891) were also examined while researching this thesis and are utilised to demonstrate the intertextual production of travelogues and the incorporation of stereotypes. However, in assessing their impact on subsequent discourse and influence on shaping of the British perception of Qajar Iran in the pre-Constitutional period, the travelogues of George Nathaniel Curzon (1892), Edward

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[49] Henes, (2012), 21-3, 247.

Granville Browne (1893), and Percy Molesworth Sykes (1902) were ultimately selected as the main focus for close analysis and comparison. Despite their distinct views and literary styles, these men emanated from comparable elite English backgrounds. While this thesis primarily seeks to examine their Anglo-British viewpoint and the texts from which it was constructed, the influence of continental European and indeed Scottish scholarship within the context of the British empire, most notably John Malcolm's *History of Persia,* must also be acknowledged.[50] Each of these travellers conceived of themselves as an 'expert' on Iran, yet were heavily influenced by each other's writings and the myriad of preceding travelogues and literature. Naghmeh Sohrabi in *Taken for Wonder,* her analysis of Qajar-era travelogues of Europe, argues that understanding the impact of these texts requires separation of the reception of the destination from the act of travel itself, as travelogues are fundamentally rhetorical attempts to quantify people and places; reflecting the writer's origins as much as their object or actual experience of travel.[51] Sohrabi also advocates for 'vertical' as well as 'horizontal' analysis of travelogues; namely that simply comparing relatively contemporaneous texts alone is insufficient without examination of the distinct factors informing their production coupled with the often-extensive textual precedents which informed them.[52] Thie primary aim of this thesis is to understand the role which stereotypes played in the formation and presentation of British travelogue writers' perceptions of Iran. This would have a subsequent impact on the framing of British knowledge production, and assertions of change and stasis, well into the 20th Century.

Having selected which travelogues to analyse, the approach to dealing with this diverse, and often factually unreliable, source material was the next matter of concern. Although primarily focused on South America and Africa, Mary Louise Pratt's research on travel writing, and the cross-cultural encounters which travelogues often describe, was instrumental in conceptualising how to productively engage with 19th Century travelogues and their myriad influences and legacies. Several of Pratt's theories and associated terminologies have been influential on the development of this thesis. Foremost is the conceptualisation of the 'contact zone', the space where the imperial traveller encounters the 'Other', described in *Imperial Eyes* as a place of 'coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict… often synonymous with the colonial frontier.'[53] Applying this concept to Qajar Iran draws attention not only to its frontier with the extreme Northwestern edges of British India, but of the status of the entire country as a colonial frontier between the British and Russian empires, and thus the existence of a tripartite 'contact zone'. In Pratt's recent *Planetary Longings,* the term is re-examined in the chapter *Mutations of the Contact Zone,* where she describes how it was 'born out of an act of re-imagining: the aim was to move the study of empire from the European imperial centre and re-centre it at the sites of imperial intervention, in effect to de-center Europe… scholarly imaginations operated within the diffusionist paradigm of imperialism itself, scholarly authority thus aligned with imperial authority and analysts looked over the shoulders of the imperialists… to grasp how imperial power worked it was necessary to move the position of analysis from the imperial centre to the places where exploration, invasion, and colonisation were unfolding.'[54] The complicity of academic scholarship, in particular, highlights the continued importance of decolonisation work in relation to these underexplored imperial sources. While travel writing was often disparaged by those who regarded themselves as serious experts, Curzon, Browne, and Sykes all portrayed themselves as both scholar and traveller, seeing no contradiction in this juxtaposition. Henes identified this in Sykes' travelogue, describing him as an 'imperial researcher' rather than merely an 'imperial traveller', though this duality requires further unpacking in relation to all three of the travelogues considered in detail in this thesis.[55]

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[50] T.M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire: The Origins of the Global Diaspora,* (London, 2004), 253-4.
[51] N. Sohrabi, *Taken for Wonder,* (New York NY, 2012), 5-6.
[52] Sohrabi, (2012), 5, 7-11.

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[53] Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation,* (Abingdon, 1992), 8.

[54] Pratt, *Planetary Longings,* (London, 2022), 126.

These men entered the 'contact zone' as both imperial travellers and researchers who, as Pratt argues, often cast themselves in the role of a 'seeing man', a sympathetic and knowledgeable observer, while also often channelling the 'master of all I survey' mentality. They represented the epitome of the European incomer who elevated themselves above both the landscape and its people, presuming themselves inherently qualified to describe, analyse, and quantify both.[56] These apparently contradictory attitudes are simultaneously found in many imperial discourses, handwringing being a common reaction alongside jingoism or imperial arrogance. The role of language is crucial here, namely whether the 'seeing man' also had the capacity to be a 'listening man', by engaging with those he encountered on their own terms: 'in human contact zones language establishes a degree of equivalence of parties in which inequalities are present. All participants have "voice."'[57] However such Iranian voices are rarely recorded in British travelogues, particularly the various subalterns who constituted the bulk of those encountered while travelling. Through their portrayal as nameless, often undifferentiated 'Others', these Iranians are homogenised and dismissed through generalisation and stereotype.

From some of these 'seeing men' emerged what Pratt defines as the 'anti-conquest', a seemingly well-intentioned discourse lamenting the oppression of indigenous populations or the extractive excesses of specific colonial commercial enterprises. This is coupled with failing to identify, or actively denying, the structural nature of empire, or critique their own position within it; producing a blinkered 'concessionary narrative' as a result.[58] While

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[55] Henes, (2012), 91.
[56] Pratt, (1992), 9.
[57] Pratt, (2022), 134.
[58] Pratt, (1992), 8-9, 98.

Curzon's *Persia and the Persian Question* is detached and unsympathetic to the Iranians and Sykes' profession of goodwill and 'friendship' towards Iran, in *Ten Thousand Miles,* appears shallow and self-serving, this criticism is particularly relevant to Browne. His *Year Amongst the Persians* is still frequently cited by both Iranian and British scholars as representing the sole 'anti-imperial' travelogue from this period and thus standing in stark contrast to both Curzon and Sykes.[59] However, certain aspects of his travelogue which conflict with his reception as a sympathetic liberal have been minimised as a result; including the significant inspiration he drew from de Gobineau's 'scientific racism', which informed his own privileging of all things Aryan, or his dismissive attitude to the significant role of Shi'a Islam in Iranian culture. This thesis therefore seeks to re-examine Browne's travelogue in direct relation to those of Curzon and Sykes, as they were fundamentally produced under the same imperial circumstances.

Pratt's use of 'autoethnography' and 'autoethnographic expression' are also relevant to this thesis, as Iranians in the late Qajar period were increasingly engaging with European expectations, and at times seeking to actively shape them.[60] This included engagement with Greco-Roman texts through translations made by Europeans at the behest of the court, in order for the Qajars to convey Iran's historical venerability and their resulting legitimacy to would-be colonisers, both British and Russian.[61] Although much attention is paid to Reza Shah Pahlavi's engagement with pre-Islamic and particularly Achaemenid history and motifs, this was already occurring in the 19th Century under the Qajars. They exploited both its potential to convey legitimacy externally while presenting themselves domestically as maintaining the ancient principles of Iranian kingship; particularly as defenders of the

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[59] M. Bonakdarian, 'Edward Granville Browne and the Iranian Constitutional Struggle', *Iranian Studies* 26 (1993), 16.

[60] Pratt, (1992), 9.

[61] Abdi, 'Development of Archaeology in Iran', *American Journal of Archaeology* 105 (2001), 53-9.

‘guarded domains’ and the nation’s foremost warriors and hunters.[62] Meanwhile, late-Qajar Iran was increasingly affected by its engagement with European modernity which facilitated the exchange of ideas as well as technology. While this was in part stimulated by the translation and serialisation of European texts, including Browne’s travelogue, increasing numbers of Iranians also travelled out with Iran in the 19th Century, and themselves produced travelogues which reflected both their reaction to Europe and subsequent reappraisal of the state of Iran.

As Henes emphasises, confronting the inherent intertextuality of these sources is essential for understanding the development of travelogue literature and constructing an epistemological framework through which to comprehend the factors and accumulated ‘baggage’ weighing on British travellers in Iran.[63] References to earlier accounts of travel are ubiquitous, a literary inheritance which grew exponentially during the 19th Century and was lent increasing credibility by the engagement of figures like Curzon. His text catalogued and critiqued earlier travelogues, and was in turn quoted from and otherwise invoked as an ‘expert’ source by British travellers late into the 20th Century.[64] Henes’ thesis accurately asserts the wide influence of Curzon’s travelogue on subsequent travel-writers and emphasises the intense intertextuality of travel-writing generally, highlighting how many earlier travelogues were incorporated into *Persia and the Persian Question* and were therefore considered obsolete as a result by subsequent readers.[65] Travelogues must thus be assessed with reference to their precedents in travel-writing as well as the influence of the Greco-Roman texts and Orientalist literature.

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[62] Amanat, (2008), 257.
[63] Henes, (2012), 244-5.
[64] S. Hobson, *Through Persia in Disguise,* (London, 1973), 18, 97, 120, 122.
[65] Henes, (2012), 87, 244-5.

Having identified a relevant methodological framework and associated terminology for analysing travelogues, it is necessary to define the two terms specifically key to this thesis: stereotype and trope. A stereotype is a simplified and fixed idea primarily related to people, in this case the Iranians. Stereotypes often comprise several tropes, literary or rhetorical devices which gain credence through repetition and are synonymous with ‘clichés’. Thus, the British ‘stereotype’ of the Iranians comprised several ‘tropes.’ This thesis adheres to Harrison’s framework of ‘ethnographic commonplaces’, i.e., tropes, which are observable across a swathe of 19th Century writing on Iran.[66] These include tyranny (and submissiveness to it), cruelty, greed, decadence, cowardice, dishonesty and intrigue, demonstrating parallels with the tropes discernible in the Greco-Roman sources. Though they are informed by the distinct circumstances of their production, both Harrison and Sancisi-Weerdenburg conceive of these literary traditions as mutually reinforcing each other due to the clear alignment of certain tropes.[67] This is particularly apparent in the manifestation of a ‘decline narrative’ applied to Iran in both source traditions: the Greco-Roman sources (particularly from the 4th Century BCE onwards) portrayed the Achaemenid empire as locked into a spiral of decline and decadence, while European writers of the 18th and 19th centuries perceived post-Safavid Iran as a faded echo of its former glories, which they tended to locate in the pre-Islamic empires of antiquity.[68] Though they stemmed from, and reacted to, entirely different circumstances, both traditions characterised Iran as in perpetual decline, facilitating the absorption of this perception by travellers confronted with the material conditions of the Qajar period.

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[66] Harrison, (2011), 98.

[67] Sancisi-Weerdenburg, (1987a), 130.

[68] L. Llewellyn-Jones, ‘The Great Kings of the Fourth Century and the Greek Memory of the Persian Past’ in *Greek Notions of the Past,* J. Marincola, L. Llewellyn-Jones and C. Maciver, (Edinburgh, 2012), 317-20.

Other tropes, however, are more difficult to compare. Discussions of the gender-norms and sexuality of the Persians feature prominently in the Greco-Roman sources, displaying anxieties around the perceived influence and assertiveness of women, effeminacy of Persian men, and the high status of eunuchs within the Achaemenid court.[69] By contrast, British travelogues of the 19th Century focus less on the position of women or the sexual mores of the Iranians generally, reflecting both the difficulty of accessing or gauging the realities of life for Iranian women, coupled with waning interest and self-censorship on the part of British travellers. Discussion of these tropes, through juxtaposition of Greco-Roman and Orientalist sources with the travelogues themselves, was nonetheless considered relevant to assessing the cultural stereotype of the Iranians which emerged. On the other hand, while the Greco-Roman sources accuse the Persians of 'impiety' or 'sacrilege', particularly stemming from the alleged blasphemy of Cambyses in Egypt and Xerxes' destruction of Babylonian temples and burning of the Athenian acropolis, this study consciously limits discussions of British attitudes towards Islam.[70] Late-19th Century British discourse tends to homogenise the experience of Muslim communities, showing little interest in the varying practices of Arabs, Iranians, Indians, Sunni, Sufi, and Shi'a; reducing them all to 'fanatical masses.'[71] Analysis of the attitudes of British travellers to Islam in Qajar Iran or indeed comparative analysis of British attitudes across various majority-Muslim societies from this period would yield compelling results, but equally requires a customised assessment which is out with the scope of this study. When these travelogues do focus on religion, it is typically the minority religions of Iran, particularly the Zoroastrians and Babis, while Christian and Jewish communities are also compared with their European counterparts. The idolisation and privileging of minorities, while ignoring or actively denigrating the majority, reflects, at least subconsciously, the impact of the ‘divide and rule’ mentality integral to British imperialism.

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[69] M. Brosius, *Ancient Persian Women,* (Oxford, 1996), 1-5.

[70] A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, 'Xerxes Destruction of Babylonian Temples' in *Achaemenid History II,* H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt (eds.), (Leiden, 1987).

[71] Dabashi, (2015), 198-203.

Outline of the Thesis

This inquiry commences with an examination of the key role the Greco-Roman sources played in the education systems, ethos, and culture of Britain and its empire in the late-19th Century, and how this shaped not only Victorian self-perception but also travellers’ expectations of the ‘East’, of which Achaemenid Persia was a key archetype. The second chapter considers the environment in which the selected travelogues were produced, particularly the role of imperial anxieties and their intersection with factors influencing the perception of the ‘Other’ in Asia, including geopolitics and diplomacy, economic interests, religion, scholarship, and racism. The third chapter then focuses on case studies of the travelogues of Curzon, Browne, and Sykes, assessing through close analysis how their perceptions and discourses were shaped by various currents of stereotyping and how this consequently informed their reception of Qajar Iran and pronouncements on its past, present, and potential futures. The final chapter considers the phenomenon of the inter-cultural encounter and its parallel expression in travel writing and fiction. This illustrates the collision of literary-inspired expectations with the realities of the ‘contact zone’, including examination of the influential orientalist novel *The Adventures of Haji Baba of Ispahan*, which played a key role in consolidating and solidifying the stereotype of the Iranians in the 19th Century. This portrayal of decline and stasis is contrasted with the significant changes taking place within Iran itself, including its own evolving production of travelogues, adoption of new technologies, and the emergence of new political ideologies.

1. Classical Reception and Late-Victorian Mentalities

> ‘All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth.’[72]
>
> 19th Century gloss of Aristotle, *Politics*

From its earliest manifestations in the 16th and 17th centuries, the expansion of English power overseas was justified as the fulfilment of an ancient legacy. Just as the Roman legions had once ‘civilised’ Britannia, so English writers characterised their own colonisation of Ireland, and subsequently North America, as bestowing that same ‘civilisation’ upon ‘barbarous’ peoples.[73] This became further enshrined as the now-British empire grew in power and wealth in the 18th Century, the *Pax Romana* providing an aspirational imperial model particularly for the administration of the ethno-linguistically and culturally diverse populations in India.[74] This comparison however also led to anxieties regarding the inevitable fate of all empires: Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788) depicted an overstretched Roman empire doomed to collapse under the simultaneous pressures of ‘barbarians’ without, and rebellion and decadence within.[75] The practise of enshrining a supposedly unbroken classical legacy in the British self-perception nonetheless endured through the Victorian period, epitomised by John Stuart Mill’s reaction to the publication of Georges Grote’s *History of Greece:* ‘The true ancestors of the European nations are not those from whose blood they are sprung, but those from whom they derive the richest portion of their inheritance. The Battle of Marathon, even as an event in English history, is more important than the Battle of Hastings.'[76] This privileging of classical history, coupled with the conceptualisation of a monolithic white European 'West' as the successor to the traditions of both Greece and Rome, led inevitably to the framing of non-Europeans as the new barbarians, none more so than the inhabitants of an equally monolithic and supposedly unchanging 'East'.

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[72] Aristot. *Pol.* 7.1333b.

[73] P.C. Mancall, *Hakluyt’s Promise,* (New Haven CT, 2007), 62-3, 107.

[74] D. Bell, ‘From Ancient to Modern in Victorian Imperial Thought’, *The Historical Journal* 49, no.3, (2006), 736.

[75] E. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* verbatim reprint, (London, 1875), Vol. I, v-vi.

The entrenchment of this binary in 19th Century British thought invites investigation of how far this drew inspiration from the Greco-Roman writers, who regarded the pre-Islamic Persian empires as the eastern antitheses of their own societies. Said's characterisation of the Greeks as 'the first orientalists' further suggests some continuity of thought with the orientalists of the 19th Century, though this should not be overstated.[77] These texts were never envisioned as a monolithic corpus and were produced under varying conditions and with different biases over the course of almost a millennium, even if they emanated from a broadly shared conception of the world and reacted to the same historical encounters with Achaemenid Persia, which came to symbolise the East as a whole.[78] There is a drastic disparity in power dynamics between these two contexts: the Greco-Roman writers were coming to terms with what has been dubbed a 'superpower' of the ancient period, reacting with trepidation and distrust but also wonder and occasional admiration.[79] By contrast, Victorian travelogue writers on Qajar Iran were reacting to what they typically deemed a weak nation at the periphery of their Indian empire, which by the late-19th Century had achieved unassailable military supremacy in South Asia and the Persian Gulf.

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[76] J.S. Mill, 'Grote's History of Greece' in *Essays on Philosophy and the Classics,* (London, 1978), 273.

[77] Said, (1978), 17.

[78] P. Hardie, 'Images of the Persian Wars in Rome' in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars,* E. Bridges, E. Hall and P.J. Rhodes (eds.), (Oxford, 2007), 127.

[79] C. Pelling, 'De Malignitate Plutarchi: Plutarch, Herodotus and the Persian Wars' in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars,* E. Bridges, E. Hall and P.J. Rhodes (eds.), (Oxford, 2007), 155.

It is necessary to examine how the classical literature, and thus the stereotypes and tropes it contained, was received and adapted in British culture during the 19th Century, to gauge the impact on the travelogue writers and their discourse on Qajar Iran. Public schools played a key role, as they were the primary organs for education in Latin and Greek, although this necessitates further investigation of what form this instruction took, its quality, and its lasting impact. It is also necessary to consider the wider impact of the classics on the public school ethos, intertwined as it was with the cultivation of British imperial identity. Universities consolidated this reception through knowledge production, while aptitude in Latin and Greek was typically valued more highly for imperial administrative posts than aptitude in the languages directly relevant to the role. It must also be acknowledged that Victorian popular culture was suffused with the mythologies and histories of Greece and Rome, reinforced through the prevalence of neoclassicism as the visual language of empire. Examination of these various manifestations of classical reception in the 19th Century allows the education of selected travelogue writers, and their exposure to and engagement with classical literature, to be properly contextualised.

1.1 Exposure to the Classics in the Victorian Public School System

The three travelogue writers who are the focus of this thesis, Curzon, Browne, and Sykes, all attended public schools and stemmed from broadly similar class backgrounds, prompting direct comparison of their education, and resulting degrees of engagement with Greco-Roman literature. The English public school system had, since its inception in the late medieval period, aspired to provide its students with an education in Latin, useful as an international ecclesiastical and mercantile language, as well as for the decipherment of legal documents and further progression into academia. Ancient Greek, long neglected outside the remnants of the Byzantine empire and its Mediterranean sphere of influence, was revived in the 16th Century as the ideas of the northern renaissance and the associated interests in philosophy and critical Bible scholarship took hold in the British isles, with St Paul's school in London pioneering its teaching.[80] The quality of this instruction appears to have been rudimentary at best, with the poet John Milton, who attended the school in the early 17th Century, describing his classical education as 'seven or eight years merely in scraping together so much miserable Latine and Greek as might be learnt otherwise easily and delightfully in one year.'[81] Charterhouse school under the headmastership of Richard Busby (1638-95) provides illumination as to the repetitive and limited format of classical education in the 17th Century: Mondays were focused on Aesop, Tuesdays on Ovid, Wednesdays on Terrence, and Thursdays on Martial, with Friday dedicated to repetition of the material already studied.[82] It is worth noting that Busby was considered among the best classics masters of the period, and his introduction of classes in modern European and Asian languages was indeed innovative in the public school setting.[83] There was also a moral component to this approach, as constant repetition of this material regardless of comprehension was considered character building: 'hateful tedium was good for the soul.'[84] This attitude to classical pedagogy endured throughout the 18th and 19th Centuries, relying primarily on rote learning and oral repetition, which only supported those pupils who were already grasping the classical languages, rather than educating all from a point of ignorance.[85] The range of texts studied appears to have expanded somewhat by the late 19th Century, with famous excerpts from others, such as Herodotus' descriptions of Thermopylae and Salamis, included in history readers.[86] The selection, however, remained limited and slanted heavily towards Latin, particularly Lucretius, Sallust, Virgil, Ovid, Livy, Horace, Tacitus, Terrence, and Juvenal.[87] These texts remained largely decontextualized and divorced from the circumstances of their production, treated as grammatical exercises rather than distinct pieces of historiography reflecting the varied experiences and biases of their authors. They also offered only fleeting glimpses of Persia, with Latin texts primarily employing the Achaemenids, and Xerxes in particular, as a shorthand for tyranny and decadence among their own political class.[88]

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[80] A.H. Mead, *Miraculous Draught of Fishes,* (London, 1990), 17-18.

[81] Mead, (1990), 18.

[82] J. Field, *King's Nurseries,* (London, 1987), 39.

[83] Field, (1987), 37.

[84] A. Renton, *Stiff Upper Lip,* (London, 2017), 137.

[85] C. Tyerman, *History of Harrow School,* (Oxford, 2000), 81.

Exceptions did exist. Robert Summer, headmaster of Harrow from 1760-71, infused classical teaching with his own radical politics. Through study of Herodotus, he praised Greek resistance to the encroachment of the Achaemenid empire which he considered the epitome of 'Asiatic despotism', mirroring contemporary discourse of embedding the critique of European monarchies and institutions in discussion of tyrannical sultans and shahs.[89] In this vein he also lauded the Athenian tyrannicides Aristogeiton and Harmodius to his students, including William Jones who would become the pre-eminent British orientalist of the late 18th Century.[90] Summer, however, represented a minority view on classical education, lacking influence outside his own classroom. In contrast, Lord Macaulay, a key reformer of the civil service in the 1830s, believed that the precise content of an individual's education was immaterial, and that suitability for roles in the imperial administration could be judged by 'the most correct and melodious Greek or, for that matter, Cherokee verses.'[91] The exact content of classical education was judged largely immaterial; retention and fluency were preferable qualities, underscoring that knowledge of the classics was not necessarily accompanied by an expectation of wider comprehension of the ancient Greek or Roman world. This is further highlighted by an 1830 article in the *Edinburgh Review,* which heavily criticised not only the lack of variety in subjects at public schools but also the poor quality and narrow scope of the classical teaching on offer: '[the Eton boy] has not read a single book of Herodotus, or Thucydides, or Xenophon, or Livy, or Polybius, or Tacitus; he has not read a single Greek tragedy or comedy.'[92] The restrictive selection of texts studied is crucial for assessing the impact of tropes related to the Persians, as the key texts may have only been fleetingly studied, if at all, or just paraphrased to the students.

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[86] M. Adams, *Teaching Classics in English Schools,* (Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2015), 180-91.
[87] K. Kumar, 'Greece and Rome in the British Empire', *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012), 78.
[88] Hardie, (2007), 130-6; Bridges, (2015), 157-89.
[89] Ansari, (2005), 12.
[90] Tyerman, (2000), 120-31.
[91] J. Roach, *Public Examinations in England,* (Cambridge, 2008), 216-8.

William Thomson, future Archbishop of York and alumnus of Shrewsbury school, eloquently summarised the attitude of those setting the curriculum: 'It seemed as if it were thought necessary, in order to allow the great plant of Greek and Latin to flourish, that all other vegetation should be repressed, and that they alone should cover the whole ground.'[93] This was also the view of Anthony Trollope, who studied at Harrow and Winchester: 'no attempt had been made to teach me anything but Latin and Greek, and very little attempt to teach me those languages.'[94] Some school masters questioned this singular focus on the classics, as in the case of Dean Frederic Farrar at Harrow, who wrote in 1866 that 'in an age of observation and experiment... we keep bowing and scraping to mere authority. … [should we] confine our eager boys for ever between the blank walls of an ancient cemetery, which contains only the sepulchres of two dead tongues?'[95] By the mid-19th Century, Latin and Greek classes comprised 75-80% of overall teaching in British public schools.[96] Growing dissatisfaction with the state of the public-school system was first officially addressed by the Public Schools Commission (better known as the Clarendon Commission) which produced its report in 1864. It concluded that ‘Those who enter the Universities from the highest forms of these schools are on the whole well-taught classical scholars...these, however, form a small proportion of the boys who receive a public school education.’ One Oxford don complained of new undergraduates that ‘The answers we get to simple grammar questions are very inaccurate.’ Of Oxford undergraduates as a whole, the commission found: ‘These facts and figures do not indicate an average of classical attainment which can by any stretch of indulgence be deemed satisfactory.’[97] One of the key reasons for poor attainment identified by the commission was the common practice of former students becoming masters at the schools they themselves had attended, thus perpetuating an inherently limited pool of knowledge and restraining innovation: ‘it must be disadvantageous [for] any school to be officered exclusively by men brought up within its walls all imbued with its peculiar prejudices and opinions, and without experience of a system or any methods but its own.’[98] Yet, despite the failings clearly highlighted, the public school system experienced a huge expansion from the 1840s until the late 1890s, with new schools established to cater for the rapidly expanding middle class and feed the expanding bureaucracy of empire. These new schools consciously emulated the image, institutions, and traditions of the long-established public schools such as Rugby, Eton, Harrow, and Winchester and, in the four decades which followed the publication of the Clarendon Commission, the number of public schools grew from nine to well over a hundred.[99]

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[92] E. Mack, *Public Schools and British Opinion,* (Westport CT, 1973), 192.

[93] J.B. Oldham, *History of Shrewsbury School,* (Oxford, 1952), 195.

[94] Mack, (1973), 143-4.

[95] Mack, (1973), 60.

[96] T.W. Bamford, *Rise of the Public Schools,* (London, 1967), 62.

There nonetheless remained a wide gap between the education provided in public schools and that expected for employment in imperial administration. In 1874, 84% of successful candidates to the Indian Civil Service had attended specialised ‘crammer’ schools for over a year before applying, with many additionally hiring private tutors.[100] This, coupled with the critiques of educational commissions and parents, prompted public schools to gradually expand their curricula. In some cases, the diversification of the curriculum was directly justified in relation to the classics themselves, as with the introduction of German at University College school, which was instituted on the basis that it enabled pupils to access the wealth of research performed by German philologers.[101] Some schools also appear to have made concerted efforts to improve and broaden their classical instruction more generally. The Taunton Commission (1868) praised the approach to the classics of the City of London school for example, where Latin began at 12 and Greek at 15, following instruction in some modern languages: 'Their [the pupils] minds have now been opened, they have begun to think and compare, Latin and Greek can now be taught to them on philological principles; they make rapid strides, and by eighteen or nineteen they have just as good a chance of being elected to open [classics] scholarships at the universities as if they had begun the dead languages at the age of eight or nine years.'[102]

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[97] *Clarendon Commission,* (1864), Vol. 1, 24, 33.

[98] *Clarendon Commission*, (1864), Vol.1, 42.

[99] Renton, (2017), 24, 134-5.

The classics remained pre-eminent primarily due to their position as the 'proper' education for the aspiring middle and upper class, with the smartest boys encouraged to pursue almost exclusively classical streams through into university. Flower argues that education in the classics endured as the primary mode of instruction due to its long-standing status, coupled with the fact it had been considered a 'good' education for the aristocracy (from the ancient Greek 'rule by the best') in the preceding centuries.[103] This is observable through examination of Fettes school in Edinburgh, founded in 1870, whose first headmaster Alexander Potts quoted Plato's *Philebus* as his mantra: 'The ancients were better than us.

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[100] Roach, (2008), 196-218.

[101] G.G.H. Page, *An Angel Without Wings: The History of University College School,* (London, 1981), 121.

[102] *Taunton Commission,* (1868), Vol. 1, 44.

[103] R. Flower, *Oundle and the English Public School,* (London, 1989), 48.

They lived nearer the gods,' which was inscribed in his commonplace book and regularly repeated to his pupils.[104] The moral value assigned to studying the classics thus outweighed the practical advantages associated with modern subjects, explaining how they retained such a privileged position until their eventual displacement by the introduction of standardised examinations in the 1950s.[105] William Heard, a subsequent headmaster of Fettes, was forced to make some concessions to the demand for scientific education in 1902 but remained staunchly in favour of classics as the superior education. The 'modern side boys' were disparaged by him as 'the barbarians' and prohibited from eating alongside the classical boys in the dining hall.[106] The fear of 'moral contagion' between the two groups plainly illustrates that study of the classics was not solely or even primarily about language acquisition. Their impact on Victorian public schools extended well beyond the curriculum itself, colouring the general atmosphere of the schools and, by extension, the ethos of the British middle and upper classes who attended them.

1.2 The Public School Ethos and the Cultivation of the Imperial Class

That the cultivation of the correct classically inspired mentality was considered as important as the classical instruction itself, is demonstrated by the priorities for pupils of H.H. Almond, headmaster of Loretto's School in Edinburgh from 1862: 'First-character. Second - physique. Third - intelligence. Fourth - Manners. Fifth - Information.'[107] Foremost of these classical influences was Sparta; the harsh *agoge* system of education and training was considered an exemplar for those who would play a crucial role in the enlargement and administration of the British Empire. Plato expressed his admiration for the *agoge* as a means of producing tough yet morally-driven men, while his description of Socrates' suggestion that children should be raised in ignorance of their families to promote self-reliance was widely quoted by masters seeking to reassure parents that the often traumatic dislocation of their young children would eventually yield positive results.[108] Many schools enthusiastically cultivated this association: Loretto's adopted *Spartam nactus es, hanc exorna* (Sparta is yours, adorn it) as its motto, while Robert Mackenzie, headmaster of Edinburgh Academy in the 1890s, instituted the role of *ephors* rather than prefects.[109] The suffering endured by Spartan boys at the annual ritual flogging at the temple of Artemis, where some would allegedly allow themselves to be flogged to death, was considered to encapsulate the qualities desirable in the Victorian schoolboy. The story of the Spartan boy and the stolen fox cub similarly lauded stoicism in the face of adversity and was adapted and repeated to underscore the inherent moral values of self-sacrifice, discipline, and suffering in silence.[110]

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[104] R. Philp, *A Keen Wind Blows: The Story of Fettes College,* (London, 1998), 16.

[105] D. Turner, *The Old Boys: Decline and Rise of the Public School,* (London, 2016), 199.

[106] Philp, (1998), 36, 41-3.

[107] J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School,* (Cambridge, 1981), 55.

Hardship was indeed considered an essential aspect of development for boys and concern that coddling would result in effete and weak adults was widespread in the psyche of Victorian parents of the middle and upper class. At its most benign, this encouraged an intense focus on athleticism, for which Plato's *Laws* and *Republic* were again utilised as justification through their emphasis on physical exercise as a counterpoint to textual study and a means of hardening the individual mentally as well as physically. Rowing was considered especially appropriate exercise due to its ancient provenance as the cornerstone of Athenian naval power.[111] This drilling through sport was inextricably linked with preparation for imperial military service, a connection drawn explicitly by Sir Henry Newbolt's 1892 poem *Vitaï Lampada* (The Torch of Life), a jingoistic anthem which resonated throughout the

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[108] P. Mason, *The Men who Ruled India,* (London, 1963), 47; Renton, (2017), 101.
[109] M. Magnusson, *The Clacken and the Slate,* (London, 1974), 224, 258; Renton, (2017), 42.
[110] Turner, (2016), 61; Renton, (2017), 202.
[111] Mangan, (1981), 22.

British empire.[112] It equated the travails of the playing fields with the blood-sodden battlefields of Asia and Africa, where even in the direst of situations the public-school spirit would triumph: ‘the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks: “Play up! Play up! And play the game!”’ Drilling and hardening through sport prepared pupils to sacrifice themselves in the service of empire and in imitation of both classical and contemporary heroes as objects of emulation. Public school propaganda did its utmost to instil in them that ‘the costs [were] insignificant when compared with the glory of the sacrifice and the derring-do... a common phenomenon in totalitarian states.’[113]

The range of hardship on offer at the public school, however, extended far beyond the playing field or the boating lake. Malnutrition and even borderline starvation were common, while the poor condition of ageing school buildings forced pupils to contend with cold, damp, and the various illnesses which they incubated; creating an environment which harkened back to the quasi-monastic asceticism of the medieval school. Corporal punishment was frequent, relentless, and imposed for even the most minor infractions. This was intended to establish strict adherence to rules, with the expectation that the punished boy would bear the whipping or caning with Spartan fortitude, while also encouraging solidarity with other sufferers. While some of the comparatively humane masters such as Edward Thring, head at Uppingham school (1853-1887), viewed violence in largely pragmatic terms - ‘The ablest man overmatched in numbers, with all things round him dislocated and imperfect, must punish’- many others appear to have delighted in inflicting pain, whether for the supposed betterment of the boys or their own gratification.[114] This parallel with the *agoge* prompts an even more uncomfortable comparison, namely the widespread sexual exploitation and abuse inflicted by masters and older boys, who resided at the top of the hierarchical system of ‘boy government’ known as ‘fagging’. Sydney Smith, who attended Winchester in the 1780s, wrote of this system that it rendered the public-school boy ‘alternately tyrant and slave,’ and the exponential growth of public schools in the mid-19th Century ensured that a far larger proportion of boys experienced it as a facet of their education.[115] Many however considered the system an invaluable tool not only to maintain order among the pupils but as an essential aspect of preparation for imperial careers, as asserted by a Harrow master reflecting on the system in 1928: ‘To learn to obey as a fag is part of the routine that is the essence of the English public school system. Those who hope to rule must first learn to obey. Who shall say it is not that which has so largely helped to make England the most successful colonising nation, and the just ruler of the backward races of the world?’[116] Public schools certainly claimed they made a large contribution to facilitating the empire, thus ‘propagating the myth of their own efficiency,’ to convince politicians and parents of the necessity of continually feeding them new pupils, with failure to do so cast as a supremely unpatriotic choice.[117] This exhortation was increasingly necessary, as parents hesitated to commit their children to a system which left many of its charges physically or mentally damaged, while those who thrived in the environment, and were truly toughened by it, did so at the cost of compassion and individuality. Reflecting on this, the writer Hannah More drew her own comparison with ancient education, though it was the practises of the ‘barbarians’ rather than the *agoge* which she evoked: ‘throwing boys headlong into those great public schools always puts me in mind of the practice of the Scythian mothers, who threw their new-born infants into the river; - the greater part perished, but the few who possessed great natural strength... came out with additional vigour from the experiment.’[118]

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[112] Renton, (2017), 151.

[113] Renton, (2017), 155.

[114] D. Leinster-Mackay, *Rise of the English Prep School,* (London, 1974), 143.

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[115] M. Falkus, ‘Fagging and Boy Government’, *The World of the Public School,* (London, 1977), 62.

[116] Tyerman, (2000), 477.

[117] Renton, (2017), 102, 129-30.

[118] Mack, (1973), 154.

While public schools deliberately sought to manufacture individual fortitude and camaraderie through hardship, they also prioritised promoting class solidarity and exceptionalism, as observed by John Galsworthy who described how his education at Harrow instilled ‘the instincts of caste that forbid sympathy and understanding between the well-to-do and the poorer classes.’[119] The ability to utilise Greek or Latin in conversation or oration were immediately identifiable symbols of elevated class status, while the pejoratives ‘oik’ (derived from the Greek *perioikos,* ‘around the house’) and ‘pleb’ (*plebeian,* the Roman commoner class) became popular descriptors of the working classes, which excluded them from awareness of being mocked. This separation was considered essential by the military and political establishment for forming a class of imperial officers and bureaucrats, who considered it better ‘for a future servant of the empire to learn how to create a cohesive group of males while at boarding school than in the officers’ mess at a besieged hill fort in Rajasthan, when a falling out might lead to military disaster and death.’[120] This cohesion was seen by both masters and politicians as the key goal of the Victorian public school: guaranteeing the future of empire. That said, the classical emphasis, associated ethos, and patriotic ideology were all disseminated to the grammar and state schools through juvenile literature, which glorified the trajectory of public school boy to colonial hero and sought to inspire lower class boys to imitate their upper-class peers as custodians of empire.[121]

Stemming from similar class backgrounds and having attended similarly prestigious public schools, the direct experiences of the travelogue writer in relation to this system require consideration and comparison. George Nathaniel Curzon (1859-1925), born an aristocrat closely related to the royal family, represents the most socially elevated member of this selection of travelogue writers. His education followed a predictable trajectory for a member of his class, beginning at Wixenford preparatory school in Berkshire before progressing to Eton and then Balliol College, Oxford; the preparation for an inevitable career within the upper echelons of the British political establishment.[122] Indeed Curzon would go on to be one of the nine 19th Century Viceroys of India who were Eton alumni.[123] He became enamoured with both the classics and the empire at Eton, where he attended a talk by the writer James Fitzjames Stephen who made numerous comparisons between the Roman Empire and the British Empire in Asia; emphasising how the latter was "more populous, more amazing, and more beneficent than that of Rome."[124] Curzon also credited Oscar Browning, his doting house master, for further cementing his interest in classics: 'Whatever I am, I owe it all to Mr Browning.'[125] Allegations surrounding their inappropriately close, allegedly pederastic, relationship however subsequently led to Browning's dismissal from Eton.[126] Nicholson, his later assistant at the Foreign Office, describes how Curzon's conceptions of the past and present, and the British empire's place within the latter, were essentially fixed by the time he left Eton, remaining consistent and free of nuance throughout his subsequent imperial career.[127]

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[119] Mack, (1973), 284.

[120] Turner, (2016), 228.

[121] J.M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire,* (Manchester, 1984), 199.

Much of Edward Granville Browne's (1862-1926) life by contrast marks him as an outlier among British travelogue writers on Iran, though his early years and initial education followed a similar trajectory to both Curzon and Sykes. Browne was born on the 7th of February 1862 at Uley in Gloucestershire into an affluent family.[128] His father, Sir Benjamin Browne, was the owner of a successful shipbuilding and engineering company, the profits of which shielded Edward from financial concerns and enabled his later lifestyle as a nonconformist academic.[129] Browne attended a slew of prestigious educational institutions beginning with Trinity College at Glenalmond, followed by Burnside's School and then Eton, overlapping with Curzon in 1877.[130] Unlike Curzon however he detested Eton, feeling isolated from the other students and chafing under its rigid imperial ethos, leaving early at the age of fifteen.[131] This formative experience, as an outsider among youths being groomed for a career in the national endeavour of empire, and Browne's rejection thereof, would prefigure his contrarian relationship with the general consensus of British imperial policy as an adult. Browne's relationship with the Greco-Roman corpus was also drastically different to those of Curzon or Sykes. He expressed disdain for the methods of classical teaching to which he was subjected at Eton, summarised as 'the general failure to invest the books read with any human, historical or literary interest, or to treat them as expressions of the thoughts, feelings and aspirations of our fellow-creatures instead of as grammatical tread-mills.' [132] This aversion may have been further crystallised by his general dislike of the public school ethos, of which rote-learning of Latin and Greek were such integral moral fundaments, though he also recognised the underlying drilling involved: '"A boy does not go to school" they say, "to learn Latin and Greek, but to learn to confront disagreeable duties with equanimity, and to do what is distasteful to him with cheerfulness."'[133] Consequently, when Browne left school, he admitted that he did so with 'little knowledge and less love of Latin and Greek,' though in later life he conceded that he had come to appreciate the historical value of the languages and regret his own paucity of knowledge in that field. However he also stressed that even among British classical scholars, 'those who could make an extempore speech, dash off an impromptu note, or carry on a sustained conversation in either language, are in a small minority,' highlighting the limited outcomes of public school education generally.[134] Though he was certainly not insulated from classical culture, which pervaded so much of Victorian art and literature, Browne's rejection of the public-school ethos, and its associated emphasis on ancient Greek and Latin, appears to have freed him from the stereotyping of the Persians derived from the classical texts.

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[122] C.N.B. Ross, 'Curzon and Browne confront the Persian Question', *The Historical Journal* 52, (2009), 386.
[123] Bamford, (1967), 239.
[124] G.N. Curzon, *Speeches of Lord Curzon of Kedleston,* (Calcutta, 1901), 1.
[125] A. Hickson, *The Poisoned Bowl: Sex, Repression, and the Public School System, (*London, 1995), 59.
[126] M.M. Kaylor, *The Major Uranians,* (Brno, 2006), 98.
[127] H. Nicolson, *Curzon: The Last Phase,* (London, 1937), 12.
[128] C.E. Bosworth, 'E.G. Browne and his "A Year Amongst the Persians"', *Iran* 33, (1995), 115.

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[129] Nash, (2005), 141.

[130] Ross, (2009), 386.

[131] C.E. Bosworth, *A Century of British Orientalists,* (Oxford, 2001), 77-8; E. Denison Ross, 'Edward Granville Browne: A Portrait', (Cambridge, 1926), viii.

[132] E.G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians,* (Cambridge, 1893), 6.

[133] Browne, (1893), 7.

Percy Molesworth Sykes (1867-1945), though influenced by both Curzon and Browne's writings, shared the former's laudatory attitude to the classics. Sykes was born in Brompton, England to a family with strong military ties: his father William had been an army chaplain while his mother Mary Molesworth was the daughter of an artillery captain.[135] Both families had minor aristocratic connections, facilitating Sykes' access to a typical public school education at Rugby, where his education, 'the underpinnings of a gentleman', consisted largely of Latin and ancient Greek.[136] Unlike Curzon, hampered by a youthful spinal injury which necessitated the use of a metal support girdle for the remainder of his life, Sykes also excelled on the playing field, particularly at racquets for which he won several trophies for the school.[137] Sykes' education reflects the tensions growing around the education and training of imperial soldiers, which vacillated between advocating for more rigorous practical training and continued prioritisation of classics. Cheltenham College, observing the changing expectations of parents, had pre-empted the criticisms of the Clarendon and Taunton educational commissions by offering two streams since its opening in 1841. The main stream remained classical: Greek and Latin plus mathematics, and some basic Hebrew and modern history. The 'modern side' still incorporated options for Greek and Latin, but also French, German, geography, history, science, and 'Hindustani' (Urdu); an innovation expressly aimed at the cultivation of future imperial bureaucrats and military officers.[138] Harrow school meanwhile introduced an explicit 'army class', which appended mathematics and rudimentary military science to the classical curriculum, attracting 45 pupils by 1857.[139] Yet the introduction of practical elements remained of secondary importance to the cultivation of class solidarity and the 'correct attitude' which remained inextricably associated with the pre-eminence of a classical education. This view was shared by the military and political establishment, as demonstrated by the Akers-Douglas parliamentary report on officer training (1902), which concluded that 'There is no question that the boys entering the R.M.C. (Royal Military College, Sandhurst) straight from public schools are certainly, as regards general educational fitness, physical fitness, general character and bearing, and aptitude for command, more desirable than those coming from 'crammers'.'[140] The implication was that dislocation from the hierarchical discipline and cohesive class identity of the public schools would erode the suitability of officer candidates, regardless of the content of their education. Those who had arrived at Sandhurst via the avenue of grammar schools or home tuition, followed by stints at crammers, were considered inherently less suitable. Through his embrace of both classics and the drilling of the playing field, Sykes thus fulfilled the initial stage of the idealised imperial trajectory: from public-school boy via military cadet to imperial agent; a career promoted and heavily romanticised in juvenile literature.[141]

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[134] Browne, (1893), 5.
[135] A. Wynn, *Persia in the Great Game,* (London, 2003), 5.
[136] Wynn, (2003), 2.
[137] Wynn, (2003), 5.

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[138] M.C. Morgan, *Cheltenham College,* (Chalfont St Giles, 1968), 11.
[139] Tyerman, (2000), 256.
[140] *Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider the Education and Training of Officers of the Army,* Appendix XXXII, HMSO, (London, 1902).
[141] MacKenzie, (1984), 199-226.

1.3 Scholarship and the Conceptualisation of Empire

While at their most embedded within the public school system, classical influences manifested themselves in myriad forms in Britain during the 19th Century. Beyond the repetitive language learning regimen and Spartan-inspired ethos of public schools, the university facilitated further examination of Greco-Roman literature and the stereotyping of Persians within it. Writing in 1786, at the beginning of the Qajar period (of which he was largely oblivious), the historian John Gillies' *The History of Ancient Greece, Its Colonies and Conquests* epitomised the orthodox, classically derived historiography which would remain influential throughout the following Century. Relying on a highly selective reading of Herodotus and Xenophon, Gillies characterised the Persians as 'debauched barbarians' enslaved by their tyrannical rulers, becoming inherently cowardly and dishonest as a result.[142] This contempt is best illustrated in the third volume, where Gillies claimed that 'the Persians had been continually degenerating from the virtues which characterise a poor and warlike nation, without acquiring any of those arts and improvement which usually attend peace and opulence'.[143] This uncompromisingly negative assessment of the Achaemenid Persians relied exclusively on Greek texts, yet is more extreme and uniform in its total condemnation than any individual Greek writer. Classical suspicion of the East is layered onto Gillies' own belief in European supremacy, emphasising a narrative of decay and decline which would become a key theme in later travelogues of Iran, especially Curzon's *Persia and the Persian Question*. Gillies also held strong monarchist views and deplored democracy; though tellingly this neither undermined his regard for the ancient Athenians nor prompted sympathy for the Achaemenids. Gillies' view of antiquity typifies the perceived infallibility of the Greco-

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[142] J. Gillies, *The History of Ancient Greece,* (London, 1786), Vol. I, 350.

[143] Gillies, (1786), Vol. III, 363-4.

Roman sources which would constitute the mainstream of subsequent 19th Century British scholarship, clearly discernible in Curzon's writing. William Mitford, who published his *History of Greece* between 1784 and 1810, was by contrast seen as an eccentric in the field for taking an actively critical approach regarding the classical sources for their selective assessment of Persia.[144] Using Greco-Roman sources in conjunction with Biblical material, which contained more nuanced and even positive descriptions of Achaemenid rule, Mitford characterised the empire as 'liberal to persons of the various nations under its dominion… scarcely distinguishing between those born its subjects and those becoming so… all were admitted to share its favours who might earn them by services.'[145] Though this gives an overly optimistic impression of the Achaemenid empire as a meritocratic entity, Mitford was relatively unique in this period for highlighting the comparative tolerance and multiculturalism present under Persian rule, which was either ignored or actively disparaged by historians such as Gillies. Throughout the 19th Century most British historians continued to regard the accuracy of classical writers as unassailable, reinforced by their uncritical treatment within the public schools.

British academia was considered particularly orthodox in this regard by French and German scholars, who increasingly moderated their reliance on classical texts with expanded inquiry into other ancient literary traditions following the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics, the various cuneiform scripts, and the Avestan Iranian languages over the course of the 19th Century.[146] The decipherment of cuneiform presents an exception to this, and is particularly relevant to this thesis as it took place through the actions of a British imperial agent in Iran, Henry Rawlinson. Arriving in India as a soldier, Rawlinson was dispatched to Iran to assist in training Qajar troops while clandestinely gathering cartographical and strategic information.[147] It was during this time that he undertook research of the rock-carved trilingual inscription of Darius I at Bisitun between 1835 and 1846, succeeding ultimately in translating the Old Persian section.[148] Comprehension of this elaborate piece of Achaemenid royal propaganda opened a new perspective onto ancient history. Some subsequent scholarship suggested that the knowledge of cuneiform rendered the British the unquestionable superiors of their Greek and Roman 'forebears', who were ignorant of the information displayed at Bisitun and within subsequent translations of Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian texts.[149] The more conventional viewpoint highlighted the general correlation of the Bisitun inscription with the events of Herodotus' *Histories,* claiming that this ultimately proved the veracity of the Greco-Roman sources and thus the underpinnings of 'Western Civilisation.'[150] Rawlinson, by contrast, saw the inscription as illustrating the limitations of the *Histories*, as Herodotus had either been ignorant of or actively ignored events described in the inscription which took place out with the context of the western Achaemenid empire and the Greco-Persian wars. He did concede that these were the 'pardonable predilections of a Greek,' while arguing that the Greco-Roman sources should be received by serious scholars with 'considerable caution'.[151] The Old Persian inscriptions however ultimately proved disappointing to Rawlinson, who saw in them only 'a certain empty parade of royal titles, recurring with a most wearisome and disappointing uniformity.'[152] This view of Achaemenid inscriptions would lead to their subsequent neglect as useful historical sources by comparison with the Greco-Roman texts, while also stoking the perception that Iranian identity had always, and thus would always, centre itself around kingship.

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[144] M. Brosius, 'Two Views on Persian History in Eighteenth Century England', *Achaemenid History V,* (Leiden, 1990), 84-7.

[145] W. Mitford, *The History of Greece,* (London, 1784), Vol. II, 92.

[146] Bosworth, (1995), 116.

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[147] L. Adkins, *Empires of the Plain,* (London, 2004), 30-1.
[148] Adkins, (2004), 74-85.
[149] R. Cust, 'Obituary Notice for Henry Rawlinson' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* (1895), 685.
[150] Adkins, (2004), 203-4.
[151] H. Rawlinson, 'The Persian Cuneiform Inscription at Behistun' in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* (1846-7), 187-8.
[152] Rawlinson, (1846-7), 269; DB §1-4: Kuhrt, (2010), 141-51.

Rawlinson was joined on subsequent archaeological endeavours in Iraq by Austen Henry Layard, whose travelogue of Iran is examined in the following chapter, with their excavations of Neo-Assyrian sites at Nimrud and Nineveh uncovering the Northwest palace of Ashurnasirpal II, the Southwest palace of Sennacherib, and the Library of Ashurbanipal.[153] The archaeological methods employed prioritised the quantity and portability of finds rather than meticulous excavation: as Layard himself admitted, the objective was to acquire the greatest amount of artefacts for as little investment of time, money, and labour as possible.[154] The merchant Edward Burgess, an acquaintance of Layard's in Iran, captured the young man's desperation to find success and glory as an archaeologist in a letter to his brother: 'I hope it may be something substantial for him. He wants it, poor fellow.'[155] Layard's publication of *Nineveh and its Remains* in 1849 brought him to the attention of academia and the upper classes in Britain, while the exhibition of artefacts, reliefs, and cuneiform tablets in London sparked the so-called 'Assyriology craze.'[156] George Rawlinson, Henry's clergyman-Oxford scholar brother, further consolidated the perception of these entities among the wider British public through his publications on the empires of the ancient Near East.[157] Originally published as the 'Five Near Eastern Monarchies', with the Achaemenids at their conclusion, this was subsequently extended to incorporate the Parthians (1873) and Sassanians (1875).[158] With the study of Avestan and Pahlavi comparatively underdeveloped in Britain it is unsurprising that these latter two dynasties were considered afterthoughts, with the archaeologist A.T. Olmstead complaining that they remained the ‘best’ works on the subject in English for the next eighty years.[159] However the Achaemenids were also deprecated by George Rawlinson, who shared his brother’s disregard for the historiographical potential of the Old Persian inscriptions, remaining heavily under the influence of the histories of the ‘thoughtful, many-sided Greeks’.[160] In terms of the ‘Near Eastern Monarchies’ themselves he also showed a clear preference for the Babylonians, in appreciation of their scientific and technological innovations, pursuits for which the Achaemenid Persians were ‘Too light and frivolous, too vivacious, [and] too sensuous’, possessing a ‘civilisation … not, perhaps, very advanced, but still not wholly contemptible.’[161] This framing of Achaemenid empire as culturally and scientifically degraded by comparison with both the Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian empires contributed to the further proliferation of ‘decline narratives’ across various manifestations of British writing on Persia, including travelogues.

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[153] Adkins, (2004), 149-70.

[154] Adkins, (2004), 259.

[155] Edward Burgess to George Burgess. Tehran. May 7 1846; cited from B. Schwartz (ed.), *Letters from Persia,* (New York NY, 1942).

[156] Adkins, (2004), 328.

[157] G. Rawlinson, *The Five Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World,* (London, 1871), 3 Vols.

[158] G. Rawlinson, *Sixth Great Oriental Monarchy,* (London, 1873); G. Rawlinson, *Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy,* (London, 1875).

Beyond corroborating the veracity of certain aspects of the Greco-Roman sources, access to cuneiform translations and Mesopotamian material culture influenced trends in art, architecture, and literature, whilst sparking wider interest in the empires of the ancient Near East and their potential parallels with British imperial power.[162] Previously known only through Biblical texts and fanciful depictions by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, engagement with the histories of Assyria in particular provoked manifestations of imperial anxiety.[163] Neo-Assyrian relief sculptures, whose influence is identifiable in later Achaemenid art, depict battles, the destruction of cities, and the execution or mutilation of war captives; rendering it abundantly clear to a domestic audience how *imperium* was established and maintained through force and the resulting horrors for conquered populations.[164] The ruins of Nineveh and Nimrud, a far cry from the romanticised and still-inhabited cities of Rome or Athens, acted as a counterpoint to the presumed glories of empire; illustrating that decadence and dissolution, prominent themes in both Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and George Rawlinson's *Great Monarchies,* was perhaps the ultimate fate of all empires.

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[159] A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire,* (Chicago IL, 1948), vii.

[160] G. Rawlinson, *Egypt and Babylon,* (London, 1885), 419.

[161] G. Rawlinson, (1885), 315

[162] Adkins, (2004), 352-4.

[163] R. Gnuse, *No Tolerance for Tyrants: The Biblical Assault on Kings and Kingship,* (Collegeville PA, 2011); 2, 14, 24-25.; J.P. Stronk, *Semiramis’ Legacy,* (Edinburgh, 2017), 2-8.

The British tendency to maintain the centrality of the Greco-Roman writers in their historiography reflected the reception of this material in the conceptualisation of the British empire, which its proponents regarded as embodying the legacies of Greek philosophy and arts and Roman order and martial ability. This also fuelled the adoption of neoclassicism as an imperial aesthetic.[165] Art and both functional and monumental architecture widely replicated Grecian and Roman themes and motifs, reinforcing the self-perception of the British empire as the benevolent *Pax Britannica*.[166] The twelve volumes of George Grote's *History of Greece* (1846-56), and the literary reactions it prompted, epitomised this trend of de-historicising ancient events and connecting them to contemporary British identity. Grote dislocated the wars with Persia from their direct historical context, transforming them into mythologised versions of themselves.[167] He believed they led directly to the 'Glories of Greece' and the emergence of Hellenism as an enduring cultural force, from which he asserted the roots of Britain and Europe at large were formed.[168] John Stuart Mill's aforementioned review of Grote's work, which elevated the battle of Marathon above Hastings in its importance for British history, was echoed by E.S. Creasy's *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World from Marathon to Waterloo* (1851).[169] This became particularly popular reading material in the public schools as it highlighted a supposedly unbroken chain of 'Western' victories over the forces of tyranny and despotism and was thus considered exemplary for the future servants of an 'enlightened empire.'[170] This trend did not completely exclude more nuanced historical works on the Greco-Persian wars, such as J.P. Mahaffy's *Rambles and Studies in Greece* (1876), which described the active role of the Athenians in propagating their own heroic mythos: '[the Battle of Salamis] became the literary property of the city, hymned by poet, cited by orator, told by aged nurse, lisped by stammering infant; and so it has taken its position, above all criticism, as one of the great decisive battles which assured the liberty of the West against Oriental despotism.'[171] The parallels with the entrenchment of Britain's own imperial mythology, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, was apparent to those who could perceive the evolution of attitudes to the Greco-Persian Wars in the 4th Century BCE.

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[164] Lincoln, (2007), 8.

[165] E. Greenwood, 'Reception Studies: The Cultural Mobility of Classics', *Daedalus* 145 (2016), 44.

[166] T. Rood, 'From Marathon to Waterloo', *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars,* E. Bridges, E. Hall and P.J. Rhodes (eds.), (Oxford, 2007), 265-9; Kumar, (2012), 94.

[167] A. Lianeri, 'The Persian Wars as the 'Origin' of Historiography: Ancient and Modern Orientalism in George Grote's History of Greece' in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars,* E. Bridges, E. Hall and P.J. Rhodes (eds.), (Oxford, 2007), 341.

[168] G. Grote, *A History of Greece,* (London, 1862), Vol. III, 223.

Much as the Greco-Persian wars were mythologised in the succeeding decades and centuries, so the Napoleonic Wars rapidly accrued mythicised elements which enshrined them as formative for 19th Century British identity.[172] The conflation of the Napoleonic Wars with the Greco-Persian wars, and the privileging of the latter as the inception point of European identity, was reinforced not only through the neoclassical material trappings of imperial Britain but also through its literary culture.[173] William Wordsworth deemed aiding Spain in resisting the French invasion to be 'the most righteous cause in which, since the opposition of the Greek Republics to the Persian invader at Thermopylae and Marathon, sword was ever drawn.'[174] His *Thanksgiving Ode* following the battle of Waterloo in 1816 reiterated the comparison, while expressing optimism that victory would facilitate a Periclean golden age: 'Victorious England! Bid the silent art reflect, in glowing hues that shall not fade, those high achievements, even as she arrayed with second life the deed of Marathon upon Athenian walls; so may she labour for thy civic halls.'[175] Byron similarly drew specific comparisons between Marathon and Waterloo, particularly the battlefields after the conflict in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, while his participation in the Greek war of independence against the Ottomans prompted further parallels with the Greco-Persian Wars.[176] Ironically, while he was particularly inspired by Byron's exploits and the romanticised accounts of his martyrdom, Browne's interest in Asian languages and cultures initially stemmed from his sympathy for the Turks in the context of the 1877-8 Russo-Ottoman war, leading subsequently to increasing fascination with Iran in his later youth.[177] This was a highly personal and romantic attraction as, according to Bayly, the country 'represented an exotic, living Eastern Greece and Browne quickly identified himself as its Byron.'[178] Though he eschewed the classics as a basis for his historical framework, Browne's initial engagement with the 'East' thus took place in a context utterly suffused with reference to them.

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[169] E.S. Creasey, *Fifteen Decisive Battles,* (London, 1851), 2 Vols.
[170] Rood, (2007), 292.
[171] J.P. Mahaffy, *Rambles and Studies in Greece,* (London, 1876), 194.
[172] Rood, (2007), 267.
[173] Lianeri, (2007), 336-7.

Memorials erected to commemorate the Napoleonic Wars across Britain further equated the conflicts as they were primarily constructed in the neoclassical style, with widespread implementation of the figure of *nike* (victory) coupled with the emergent use of the classicised *Britannia* as a national emblem.[179] By 1900 this figure was synonymous both with British domestic identity and with the empire at large, emblazoned across a range of propaganda materials which were disseminated across society, including to the working classes who were otherwise largely excluded from Victorian classicism though they nonetheless engaged with the texts in translation.[180] Not all enthusiastically embraced this self-mythologising, including the newspaper editor and writer Robert Mudie who mocked the vanity and pretensions of the Edinburgh upper class, revelling in their 'Modern Athens'.[181] Describing the reception of George IV in the city in 1822, he satirised the clumsy attempts to draw parity between the two conflicts: 'They began with a long and learned parallel between the overthrow of Bonaparte and that of Darius and Xerxes; and then, coming gradually nearer home, they hinted, that, in his encouragement of the arts, Lord Melville was the express image of Pericles.'[182] Cynicism however did not diminish the enshrining of the Greco-Persian wars in 19th Century British identity, a trend consolidated by the growing radical movement's embrace of the conflict as the prime example of the liberty-tyranny binary.[183]

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[174] W. Wordsworth, *Prose Works,* (Oxford, 1974), Vol. I, 229-30.
[175] W. Wordsworth, *Poetical Works,* (Oxford, 1940-9), Vol. III, 147.
[176] Lord Byron, *Selected Poetry,* (Oxford, 1994), 285-7.
[177] Bosworth, (1995), 115-6.
[178] C.A. Bayly, 'The Orient: British Historical Writing about Asia', *History and Historians in the Twentieth Century,* P. Burke (ed.), (Oxford, 2002), 93.
[179] Rood, (2007), 267-8.

This classicised conceptualisation of the British empire however also provoked internal political debate, particularly emanating from comparison of Roman and Greek histories and the conflicting inspirations drawn from them. Rome had long represented an aspirational model for imperial rule throughout Europe. However, in an atmosphere of increasing imperial anxiety in the late 19th Century, it prompted concern over how Britain could reconcile its *imperium,* which sought constant expansion and necessitated the use of violence to control subjected populations, with the concept of *libertas,* and thus forestall the decadence and subsequent disintegration that Gibbon had described.[184] The rule of 'the many' by 'the few' was increasingly seen as a threat to stability of the empire. The 'Greek model' of colonies by contrast was considered, particularly by Liberals including J.S. Mill, to represent a more durable and enlightened approach to empire, though not an inherently pacific one, as it also encouraged comparisons between the British empire, underpinned by the strength and reach of the Royal Navy, and the thalassocracy of Athens.[185] The tension between these two approaches was encapsulated in differing attitudes to the potential imperial future of India when compared with the emerging dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. This division was explicitly tied to race with a Greek model only considered appropriate for administering white settler populations, whereas a 'civilising mission', the domain of Roman imperialism, was deemed the only option for the heterogenous, non-white and supposedly barbarous population of India.[186] Essentially this was a division between a 'commercial empire' and an 'empire of conquest', with India resolutely among the latter.[187] James Bryce's 1901 essays *The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India* and *The Diffusion of Roman and English Law throughout the World* epitomise attempts to reinforce the 'Roman approach' to governing India, and were subsequently reprinted in 1914 specifically to be circulated among the (white) entrants to the Indian Civil Service.[188] The usual parallels were drawn, especially regarding the spread of language and pacification achieved by both empires, however Bryce emphasised that the key distinction between the two was racial: 'The English are too unlike the races of India, or any of those races [Asians] to mingle with them, or to come to form, in the sense of Claudian's words, one people with them. …The relations of the conquering country to the conquered country, and the conquering race to the conquered races, are totally different in the two cases compared.'[189] While Bryce concluded that Britain ultimately possessed the superior empire due to the speed of its propagation and its scientific achievements, the realities of British rule in India, particularly racial separation and the refusal to grant Indians equal rights or citizenship, further distinguished it from Rome.[190] Victorian socio-biology was ultimately a far more impactful factor on the actual nature of the Raj than aspirations or attempts by its administrators to imitate the Roman imperial model.

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[180] MacKenzie, (1984), 48.; J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes,* (New Haven CT, 2010), 18-20, 42-3.

[181] R. Mudie, *The Modern Athens,* (Edinburgh, 1825).

[182] Mudie, (1825), 128.

[183] D. Bell, 'From Ancient to Modern in Victorian Imperial Thought', *The Historical Journal,* 49 no.3, (2006), 736-41.

[184] Lianeri, (2007), 349; Kumar, (2012), 79.

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[185] Kumar, (2012), 81.
[186] Kumar, (2012), 91-4.
[187] Kumar, (2012), 78-80.
[188] J. Bryce, *The Ancient Roman Empire and the British Empire in India,* (London, 1901a); *The Diffusion of Roman and English Law throughout the World,* (London, 1901b).

Curzon however continued to observe largely nuance-free parallels between the British and Roman empires during his time at Balliol College, Oxford; regarding his ongoing classical studies as appropriate preparation for a career as an imperial statesman.[191] Already within the highest echelon of the British class hierarchy, Curzon's high-handed and aloof attitude prompted the popularisation of the so-called 'Balliol Rhyme' among his contemporaries. This ran 'My name is George Nathaniel Curzon/ I am a most superior person/ My cheeks are pink, my hair is sleek/ I dine at Blenheim twice a week', lines which Curzon admitted dogged him throughout his career.[192] His dejection at only receiving a second class degree spurred him to undertake a journey to Greece and the Levant in 1883, with the aim of researching the Byzantine emperor Justinian, and winning the related and notoriously difficult essay prize at Oxford.[193] Curzon's expansive classical knowledge exhibits itself in his citing of more obscure writers such as Nicolaus of Damascus and Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, both of whom summarised aspects of Ctesias *Persika* and so preserved sections of the text for later readers.[194] Though heavily influential on his framing of Persia, Curzon did not have an entirely uncritical view of the classical authors, acknowledging discrepancies within the texts and directing pointed criticism at writers he considered unreliable such as Diodorus Siculus or Quintus Curtius Rufius. He described their writing as ‘uncritical and sacrificed to rhetorical effect [and] obviously untrustworthy,’ though this did not deter him from referencing their texts when they supported his own theories.[195] Curzon also identified issues surrounding not only the interpretation but also the actual translation of the texts themselves, insisting that ‘The first essential is a correct reproduction of what the Greek and Latin historians actually did say; and here I must record my surprise that I have not discovered a faithful translation of them in a single work, even in those of great scholars; and that in some cases hypotheses have actually been sustained or rejected upon a palpable mistranslation of the original texts.’[196] These criticisms of the study of classics, crucially, did not undermine his regard for the majority of the texts themselves, with Curzon maintaining that it was right for an ‘heir of the classical tradition’ such as himself to attribute a ‘becoming value to the statements of the Greek and Roman writers.’[197]

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[189] Bryce, (1901a), 58-9, 68-70.

[190] Kumar, (2012), 97.

[191] Ross, (2009), 388.

[192] K. Rose, *Superior Person: A portrait of Curzon and his Circle,* new ed., (London, 2001), 10-13.

[193] Nash, (2005), 109.

[194] G.N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question,* (London, 1892), II, 85; L. Lewellyn-Jones and J. Robson, 'Introduction' to *Ctesias' History of Persia,* (Abingdon, 2013), 36-7, 43.

While he did not attend university, Sykes’ engagement with the classics similarly endured during his time at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, where he was judged ‘exemplary’.[198] Sykes indeed epitomised the continuing preferential treatment of classics students in the context of officer training at Sandhurst, at the expense of science, practical skills, or modern languages. This was labelled ‘incredibly stupid and perverse’ by G.G. Coulton, a former master who had taught the army class and believed classics dominated the curriculum to the detriment of all other subjects.[199] The entry exam for Sandhurst still allowed prospective students to focus exclusively on the classics at the time of Sykes’ own application, though this would be altered following the British army’s lacklustre performance in the Second Boer War, in which Sykes also participated.[200] In the introduction to his travelogue *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia*, Sykes describes his ancient Greek as 'rusty', before quoting two passages from Aeschylus' 'great tragedy', the *Persae.*[201] False modesty did not deter Sykes from subsequently quoting from a range of Greco-Roman writers throughout the text. Each chapter is prefaced by a short quotation with Herodotus and Horace both appearing in this context, while Strabo's *Geography* is referenced throughout with regards to Sykes' own journey, in conjunction with Arrian and Diodorus' accounts of Alexander's campaigns, with which he was obsessed.[202] Sykes demonstrates an overwhelmingly positive reception of these writers, applying positive epithets such as when he praised 'the genius of Xenophon', and unable to apply a critical eye to the texts in the way that Curzon more often achieved. However, this did not prevent both men being heavily influenced by the same stereotyped portrayal of the Persians.[203]

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[195] Curzon, (1892), II, 79-81, 86, 166.

[196] Curzon, (1892), II, 79.

[197] Curzon, (1892), I, 295.

[198] Wynn, (2003), 5.

[199] Mack, (1973), 218.

Curzon and Sykes' view of classical education as a 'fitting' preparation for imperial administration, was reflected in official policy which used classical aptitude to gatekeep access to the most prestigious colonial jobs throughout the 19th Century. For example, applicants to the East India Company's (EIC) administrative training college at Haileybury were required to demonstrate knowledge of Greco-Roman writers, including Herodotus and Xenophon, and translate excerpts of their work into English.[204] Latin and Greek, as well as modern European languages, were similarly considered crucial linguistic criteria for agents and soldiers in Asia, as can be observed in the official prospectuses for the Addiscombe academy, which focused on training officers for the Company army.[205] Applicants to the

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[200] Turner, (2016), 132.

[201] P.M. Sykes, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia,* (London, 1902), 4.

[202] Sykes, (1902), 9, 93, 145.

[203] Sykes, (1902), 168.

[204] J.H. Stocqueler, *Handbook to India,* (London, 1845), 92.

[205] Stocqueler, (1845), 92-3.

Indian Civil Service (ICS), which replaced the administration of the EIC in 1858 following the violent upheaval of the Indian Uprising, were similarly expected to have acquired Greek and Latin through public schooling, with those that had not at a distinct disadvantage.[206] While classical aptitude was thus a prerequisite for these roles throughout the 19th Century, it is notable that the EIC admissions process was generally more flexible and Company employees often attained promotions based on their aptitude with Asian languages.[207] Phiroze Vasunia's research into the ICS admissions process additionally confirms that classical aptitude was consistently weighted higher than proficiency in Asiatic languages relevant to the posting itself. In the 1860s, 1,500 marks could be gained through knowledge of Latin and Greek compared with only 750 for Arabic and Sanskrit, while by 1893 the total points available through classically-related subjects (including Roman law, logic, and moral philosophy, as well as language) rose to 3,600, against only 1,000 for Arabic and Sanskrit combined.[208] This made it significantly more difficult for Indian candidates to gain admission, even if they possessed the funds required to access instruction in Greek and Latin, which typically involved travel to Britain. This disparity is clearly illustrated by the admission figures: in 1904, only a single Indian candidate passed the 'open competition', followed by three more in 1905.[209] Simultaneously, it ensured that British candidates stemmed from the 'appropriate' class background for the task of imperial administration. Following the re-weighting of the classical subjects, 77% of successful applicants to the ICS came from Oxford and Cambridge, a significant homogenisation compared with the more diverse educational backgrounds observable among the employees of the EIC.[210] Vasunia also highlights that this actively reduced the proportion of Scots and Irish within the ICS, ensuring the consolidation of its Anglo-British character and again contrasting directly with the EIC.[211] Not only was the British imperial administration in India becoming more homogenous in terms of class, education, and ethnicity at the beginning of the 20th Century, the central role of a classical education and belief in the need to emulate Rome, however superficially, was also being re-emphasised.

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[206] Kumar, (2012), 95.

[207] P. Vasunia, 'Greek, Latin and the Indian Civil Service', *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 51 (2005), 37-44.

[208] Vasunia, (2005), 46, 52-3.

[209] Vasunia, (2005), 62.

[210] Vasunia, (2005), 53.

Though more intangible compared with their impact upon the conceptualisation of empire, the classics also pervaded Victorian culture on a more intimate basis, namely as a vector for self-expression in a society which publicly valued conformity, uniformity, and adherence to strict social and class norms. Greek and Roman history and mythology were useful as a vehicle for pulling a veil over topics otherwise considered taboo in polite society - sexuality (of all varieties), violence, and death. Far from the prudish veneer presented in 20th Century popular culture, the Victorians were intensely engaged with these topics, exploring them by pathologising them through now-discredited 'sciences' such as phrenology, or under the aegis of other cultural contexts in literature, art, music, and drama.[212] Images of Leda and the Swan, for example, were produced prolifically in the 19th Century both in painting and sculpture and could be found in many middle and upper-class homes, while homosexuality was often euphemistically referred to as 'Greek love'.[213] As well as the Greco-Roman sources, these contexts for expression were derived from Biblical as well as 'Oriental' literary settings, an increasingly popular avenue for the exploration of otherwise inaccessible topics which will be assessed further in Chapter 4. Engagement with all three, especially the classics, were closely tied to class due to their dissemination through public schools, but also permeated more widely throughout society as engagement with these cultural lodestones was a key component of class aspiration.[214] The exposure to Greco-Roman literature, culture, and aesthetics was broad and multifaceted, yet often simultaneously superficial and skewed by contemporary British imperial self-image and mythology rather than deep understanding of the texts themselves or the cultures and historical circumstances which led to their production. The accompanying revivification of the East-West/Barbarism-Civilisation binaries facilitated the absorption of de-contextualised tropes and stereotypes of the Persians, both ancient and contemporaneous. To comprehend the range of factors prompting the absorption of stereotypes, or indeed their rejection, it is necessary to interrogate the careers and experiences of these writers in relation to empire, and how the classics intertwined with the influences of orientalism and racism to further crystallise views of Persia, the Persians, and the East as irreconcilably ‘Other’.

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[211] Vasunia, (2005), 68; Devine, (2004), 260-1, 335-6.

[212] S. Heffer, *The Age of Decadence,* (London, 2017), 518-9.

[213] Heffer, (2017), 499, 501, 517

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[214] Rose, (2010), 187-9.

2. British Travellers and Empire: 'Imperial Anxieties' in the 19th Century

'We talk in the West of the 'Yellow Danger', the 'Black Danger', and the like; but what are these when compared with the 'White Peril' which threatens Asia?'[215]

Edward Granville Browne

2.1 – The 'Great Game': Geopolitics and Diplomacy

Anglo-Iranian relations in the 19th Century were significantly shaped by the 'imperial careers' of the individuals who travelled there as diplomats, under the auspices of the East India Company, the later more formalised British government in India, or in various other roles within the British imperial structure. It is crucial to take this into account when analysing the written material that was generated as a result since, regardless of rank or specific role, many of these travellers were at least nominally beholden to the idea that their goal was the advancement of British interests in the region.[216] The Iran travelogues of C.J. Wills (1883), A.H. Layard (1887), and I.L. Bird (1891) were assessed in this regard and are examined alongside the core travelogues in this chapter, as they further elucidate the range of often-interlocking imperial careers and anxieties, and were influential upon the subsequent travelogues of Curzon, Browne, and Sykes.

The British delegation which arrived at the court of Fath' Ali Shah Qajar in 1810, the first official British diplomatic mission to Persia since that of Dodmore Cotton in the late-

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[215] E.G. Browne, *Pan-Islamism,* (Cambridge, 1902), 24.

[216] D. Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians,* (London, 1977), 11.

1620s, was initially dispatched to stymie Napoleonic overtures to the Shah. The delegation played a key role in facilitating the Treaty of Gulistan (1813) between Persia and Russia, at that time a British ally in the conflict with Napoleon, initiating a phase of heightened interaction, cooperation, and competition between European powers in Iran.[217] Following the end of meaningful French influence in South Asia, tensions steadily escalated between erstwhile allies Britain and Russia; a geopolitical rivalry which impacted British policy in Asia throughout the 19th Century, particularly regarding Iran and Afghanistan. This confrontation across Central Asia was informally dubbed 'The Great Game', with the term popularised by Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), wherein the eponymous protagonist participates in adventures across India culminating in the foiling of a Russian invasion.[218] The Russians themselves referred to it as the 'Tournament of Shadows' due to the use of spies and proxy conflicts, which intensified following the Russian conquests of Bokhara (1868), Khiva (1873), and Kokand (1876), which had served as their boundary with Iran.[219] That both powers framed this confrontation in the language of a 'game' belies the suffering it inflicted on local populations and its significant impact on reshaping alliances and power structures in the region. The more hawkish elements in the British government, supporters of an assertive 'forward position', interpreted Russian expansion as a prelude to designs on their Indian empire, a view which Kipling and other imperialist authors further amplified through literature.[220] India was very much its own imperial centre, and it is impossible to contextualise Iran's significance to British imperial policy without considering the influence and concerns of the Raj and the EIC government which preceded it.[221]

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[217] Amanat, (2017), 195-6.

[218] E. Said, 'Introduction' to R. Kipling, *Kim,* (London, 1987), 13-14, 36.

[219] T. Barfield, *Afghanistan,* (Princeton NJ, 2010), 139-40.

[220] Said, (1987), 11, 29-30, 37.

[221] H. Lyman Stebbins, 'British Imperialism, Regionalism, and Nationalism in Iran' in *Iran Facing Others,* A. Amanat and F. Vejdani (eds.), (New York NY, 2012), 153.

Qajar Iran thus became a contested buffer between two imperial powers, granting it a strategic significance it had never truly possessed as a trading partner for Britain. This necessitated a renewed concerted approach towards assessing the state of Iran, its Qajar rulers, and its peoples, all of which underwent significant change during the 19th Century.[222] For the British, the 1880s also marked a revival of imperialism, both domestically and throughout the empire, and a clear hardening of attitudes to both colonial subjects and the external 'Other', a symptom of the imperial anxiety stoked simultaneously by fears of internal decadence, imperial competition, and indigenous unrest.[223] The British travelogue writers of Qajar Iran in this period were inevitably affected by this heightened imperial fervour which intensified adherence to stereotyped receptions of the 'Other' in an atmosphere of racial superiority and jingoism. Assessing this however necessitates greater scrutiny of their individual relationships both to British imperial power structures and their impact on Qajar Iran.

The British strategic approach to Iran was further complicated by the status of Afghanistan. Mohammad Shah Qajar's attempt to capture Herat in 1836, accompanied by Russian troops, alarmed the British who responded by breaking off diplomatic relations in 1837 and landed a small force to occupy Kharg Island in the Gulf. This forced the Shah to withdraw his troops, fearing a full-scale invasion.[224] Though a wider conflict was averted through 'gunboat diplomacy', British anxieties around Russian encroachment in Afghanistan persisted, with the administration in India falsely perceiving the Afghan Amir Dost Mohammed as receptive to a potential alliance with their imperial rival.[225] This anxiety was compounded by fears that, in exchange for control of Herat, Mohammad Shah Qajar would ally himself with Dost Mohammad and the Russians in an anti-British triple alliance.[226] The disastrous First Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42) ultimately underlined the potential vulnerability of British power after a Century of military victories and imperial expansion. Hindered by inadequate leadership, the unpopularity of their chosen client ruler Shah Shuja, and lacking a clear exit-strategy (the common denominator of all imperial adventures in Afghanistan), the British Army of the Indus was driven out of Kabul and almost entirely massacred. The remainder died of starvation and exposure, or were enslaved during their chaotic retreat through the Hindu Kush in the winter of 1842.[227] This catastrophe was rapidly transformed into a 'heroic failure' for the British home audience, epitomised by William Barns Wollen's painting *The Last Stand of the 44th Foot at Gundermuck, 1842,* which elevated the white British dead to the status of imperial martyrs while entirely erasing the Indian *sepoys* who comprised the vast majority of the army.[228] British depictions of the Afghans as inhuman, bestial killers also heightened fears of the 'cruel native', and intensified the perceived rift between the 'civilised' and the 'barbarous.'[229] Yet, disastrous as it was, the invasion of Afghanistan also contained the seeds of a far greater challenge to British hegemony.

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[222] Abrahamian, (2008), 35.

[223] E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* (London, 1994), 92.

[224] R. Johnson, 'The Great Game and Power Projection' in *Imperial Crossroads,* J.R. Macris and S. Kelly (eds.), (Annapolis MD, 2012), 34-5.

[225] Barfield, (2010), 114.

The massive loss of life among Indian EIC troops and subalterns, who were abandoned by their British officers during the retreat from Kabul, eroded perceptions of British supremacy in India whilst stoking resentment among *sepoys*, who realised their comrades had met only slavery or death in Afghanistan.[230] While the controversy over the alleged use of pig and cow fat in rifle cartridges has long been cited as the inciting incident for unrest, there were religious factors relating to directly to Afghanistan which undoubtedly contributed over a longer period. Muslim *sepoys* had fundamentally resented being deployed against their co-religionists without ample justification, while Hindu soldiers only reluctantly left the sacred confines of Hindustan, fearing ritual pollution.[231] This simmering unrest among the Company armies, coupled with the puncturing of the perception of British invincibility by the *jezail* barrels of Ghilzai tribesmen, thus facilitated the circumstances of the 1857 Indian Uprising. It is striking that the rebels, both Hindu and Muslim, sought the leadership of the ailing Mughal Bahadur Shah II as their commander, a role he also nominally occupied for the EIC according to the *firman* they had been granted. [232] This led to a moment of direct moral confrontation between coloniser and colonised, as both sides possessed grounds for accusing the other of treacherously breaking their oaths. Atrocities committed by the *sepoys* were used for maximum propaganda effect to galvanise outrage in Britain and among the forces of retribution, as had been done with Afghanistan. The Uprising was subsequently cast as a 'grand betrayal', implicit in its designation as the 'Indian Mutiny' in British historiography.[233] The Qajars were also to some extent implicated in events. The British had landed an expeditionary force at Bushehr when Herat came under renewed Qajar attack in 1856, forcing Naser al-Din Shah to finally renounce all territorial claims to western Afghanistan in the 1857 Treaty of Paris.[234] Rumours circulated among both the rebels and the British that the Qajars planned to capitalise on the collapse of British control to seek revenge for Herat and rapidly advance territorial claims, perhaps even invading India itself.[235] Though no such incursion took place, or was even seriously considered, conjecture surrounding a 'great Oriental conspiracy', involving not only the Indian rebels and Qajars, but also potentially the Russians, heightened British fears of the 'Other' in Asia.[236] The appearance of an uninvited Russian diplomatic delegation in Afghanistan in July 1878 ignited further conflict. The Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880), while not a catastrophe on the scale of the first, nonetheless proved costly and damaging to the British, who initially attempted to partition the country to exercise more effective control.[237] The massacre of Louis Cavagnari's diplomatic delegation in Kabul, as the result of rioting over unpaid wages to Afghan troops, highlights that the British were regarded as the 'real' power in Afghanistan at this point, simultaneously illustrating the weakness of their then-client Yaqub.[238] Subsequent British support for another claimant, Abdur Rahman, ultimately led to his triumph over internal rivals and the reunification of the country under his increasingly authoritarian and centralising rule.[239]

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[226] W. Dalrymple, *Return of a King,* (London, 2014), 118.
[227] Barfield, (2010), 121-6.
[228] W. Dalrymple, 'Violence, Victors and Victims: How to Look at the Art of the British Empire', *The Guardian* (20. Nov. 2015).
[229] MacKenzie, (1985), 48.
[230] Dalrymple, (2014), 389-90, 399.

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[231] R.T. Harrison, *Britain in the Middle East,* (London, 2016), 59.

[232] P. Gopal, *Insurgent Empire,* (London, 2020), 53-5.

[233] Said, (1987), 25.

[234] Amanat, (2008), 304-6, 313-5.

[235] Dalrymple, (2006), 11, 124.

[236] Gopal, (2020), 50.

Though temporary, these violent disruptions of British imperial power in India and Afghanistan were instrumental in stoking imperial anxiety and hardening British attitudes towards indigenous populations in Asia in the late 19th Century. The decline in social contact between the British and native populations accelerated rapidly in the years following the Uprising, with the British population in India segregating itself in lodges, clubs, and gated communities, termed the 'enclaves of power' by Priyamvada Gopal.[240] This was accompanied by greater emphasis on maintaining exclusively British norms within these enclaves; dictating strict standards of dress, food, and social etiquette. Those Indians who did subsequently penetrate these spheres did so, almost exclusively, in the role of subaltern.[241] Shimla, which became the summer capital in 1864, epitomised this trend of dislocation and separation. British administrators in Shimla decided the course of the Raj and several of the travelogue writers who travelled in Iran received orders from there detailing how they might best assist in the maintenance of an increasingly paranoid empire.[242] British policy focused almost exclusively on buying and maintaining the loyalty of the Indian ruling families and elites, as well as favoured minorities such as the Parsis.[243] This was not always successful, most notably in the case of Duleep Singh, the deposed Sikh Maharajah who had converted to Christianity as a youth and had, at least according to the British authorities, been thoroughly 'anglicised'.[244] In 1886 he suddenly became a source of imperial anxiety when he left Britain for India, vowing to raise the Punjab in revolt in conjunction with a Russian invasion, as his letter to Czar Alexander III illustrates: 'I am a patriot and seek only to deliver some 250,000,000 of my countrymen from the cruel yoke of the British rule…altogether some 300,000 soldiers…are prepared to rise should the Imperial Government think proper to make an advance against the British… it is in my power to raise the entire Punjab in revolt and cause the inhabitants to attack in their rear, the British forces sent to oppose the Imperial army.'[245] Duleep Singh was ultimately prevented from returning to the Punjab and this joint invasion never materialised. However, a threat of this scale to India, involving not only an Indian Maharajah and the Russians but also, allegedly, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) as middlemen, was just the sort of wide-ranging conspiracy which seemed credible in an atmosphere of growing imperial anxiety. This had been stoked domestically by the IRB's bombing campaign in England and particularly London (1881-5), the fear of losing Ireland cutting to the heart of the British imperial project.[246]

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[237] Barfield, (2010), 146.
[238] Barfield, (2010), 142-6.
[239] Barfield, (2010), 147-55.
[240] Gopal, (2020), 56.
[241] Gopal, (2020), 56-7.

The disasters in Afghanistan and the traumatic upheaval of the Indian Uprising were kept at the forefront of the British psyche through extensive memorialisation and the proliferation of jingoistic plays and literature.[247] This popular literature, disseminated through newspapers and magazines as well as books, played a prominent role in the post-1880 reinvigoration of imperial propaganda. Set across the spectrum of exotic colonial possessions and frontiers, these texts extolled the heroism of explorers and soldiers, encouraging British youth to imitate their acts and replenish the ranks of colonial militaries and bureaucracies.[248] This further contributed to the watershed in public perceptions of Asia; severing social bonds between the British and indigenous populations and intensifying their negative portrayal in the literature of the late-19th Century.[249] By breaking 'the spell of inviobility which seemed to attach to an English man', as *The Times* described it, the Uprising in particular played a key role in initiating the phase of anxiety for the British empire in Asia.[250] These experiences of defeat and precarity contributed to the imperial revival of the 1880s and had a significant impact on subsequent framings of the 'Other' in Asia, which inevitably also coloured receptions of Qajar Iran. Just as the Napoleonic Wars had been instrumental in framing the conceptualisation of British imperial power in the first half of the 19th Century, particularly with regards to the classicism which became entwined with it, so the Indian Uprising redefined British attitudes to the empire, its subjects, and its potential futures.

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[242] A.H. Layard, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susiana and Babylonia,* (London, 1887); Sykes, (1901).
[243] Lyman Stebbins, (2012), 153-4.
[244] C. Campbell, *The Maharajah's Box,* (London, 2001), 53, 63, 119.
[245] Maharajah Duleep Singh to the Emperor of Russia, 10. May 1887: cited from Campbell, (2001), 237-41.
[246] Heffer, (2017), 272-5.

Following his election as the Member of Parliament for Southport in 1886, George Nathaniel Curzon increasingly focused his attention on the condition of the Raj, which he viewed as the cornerstone of the British empire: 'as long as we rule India, we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it, we shall drop straightaway to a third-rate power.'[251] Curzon fixated upon the potential threat posed to India by Russian expansion, before embarking on a series of travels with explicitly political objectives. These began with an expedition to Central

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[247] MacKenzie, (1984), 18.
[248] MacKenzie, (1984), 199-244.
[249] MacKenzie, (1984), 48-9.
[250] *The Times,* (31. Aug. 1857).
[251] G.N. Curzon: quoted from N. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience,* (London, 1969), 256.

Asia from 1888-89 followed by his first publications, *Russia in Central Asia,* and *The Anglo-Russian Question;* both published in 1889.[252] Curzon's subsequent journey through Qajar Iran, from late September 1889 to January 1890, provided the firsthand material for the two vast volumes of *Persia and the Persian Question*, published in 1892. This flurry of publications amounted to Curzon quite deliberately laying out his credentials for the coveted post of Viceroy of India.[253] He went on to hold the position from 1899 until 1905, occupying Government House which the architect Edwin Lutyens had modelled after Kedleston Hall, Curzon's own ancestral home.[254] Curzon's political interest in Iran endured during his tenure as Viceroy and he would regularly urge Arthur Hardinge, the British Minister to Tehran, to take a more aggressive approach with the Qajar authorities whenever they made concessions to the Russians.[255] Curzon's imperial career thus constituted the elevation of a supporter of the 'forward position' in Iran and an avid 'player' of the Great Game to the highest office of the British empire in Asia.

The primary objective of *Persia and the Persian Question*, according to Curzon himself, was to advocate for this 'forward position'; countering Russian expansion by taking a more forceful role in Iran and across the region.[256] This was a more aggressive policy position than that of the prime minister Lord Salisbury who, in 1889, stated in the Commons that 'were it not for our possession of India, we should trouble ourselves but little over Persia.'[257] This marked Curzon as particularly hawkish on the issue of Russia, even by the standards of the late-Victorian Tory party, as he argued that direct and consistent intervention in Iran was required. Browne also sought to influence the direction of British Persia policy following his return from Iran, considering the fear of Russian expansion to be its primary motivator which consequently led to Iran's exploitation as a convenient buffer zone.[258] Henes has described how the Persia Committee and Persia Society became influential following the Constitutional Revolution, whereas prior to that opinion-making was largely confined to those who had travelled to Iran and were able to have their writings published.[259] Ironically, it was Curzon, the arch-imperialist, to whom Browne turned for assistance; believing that the MP's wide-ranging political connections might facilitate a change in imperial policy. At the same time, Curzon saw Browne as the means of gaining academic validation for his own travelogue and confirmation of his status as an 'expert'.[260] By acquiescing and endorsing *Persia and the Persian Question*, Browne vindicated Curzon's forceful advocacy for the 'forward position' despite it being antithetical to his own views, complicating later receptions of Browne as an 'anti-imperial radical.'

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[252] D. Wright, 'Curzon and Persia', *The Geographical Journal* 153 (1987), 343.
[253] Harrison, (2011), 107.
[254] D. Olusoga, *Cult of Progress,* (London, 2021), 142-6.
[255] Wright, (1987), 347.
[256] G.N. Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia and the Anglo-Russian Question,* (London, 1889), 257; Curzon, (1892), I, ix.
[257] W.J. Olson, *Anglo-Iranian Relations during World War I,* (London, 1984), 1.

British Diplomacy in late-Qajar Iran

The transfer of diplomatic responsibility from London back to India reflected a return to British indifference towards Iran following the abatement of the Napoleonic threat, along with reluctance to commit further resources or personnel to shore up the Qajar army.[261] Though there was little recognition of the significance of this among the EIC, Fath' Ali Shah Qajar certainly perceived it for the snub it was; complaining to the British agent that he had 'ridden an elephant too long to submit their setting me to ride a jackass.'[262] Trust in the British as a potential ally and guarantor of sovereignty in Iran quickly eroded, as promises of material and financial aid during the second Russo-Persian War did not materialise. The humiliating terms of the Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828), which finalised the loss of Georgia and Armenia to the Russian empire, also diminished the Qajar state in British eyes.[263] This was compounded by the appointment of John Campbell as the British chargé d'affaires (1830) and then Consul General (1834) in Tehran, who was extremely unpopular at the Qajar court for his rude and aggressive manner.[264] Mohammad Shah Qajar's lament that 'they [the British] do what they like now; they think the waters have passed over me' reflects the growth of this diplomatic rift, exacerbated further by the confrontations over Herat and the British occupation of Bushehr and Kharg island.[265] This situation was, however, reversed by the late 19th Century. The British and Indian governments sought to rapidly expand their influence within Iran, as a means of checking Russian encroachment and securing their own strategic and growing commercial interests. Diplomatic infrastructure was increasingly imposed on Iran; competition with Russia and growing economic and infrastructural interests driving the establishment of a network of consulates. From 1889-1921, British consulates in Iran expanded from three to twenty four and, in the focal timeframe of this thesis (c.1880-1905), seven new consulates were established.[266] These were in Muhammara (now Khorramshahr) (1890), Kerman (1894), Sistan (1898), Bandar Abbas (1900), Shiraz (1903), Ahvaz (1904), and Kermanshah (1905).[267] Lyman Stebbins highlights the similarity to the situation in India, as both there and in Iran the British viewed influence over local and regional notables as the key means of solidifying their influence.[268] Consuls were constantly occupied with maintaining and expanding this influence, subtly subverting and circumventing the state while Qajar sovereignty was nominally maintained as a convenient cover for their actions.

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[258] Denison Ross, (1926), xiv.
[259] Henes, (2012), 128-33.
[260] Ross, (2009), 394.
[261] Canning to Wynn (pte.). 24. October 1826. F.O. 60/29.
[262] McNeil to Lockhart (pte.) 17. October 1824. Lockhart MSS 925 Vol. III F.O. 43.

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[263] Amanat, (2017), 211-6.

[264] M.E. Yapp, 'The Control of the Persian Mission', *The University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 7, (1960), 172.

[265] McNeil to Campbell, 30. June 1832. Enclosures to Secret Letters, Vol. 43, no.27.

[266] Lyman Stebbins, (2012), 152.

[267] *The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Yearbook for 1921,* (London, 1921), 59-60.

[268] Lyman Stebbins, (2012), 154.

Percy Sykes played an integral role in this expansion. Originally commissioned into the 16th Lancers straight from Sandhurst, he was transferred to the 2nd Dragoon Guards in 1888 and then dispatched to India. There he underwent instruction in several Asian languages and acquired a competent level of Persian, though he never matched Browne's fluency.[269] This allowed him to undertake clandestine intelligence missions throughout Iran and Central Asia, receiving his orders directly from the British command at Shimla. Sykes, however, would often claim in his writings that he travelled for his own pleasure or to satisfy his 'sense of adventure', despite subsequently holding several diplomatic posts across Iran. [270] In October 1894, he was tasked with the establishment of a British consulate in Kerman; calculated to exert influence over the tumultuous border region of Baluchistan which was divided between Iran and British India. He was also involved in the foundation of the Sistan consulate in 1898, in direct response to the appointment of a Russian vice-consul for the similarly unstable region.[271] Sykes, unexpectedly, became the sole interpreter for the Baluchistan boundary commission in 1896, due to the British officials in India tasked with assembling the commission being unaware of the significant differences between the Persian used there and that used in Iran.[272] These diplomatic undertakings were matched by involvement in economic affairs. Throughout his time in Persia, Sykes undertook topographical surveys for the Central Persia Telegraph Company which served commercial as well as strategic ends for the British.[273] He was also heavily involved in the British development of the Karun River, identified as a means of making commercial inroads into

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[269] Wynn, (2003), 3, 5-7.
[270] Sykes, (1902), 89.
[271] Sykes, (1902), 176, 369.
[272] Sykes, (1902), 226.
[273] Sykes, (1902), 333, 346-7.

Persia and Central Asia almost half a century earlier by Layard.[274] Receiving orders to make a survey of the Karun valley, Sykes proceeded from there to Tehran in autumn 1896. There, acting on the orders from Mortimer Durand the Minister Plenipotentiary, he presented a proposal for the construction of a bridge spanning the Karun to the prominent Qajar prince Abdol-Hossein Farman Farma, which subsequently received approval from Mozaffar ad-Din Shah.[275] Sykes' own commercial interests also played a role, as he became involved in trading rugs within Iran and exporting them to Britain.[276]

Henes has highlighted the popularisation of the military memoir as a subgenre of travel writing in the period examined in this thesis, though Iran's location on the periphery of empire limited the emergence of examples until the First World War.[277] Sykes' *Ten Thousand Miles* therefore represents an invaluable description of British military activities in Qajar Iran in defence of British interests. This is epitomised by his participation in a retaliatory expedition against the Karwanis of Baluchistan examined in the following chapter; leading a small party of British and Indian troops alongside the governor of Kerman and his Persian forces.[278] Sykes had requested permission to travel to South Africa in 1900, due to the escalating Anglo-Boer War, which was initially denied. However, in 1901, the deteriorating course of the war convinced military officials to amend their decision and he was despatched from Bandar Abbas to assume command of the 9th Welsh Yeomanry.[279] During the war he was also involved with the intelligence department, but in 1902 was reassigned to the Indian Army after being shot in the leg by the 'stubborn Boers.'[280] Upon his return to Iran, Sykes held a number of further of diplomatic positions, first as British consul at Kerman and then, in 1905, as Consul-General at Mashad.[281] Sykes' imperial career thus highlights the convergence of military and diplomatic roles, as Qajar Iran was gradually carved into spheres of influence by the British and Russians. This intensified, in 1907, through the secret division of Iran into British (southern) and Russian (northern) spheres of influence, with a neutral zone centred on Isfahan separating them.[282] Sykes was also inadvertently involved in constructing the 'infrastructure' for resistance to the Qajar monarchy through his role in the proliferation of British diplomatic installations. The crowd of approximately 15,000, who sought *bast* (sanctuary) at the British legation from 19th July to 14th August 1906, originally demanded reforms from Mozaffar ad-Din Shah, which instead led to the establishment of the *Majlis* and the creation of Iran's first constitution.[283]

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[274] S. Shahnavaz, *Britain and the Opening Up of South-West Persia,* (Abingdon, 2005), 32-5.

[275] Sykes, (1902), 240-256.

[276] Henes, (2012), 104.

[277] Henes, (2012), 174, 183.

[278] Sykes, (1902), 298.

[279] Sykes, (1902), 419, 424.

[280] Sykes, (1902), 446.

It was ultimately the military component of Sykes' brief in Iran which led to the end of his 'imperial career'. Having long expected sympathy and material support from the nomadic groups of southern Iran, British administrators were shocked at the ability of German diplomats and agents to reach these communities and win their assistance in the context of the First World War.[284] The South Persia Rifles were formed in 1916 in response, with Percy Sykes holding the temporary rank of Brigadier-General in command, adding new resonance to the nickname long held among unsympathetic contemporaries: 'Napoleon-Attila Sykes.'[285] Sykes was never popular among his peers, considered vain and hungry for personal glory at the expense of duty or loyalty. Charles Hardinge, the first secretary of the British mission in Tehran (1896-8), considered him a 'terrible bounder', while another diplomat, Horace Rumbold, criticised him for his aggressively self-promotional behaviour, admitting

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[281] Wynn, (2003), 129.
[282] K. Matin, 'The Enlightenment and Historical Difference' in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906,* A.M. Ansari (ed.), (London, 2016), 88-9.
[283] E. Helbig, 'From Narrating History to Constructing Memory' in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906,* A.M. Ansari (ed.), (London, 2016), 60.
[284] P. Szlanta, *Die deutsche Persienpolitik,* (Schenefeld, 2006), 7-9.
[285] J. Ure, *Shooting Leave,* (London, 2009), 260; Amanat, (2017), 399.

‘we none of us liked him’ in reference to the staff of the Foreign Office.[286] This unpopularity would cost Sykes dearly: his unauthorised occupation of Isfahan in 1917 alongside Russian troops following their defeat of the Qashqai encouraged his many critics to demand his removal from office.[287] Even the hawkish Curzon, who had previously provided support, ultimately disavowed Sykes’ unilateral actions, his own influence diminished following his unpopularity and replacement as Viceroy in 1905.[288] In 1918, just as Britain was further expanding its military presence in Iran, Sykes was recalled to Britain, holding no further diplomatic or military posts, and quietly retiring from the army in 1924, thereafter hosting occasional lectures on Iran or Afghanistan.[289] Sykes’ multiple roles within the hierarchy of the British empire; diplomat, intelligence officer, soldier, and eventually ‘expert’; rendered him the epitome of a multifaceted ‘imperial agent’.

2.2 Imperial Agents: Traversing the ‘Contact Zone’

As apprehension of Russian expansion encouraged greater British engagement with Qajar Iran through diplomacy, it also prompted efforts to explore, map, assess, and quantify the land and its peoples, truly becoming ‘masters of all they survey[ed].’[290] This took place through the efforts of what this thesis designates as ‘imperial agents’, typically the first representatives of empire to permeate the ‘contact zone’ out with the formalised diplomatic context. These ‘agents’ typically comprised an assortment of overlapping professions: explorers, soldiers, spies, cartographers, merchants, archaeologists, anthropologists, and naturalists.[291] While their experiences and motivations were diverse, and frequently disreputable, in the last decades of the 19th Century these agents were increasingly lauded as adventurers and imperial heroes: ‘John Company had a knack of turning out a splendid class of scholarly soldiers and civilians – men who seemed equal to any sort of task, of war, of administration, or of research, that chanced to come in their road.’[292] Henry Rawlinson and Austen Henry Layard were among the most prominent of these agents in the first half of the 19th Century, famous in Britain for their archaeological exploits in Mesopotamia rather than their imperial activities in Iran.[293] Sykes in particular wanted to shape his career in the mould of these men, engaging in periodic antiquarian expeditions and excavations during his time in Iran with hopes of making significant finds, though this ultimately eluded him.[294]

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[286] Ure, (2009), 250; Wynn, (2003), 105.
[287] Amanat, (2017), 399-400.
[288] Henes, (2012), 163.
[289] Henes, (2012), 166.
[290] Pratt, (1992), 9.
[291] Pratt, (1992), 3, 12.

Layard’s travelogue, *Early Adventures in Persia, Susiana, and Babylonia* was only published in 1887, over forty years after the events themselves. The delay was due to the clandestine dual-purpose of Layard’s journey through Iran. This involved providing cartographic surveys to the EIC administration in India while covertly investigating the feasibility of gaining traction with the nomadic tribes, particularly the Bakhtiari, as a means of extending British influence and creating internal checks on potential Russian advances.[295] British policy also directly encouraged regionalism within Iran, particularly between North and South as a means of weakening Qajar influence on the Gulf-littoral, but also among the tribal groups of the South.[296] Cartography was often cast by Europeans as a benign, scientific activity, intended to expand the bounds of human knowledge but, in the case of Iran, it was deemed strategically crucial by the administration in India. Accurate maps would allow them to predict potential Russian troop movements, ascertain key Qajar strongholds, and identify defensible geographical features which could be held by EIC troops and facilitate the transport of artillery and supplies.[297] Cartographical missions thus typically presaged more concrete British imperial expansion. This pattern had precedence back to William Petty's 'Down Survey' of Ireland (1656-8), which quantified the dimensions, value, and ownership of land, and was soon followed by the plantation of Ulster by Protestant colonists.[298] The commercial as well as strategic interests of empire were well-served by such missions. and Curzon praised Layard for being the first Englishman to highlight the potential of the Karun river as the only navigable artery for British trade into Iran and Central Asia, in his reports to the British government and the chamber of commerce in Bombay.[299] Though Layard was far from the only British traveller to undertake such assignments in Qajar Iran, the impact his report on the Karun, in consolidating British influence, led Sohrab Shahnavaz to deem his journey the 'most sinister' of British surveying efforts, and criticise the distortion in Layard's selective presentation of 'remarkable wanderings' in his heavily-edited travelogue.[300] The process of exploring and quantifying were never neutral pursuits, but rather integral aspects of the encroachment of imperial power into the 'contact zone.'

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[292] *The Athenaeum,* (9. Mar. 1895), 313.

[293] Shahnavaz, (2005), 9-10.

[294] Sykes, (1902), 442-3.

[295] Shahnavaz, (2005), 9.

[296] Lyman Stebbins, (2012), 152.

Covert Assignments

Early Adventures, while inherently problematic as a historical source, provides a useful case study for examining how Layard refashioned his covert activities in Qajar Iran into an 'adventure' narrative; impacting his depiction of the Qajar state and the Bakhtiari nomads in the process. The Shah is notably absent from Layard's travelogue. At the time of his travels Britain was in a diplomatic rift with Iran, due to attempts by Mohammad Shah

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[297] Shahnavaz, (2005), 8-10.

[298] M. Siochrú and D. Brown, *'The Down Survey of Ireland Project', History Ireland* 21, (2013), 6.

[299] Curzon, (1892), II, 332-3.

[300] Shahnavaz, (2005), 9.

Qajar to capture Herat in 1837 and 1838, and his collaboration with the Russians to achieve this.[301] Layard thus generally avoided major urban centres and meetings with members of the royal family and court. Naser al-Din, who became a focus of later British travelogues, was a young and by all accounts meek and withdrawn child at this point. However, his father's humiliation by the British, coupled with the punishing terms of the treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay imposed by the Russians, would be formative for his later policy of playing imperial competitors off against each other.[302] As a result, Manuchehr Khan Gorji, the governor of Isfahan is referred to by Layard as 'the Matamet' (*Motamed ad-Dowlat*), and serves as stand-in for the 'despotic oriental ruler'; becoming the de-facto antagonist of this novelistic travelogue. Layard's description of Manuchehr Khan accords with well-established tropes: in addition to his despotic tendencies, he was criticised for his cruelty, greed, and dishonesty.[303] Layard emphasised his 'ample experience of Persian perfidy' and that the Bakhtiari *Ilkhan* had conveyed to him that no faith could be put in the word or promises of the governor; assertions which only strengthened his belief that dishonesty pervaded the entire society.[304] This presented Layard an opportunity to contrast the behaviour of the nomadic tribes with the urban population, in this case focusing on the alleged dishonesty of the latter: 'I had been the guest of one of the principal mountain chiefs, and his appearance, his independent and manly bearing, and the quiet dignity of his manners, so different from those of the false and obsequious Persians of the towns, much impressed me.'[305] Extrapolating this to cast the Iranians generally as deceitful and prone to intrigue is a particularly ironic assessment, considering Layard's own secretive topographical surveying and clandestine involvement with the Bakhtiari rebels under the guise of a 'curious traveller'.

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[301] Barfield, (2010), 114.

[302] W. Stuart, *Journal of a Residence in Northern Persia,* (London, 1835), 136; Amanat, (2008), 38.

[303] Layard, (1887), 264.

[304] Layard, (1887), 217-221.

[305] Layard, (1887), 137.

These negative traits were additionally attributed to the fact that Manuchehr Khan was a eunuch, an anathema to the author's Victorian sensibilities.[306] Layard's characterisation of the 'Matamet' as the epitome of 'Persian tyranny' however rests upon a fallacy. Manuchehr Khan Gorji, born Chongur Enakolopashvili, was a Georgian and had been subjected to this self-same tyranny. During the Russo-Persian War (1804-1813) he was captured by Tabrizi soldiers, forcibly converted to Islam, and castrated, before being enlisted in Fath' Ali Shah's harem.[307] Having formed alliances with other prominent Georgians within the harem, he secured not only the governorship of Isfahan but also control of significant portions of central and southwestern Iran, including the provinces of Kermanshah, Luristan, and Khuzestan. However, Manuchehr Khan's protection of the *Bab,* and alleged offer to back him militarily, demonstrates his dissatisfaction and perhaps even hatred of the existing political order, rendering him a deeply unsuitable exemplar of 'Qajar' or 'Iranian' despotism.[308] These political and ethnic nuances were lost on Layard who, when presented with a convenient candidate for the role of 'Oriental despot', seized enthusiastically upon the chance.

Much of Layard's information about Manuchehr Khan was derived second-hand from the Bakhtiari, particularly their Ilkhan Mehmet Taqi Khan who was actively leading resistance against the Qajars. They did, however, have at least two face-to-face meetings, one of which occurred during Manuchehr Khan's attempts to open negotiations with Mehmet Taqi Khan and the other Bakhtiari khans. Layard was incongruously, though certainly not coincidentally, present at what his travelogue describes as an effort to 'obtain by fraud what he [Manuchehr Khan] could not effect by force.'[309] Layard's travelogue records that Manuchehr Khan, not without justification, accused him of espionage, before launching into a tirade against the perfidy of the British more generally: 'You Englishmen… are always meddling in matters which do not concern you, and interfering in the affairs of other countries. You attempted to do it in Afghanistan, but all your countrymen there have been put to death; not one of them has escaped.'[310] Manuchehr Khan subsequently described the violent death of Sir William MacNaghten in Kabul, and the mutilation of his corpse, along with those of EIC officers and *sepoys*.[311] Receiving this information in the context of a tense parley at Manuchehr Khan's encampment must have been deeply unsettling for Layard, especially as this exchange allegedly happened in August 1841, four months before the massacre took place, implying that the governor of Isfahan was in contact with the Afghan resistance and privy to their plans.[312] Layard's unwitting proximity to these events, and realisation that he had potentially had foreknowledge of the disaster which would befall the Army of the Indus, may have further contributed to delaying publication of his travelogue. This episode also constituted a rare moment of direct dialogic confrontation between the interests of Iran and Britain recorded in a British travelogue. However, emanating from Manuchehr Khan it was hardly likely to elicit sympathy towards Iranian grievances.

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[306] Layard, (1887), 282.

[307] Amanat, (2017), 207.

[308] H. Walcher, 'ISFAHAN viii. Qajar Period' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* Vol. XIII, Fasc. 6, 657-675.

[309] Layard, (1887), 255.

While condemning the cruelty of Manuchehr Khan, it is notable that *Early Adventures* includes passing references to Layard's own capacity for violence during his travels. There are descriptions of how disagreements with other travellers led him to 'threatening acts of violence with the butt-end of my gun, or with a stout stick with which I had armed myself for the purpose', and, when Layard was accosted for breaking an undisclosed religious taboo, he had to be dissuaded from lashing out with this stick in response.[313] Attempts to restrain this aggressive streak failed during Layard's subsequent excavations outside Mosul where an argument with the local *qadi*, while crossing the Tigris, escalated to violence: 'I lost my temper, and dealt him a blow on his head with a short hooked stick… as he wore a thick turban, I did not believe that the blow would have had much effect, and I was surprised to see the blood streaming down his face.'[314] Layard subsequently grabbed the injured man, threatening to drown him in the river if any of his party retaliated. This incident jeopardised the excavations, and Henry Rawlinson complained about Layard's propensity to answer even mild provocation with violence. It was only through the political connections of the former that a wider backlash was averted.[315] Layard expressed no regret for the attack and maintained the *qadi* had 'deserved the punishment I had inflicted upon him,' and, ironically, used the event to justify his belief in the inherent fanaticism and predilection for violence of Muslims.[316] When assessing Layard's perceptions of violence or cruelty in Iran, it must thus be acknowledged that he himself was prone to inflicting it, perhaps a necessary capacity for an 'imperial agent.'

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[310] Layard, (1887), 282.

[311] Layard, (1887), 282.

[312] Adkins, (2004), 166.

[313] Layard, (1887), 228.

Nomads of Iran: Proto-Anthropology and the 'Noble Savage'

Jean Jacques Rousseau's concept of the 'noble savage', a romantic utopian vision of prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies living in the 'State of Nature', was highly influential on how Europeans conceptualised their encounters with 'Others' in the 'contact zone.'[317] Particularly applied to Native Americans in the 18th Century, this discourse exerted significant influence on how British travellers perceived and engaged with a variety of cultures in the 19th Century. In part this reflected a manufactured nostalgia regarding romanticised ideas of wilderness and ‘natural’ freedom, contrasted with the contemporaneous anxieties stoked by agricultural enclosure, industrialisation, and accelerating urbanisation.[318] However it also aligned to some extent with the themes of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*, which contrasted the growing decadence of the Rome with the ‘uncomplicated savagery’ of the Germanic peoples encroaching on its borders.[319] While lacking the more systematic approach of the emergent study of anthropology, a field inextricably linked to imperialism and socio-biology from its inception, Layard’s description of his time among the Bakhtiari prompted both reflection on their society and comparison with the sedentary populations of the towns and cities, largely to the detriment of the latter. His admiration for the nomadic tribes, and the Bakhtiari in particular, also invites comparison with *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* (1891); the travelogue of Isabella Lucy Bird, referred to in the convention of Victorian sources as ‘Mrs Bishop.’[320] Her travelogues of Japan (1872) and the Rocky Mountains (1873) attracted a significant readership which made her into a well-known late-Victorian personality.[321] This rendered her the most well-known travelogue writer examined here, except for Curzon, and this popularity provided her with a sizeable independent income.[322] This facilitated further travels, including accompanying British troops from Baghdad to Tehran for a survey expedition in 1890, and undertaking her own solo journey through Baluchistan, Iran, and Armenia in 1891. This provided the material for *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, published in two volumes later that year from her notebooks. Bird read and admired Layard’s *Early Adventures* before travelling to Iran, and her own travelogue similarly compared the Qajar state with the tribal power structures of nomadic groups, again focusing on the Bakhtiari.

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[314] A.H. Layard, *Autobiography and Letters,* (London, 1903), II, 169.

[315] Adkins, (2004), 209-11.

[316] Layard, (1903), II, 172.

[317] Pratt, (2022), 126; D. Graeber and D. Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything,* (London, 2021), 9-14, 71-3.

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[318] Graeber and Wengrow, (2021), 47.
[319] Gibbon, (1875), Vol. I, 169-85.
[320] I.L. Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan,* two volumes, (London, 1891).
[321] C.E. Bosworth, ‘The Intrepid Victorian Lady in Persia’, *Iran* 27 (1989), 86-7.
[322] Bosworth, (1989), 88.

As with his knowledge of Manuchehr Khan, the ‘villainous Matamet’, Layard’s view of the Qajar monarchy and administration more generally was predominantly formed from second-hand information accumulated during his time with the Bakhtiari. His discourse on their conflicts with the Qajar state highlights the ethnic tensions which the British sought to exploit to their advantage in the late 19th Century. Layard’s travels were an early exploratory contact which demonstrated the increasing prevalence of racialised thinking in British foreign policy. In Layard’s description of Bakhtiari tribesmen, their contempt for the Turkic Oghuz origins of the Qajars is evident: 'We cannot endure that those dogs of Turks should interfere between us,' and in reference to their stronghold the *Diwan Khaneh,* '…as for those Turks, they shall never come within sight of it.'[323] His travelogue emphasises that the leader of the Bakhtiari uprising, Mehmet Taqi Khan, shared this hostile view of the Qajar monarchy, and accorded with Layard’s own: 'He deplored the tyranny and maladministration which were the cause of widespread distress and disorder and were bringing the kingdom to ruin, and he despised the pusillanimous and corrupt Persian authorities.'[324] It is doubtful Layard could communicate extensively with Mehmet Taqi Khan, let alone average Bakhtiari, so the finer details of the chief’s grievances with the Qajars more likely reflects Layard’s own biases. The binary he presents, between sedentary authoritarian rule and yearning for nomadic freedom, consciously evokes the Greeks extolling the virtue of *libertas* in the face of Achaemenid *imperium*, and the enslavement which they feared would accompany it.[325] Layard was certainly influenced by the trend of archaising Qajar Iran, subscribing to a ‘decline narrative’ stoked, according to Lord Aberdare’s introduction to the travelogue, by ‘the scattered and mutilated remnants of a high and ancient civilisation [which] exercised upon his mind.’[326]

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[323] Layard, (1887), 332.
[324] Layard, (1887), 194.
[325] Kumar, (2012), 79.
[326] Layard, (1887), 28.

This narrative is in evidence within *Early Adventures*, demonstrated by Layard's disappointment at the apparently degraded condition of Iran, and the lack of widespread appreciation among Iranians for their pre-Islamic heritage, which he considered infinitely superior. However, he also recognised that his pursuit of ancient sites in Iran and Mesopotamia was, in effect, 'an acknowledgement of the debt which the West owes to the East,' indicating his belief that these cultures had once been sources of inspiration and progress, while further underlining the scale of their perceived decline.[327]

In practical terms, Bird identified a significant degree of similarity between Qajar monarchy and tribal authority, describing how 'the Khan of each tribe is practically its despotic ruler, and every tribesman is bound to hold himself at his disposal,' which somewhat evoked the subjects of the king being bound to him in a master-slave relationship.[328] According to Bird, the Bakhtiari themselves conceded very little deference to the Shah, treating his authority as 'merely nominal, a convenient fiction for the time being.'[329] This coherent resistance to Qajar authority was initially achieved through the efforts of two particular Ilkhans: Mehmet Taqi Khan, 'Sir A.H. Layard's friend,' and his successor Hossein Quli Khan, 'the last real ruler of the Bakhtiaris.' They achieved this by 'curbing the power of these [lesser] Khans [and] steering a shrewd and even course among their feuds and conflicts, by justice and consideration in the collection of the revenues, and by rendering it a matter of self-interest for them to seek his protection and acknowledge [their] headship'; effectively setting themselves up as overlords of a tribal confederation through a combination of force and consensus.[330] However, in the decades following Layard's involvement with Mehmet Taqi Khan and the Bakhtiari, the balance of power shifted decisively towards the state, which had focused its efforts on weakening the most prominent tribal chiefs. Bird describes how the 'Oriental method of attaining this end is by plots and intrigues at the capital, by creating and fomenting local quarrels, and by oppressive taxation,' a summary of what she considered ‘particularly Persian stratagems’.[331]

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[327] Layard, (1887), 316.
[328] Bird, (1891), I, 296.
[329] Bird, (1891), I, 357.
[330] Bird, (1891), I, 378.

In the case of the Bakhtiari, this approach certainly yielded results for Naser al-Din Shah, as wider loyalty to the Ilkhan was eroded and royal tribute became more consistent, though there were many instances where taxes could not be extracted. The resulting social cost of the destabilisation of tribal hierarchy was also significant, with Bird describing how 'blood feuds, predatory raids, Khans at war with each other, tribal disputes, and hostilities, are nearly universal. It is not for the interest of Persia to produce by her misrule and intrigues such a chronic state of insecurity as makes the tribes desire any foreign interference which will give them security and rest, and relieve them from the oppressive exactions of the Persian governors.'[332] Though it highlights the pressures from within Iran which prompted it, Bird’s recounting of this desire neglected to seriously acknowledge the impact of the machinations of Britain and Russia. Both sought to solidify their spheres of influence within Iran and cultivated relationships with tribal groups to exert leverage on the Qajar monarchy and thwart each other’s influence.[333] Bird exhibited a degree of deference for the legacies of Mehmet Taqi Khan and Hossein Quli Khan as the last bastions of Bakhtiari independence (or at least meaningful autonomy). However, she does not convey optimism about authoritarian rule in either the urban or tribal contexts: 'near views of Oriental despotisms are as disenchanting as near views of ‘the noble savage,’ for they contain within themselves the seeds of ‘all villainies,’ which rarely, if ever, fail of fructification.'[334] Engagement with the concept of ‘the noble savage’ first appeared in Bird’s discourse on the Scottish Gaels, who she described as possessing 'some very charming qualities, but in cunning, moral timidity, and plausibility they remind me of savages of rather a low type,' which in her view justified their ethnic cleansing during the Highland Clearances.[335] In relation to Iran, this concept would prove especially pertinent to Bird’s views on the differing forms and attitudes to violence among urban and nomadic populations.

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[331] Bird, (1891), I, 328.
[332] Bird, (1891), II, 92-3.
[333] Shahnavaz, (2005), 7-8.
[334] Bird, (1891), II, 128.

Similarly, Layard’s interactions with the Bakhtiari impacted heavily on his perceptions of violence and cruelty in Qajar Iran. His sympathetic relationship with Mehmet Taqi Khan provided him with a minority view of state violence, particularly the Khan’s fears should his uprising against the Qajars fail: 'the loss of sight was what he most dreaded… this cruel and barbarous punishment was then generally inflicted upon those chiefs who, having been declared in rebellion, had fallen into the hands of the Shah,' one of his scant references to the contemporary ruler, Mohammad Shah Qajar.[336] Layard’s concern extended to the family of Mehmet Taqi Khan upon their impending capture by the Iranians, who he reiterated 'delighted in cruelty, and were at that time ingenious beyond most other Easterns in inventing new tortures… [their fate] weighed upon me.'[337] His sympathies extended to the Bakhtiari generally, along with other tribal groups who opposed the Qajar administration (epitomised by Manuchehr Khan), with Layard embracing the ‘noble savage’ stereotype, in relation to their nomadic lifestyle, and their supposedly uncomplicated natures. This was partly achieved by comparing their behaviour to that of the archaic Greeks, describing the singing of ballads around the campfires before battle as ‘Homeric’, the poetry having a marked effect upon such a 'warlike and emotional race.'[338] Nonetheless, Layard did perceive in the nomads an inherent capacity for brutality and cruelty which he considered apparent in 'their ferocious countenances – rather those of demons than of human beings.'[339] The Bakhtiari were also laden with some of the same vices as the sedentary Iranians, such as a lack of pity and a willingness to shed blood for the sake of some small financial gain, with the act of revenge described as 'a delight as well as a duty with all semi-barbarous tribes… blood for blood is a maxim inculcated in the child from its earliest age.'[340] Individual nomads were also directly criticised for their cruel behaviour. A prime example was Malek Ahmed Khan, the chief of the Faïli tribe of Sagwand, who Layard describes as 'barbarous [and] one of the most notorious robbers and evil characters in the Luristan mountains.'[341] Therefore, although Layard assigned certain positive attributes to the nomadic peoples of Iran, contrasting them to the supposed degeneracy of the urban populations, he nonetheless dehumanised and essentialised them in the course of his narrative through generalising statements: 'It might be supposed that such men were insensible to all feelings and emotions except those excited by hatred of their enemies, cupidity, or revenge.'[342] Throughout his narrative, Layard betrays his fear of being killed in his sleep by one of the tribesmen, a cowardly act which undermines his assertions of their nobility and bravery: 'to be murdered in cold blood by a barbarian, far away from all help or sympathy, the place and cause of one's death to be probably forever unknown, and the author of it to escape with impunity, was a fate that could not be contemplated with indifference.'[343] The impression Layard created of Iranian society was thus of one inured to violence, its constituents accustomed to perpetrating cruel acts and having such acts perpetrated against them by those in positions of greater authority. It is in this frame of mind that Layard's assessment of Iranian violence approached its most hyperbolic: 'At that time few nations, however barbarous, equalled – none probably exceeded- the Persians in the shocking cruelty, ingenuity, and indifference with which death or torture was inflicted.'[344] Whether in the cities or among the encampments of the hill tribes, cruelty was depicted by Layard as an essential characteristic of the Iranian peoples.

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[335] A.M. Stoddart, *The Life of Isabella Bird,* (London, 1906), 140-1.
[336] Layard, (1887), 345.
[337] Layard, (1887), 348.
[338] Layard, (1887), 212.

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[339] Layard, (1887), 212.
[340] Layard, (1887), 212, 347.
[341] Layard, (1887), 365.
[342] Layard, (1887), 212.
[343] Layard, (1887), 272.

While her examination of punishment and torture in Iranian cities was formulaic, Bird's discourse on the role of violence among the Bakhtiari is of greater interest. In common with the Iranians generally, she perceived justice and punishment among the nomads as swift and direct, as in the case of robbery: 'when caught, the headmen consult as to his punishment, which may be the cutting off of a hand or nose, or to be severely branded.'[345] Averting blood-feuds and internecine conflict was a particular focus of Bakhtiari justice, since this weakened the ability of the tribe to present a united front against external threats, such as the encroachment of the Qajar state or raids by other nomadic groups. To prevent this, Bird described punishments as 'simple and deterrent, well suited to a simple people. When a homicide is captured he is handed over to the relatives of the slain man, who may kill him, banish him, fine him, or pardon him,' and directly echoed Layard in claiming ''Blood for blood' is a maxim very early inculcated.'[346] In Bird's description of Bakhtiari morality and what they considered sinful, cowardice is frequently cited, alongside 'breaches of the seventh commandment… disobedience to a chief when he calls on them to go to war, fraternising with Sunnis, who are 'accursed,' betraying to an enemy a man of their own tribe, and compassing the death of another by poison or evil machinations.'[347] As many of these edicts concerned warfare and service to their khan, Bird believed that tribal societies and their constituents were inherently braver and more martial than Iranians generally; a view she derived from observing her servants and other travellers.

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[344] Layard, (1887), 117.
[345] Bird, (1891), I, 329.
[346] Bird, (1891), II, 56.
[347] Bird, (1891), II, 99.

Perhaps due to its almost biblical literality, or because of Bird’s belief in its suitability for a 'simple people,' this form of justice was characterised as unchanging and, indeed, unchangeable. Punishments for robbery and the payment of blood money do not represent the sum of Bird’s description of violence among the Bakhtiari, who she portrays to a large degree, as inherently bloodthirsty and refers to repeatedly as ‘savages’ and ‘barbarians.’ This characterisation has a dehumanising effect on Bird’s nomadic subjects; apparent when she describes their reactions to an injured comrade receiving treatment for a wound: 'they seem to have no feeling for pain or shrinking from painful spectacles, and rather to enjoy the groans of the sufferer.'[348] She also emphasises that in the everyday functioning of tribal society, might very much equalled right. At the Bakhtiari village of Gardan-i Gunak, Bird was brought to a woman with severe facial injuries and asked to treat her but subsequently discovered the wounds resulted from the woman being stoned by her brother. This led Bird to remonstrate with the local headman, Sardah Khan, about why the perpetrator was not thrashed for such brutality, to which she received the explanation that 'no one would touch him, as he had killed three men last winter.'[349] Although she seemed to prefer their company to that of the urban Iranians, incidents such as this undoubtedly contributed to Bird’s summation of the Bakhtiari as inherently barbarous and cruel: 'they are savage at heart. They take pride in bloodshed, though they say they are tired of it and would like to live at peace, and there would be more killing than there is, were it not for the aversion which some of them feel to the creation of a blood-feud. When they do fight, ‘the life of a man is as the life of a sheep,' as the Persian proverb runs.'[350] Yet equally Bakhtiari and other tribal violence did not occur in a vacuum. In *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan,* Bird contemplates the potential for another tribal uprising against the Qajars: 'among a people at once simple and revengeful, it is not unlikely that such severities may bear their legitimate fruit if an occasion presents itself, such as the embroilment of Persia with any other power;' indicating her belief that the Bakhtiari and other tribes might aid British interests in Iran. She quotes the bitterness of another Khan, who was imprisoned by the Zil-es Sultan: 'Five years,' he said, holding out his muscular wrists, on which the marks of fetters are still visible, 'I wore the chains. Can I forget?' The Bakhtiari do not love the Persians, and are held, I think, by a brittle thread.'[351] Though somewhat disabused of the stereotype of the 'noble savage' by the harsh realities of life among the Bakhtiari, Bird's sympathies nonetheless lay with them rather than the Iranians generally. This was, perhaps, because a 'civilised' people, as the latter claimed to be, should know better, whereas the nomads knew nothing else and existed in a state of 'uncomplicated savagery,' as Victorian anthropology defined it.

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[348] Bird, (1891), II, 72.
[349] Bird, (1891), II, 72.

2.3 – 'Concessions' and Economic Imperialism

The replacement of the EIC by direct British imperial administration through the 1858 Government of India Act, came as a direct consequence of the Indian Uprising and the destruction of the Company's reputation. The official purpose of direct British rule in India, the Raj, became the 'fair administration and elevation' of the populace, though with far less emphasis on direct intervention.[352] The 'civilising mission' nominally became policy, though the extraction of huge revenues, to the detriment of the Indians, continued, much as under

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[350] Bird, (1891), II, 98.

[351] Bird, (1891), II, 54.

[352] Gopal, (2020), 56-7.

EIC administration. This, according to Collingham, was the inherent contradiction of the British Empire in Asia: pledging to free populations from ‘Oriental despotism and slavery’ while maintaining power through economic exploitation, the support of despotic rulers, or direct enaction of tyrannical rule in order to ensure continued access to resources and resulting profits.[353] Additionally, territorial expansion and administration in Asia was increasingly recognised as an expensive and unpredictable gamble: particularly in the wake of the two disastrous invasions of Afghanistan, the supporters of the imperialist revival of the 1880s and 90s largely accepted Qajar Iran as a necessary buffer zone to the Russian threat.[354] Informal economic hegemony and the cultivation of sympathetic factions within Iran was seen as a sustainable alternative, aligning with Liberal admiration for the ancient Greek model of colonisation and the frequent parallels drawn between British maritime power and the Athenian thalassocracy.[355] These two strands of imperial strategy are observable in relation to late-19th Century Qajar Iran, where the British and Russians began to extract lucrative ‘concessions’ from Naser al-Din Shah in exchange for increasingly large loans.[356] Matin describes the situation created in Iran as a ‘positive equilibrium’: by ensuring that both Britain and Russia held significant economic stakes in Iran, Naser al-Din maintained the nation’s independence, as neither power could totally dominate.[357]

The first of these ‘concessions’ was the Telegraphic Convention of 1863, followed by a second in 1872, with the London-Tehran telegraph opened in 1870.[358] Charles James Wills signed up to work as a doctor for this newly established Indo-European Telegraph Department (ITD) in 1866 and relocated to Iran, where he would remain until 1881, publishing his travelogue *In the Land of the Lion and Sun* in 1883.[359] His writing not only reflects the extent of his residence in country but also the priorities of someone whose primary purpose in Iran was inextricably linked to the 'concessions'. Though intended purely to facilitate rapid communication between India and Britain, the introduction of the telegraph to Iran contributed to the further centralisation of Iran under Qajar rule while simultaneously facilitating greater permeation of new ideas and improved communication between Iranian cities.[360] The creation of the Imperial Bank of Persia (1889) and the cultivation of the Karun as an artery for trade continued this trend; bringing minor benefits to Naser al-Din Shah while in fact extending British influence over the economy, what the American economist W. Morgan Shuster would dub 'the strangling of Persia'.[361] While not particularly focused on economic issues, Browne succinctly summarised this dynamic in his travelogue: 'These things, so far as they are sources of wealth at all, are so, not to the Persian people, but to the Sháh and his ministers on the one hand, and to the European promoters of the schemes on the other.'[362] The drive to develop infrastructure along European lines in Iran was, supposedly, the clearest manifestation of 'modernity' emanating from the Qajar monarchy itself, yet in practice it was consistently directed by the strategic imperatives of the imperial powers.

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[353] L. Collingham, *The Hungry Empire,* (London, 2018), 156, 268.
[354] Lyman Stebbins, (2012), 151-2.
[355] Kumar, (2012), 81.
[356] Amanat, (2017), 283-7, 301-6; Shahnavaz, (2005), 42.
[357] Matin, (2016), 89.
[358] Amanat, (2008), 404.

In the case of the *dārogheh* (anglicised as darogas), the force of police-masters instituted in Tehran to mimic European constabularies, Wills claims they were so mercenary that the inhabitants 'preferred to be robbed to complaining to them, on the principle of two evils to choose the lesser.'[363] Wills thus dismissed the idea that Iran would become modernised simply by aping Western institutions, though this process would only accelerate in the later years of the Qajar monarchy, reaching its zenith under the Pahlavis in the 20th Century. While this would be facilitated by oil rents which were not yet a factor in the concessions system, commodity trading was already a core aspect of British economic policy in Qajar Iran.[364] Opium cultivation was heavily encouraged by the British, who cheaply exported it from Iran to India from where it was re-exported to China in exchange for silver.[365] In both India and Iran this weakened traditional subsistence agriculture, as farmers switched to cash crops, leaving them more vulnerable to droughts and food shortages. British influence also increasingly extended over the Iranian grain trade; further implicating British and Indian merchants in the catastrophic famine which ravaged Iran for four years from 1869-72 and is further described in Wills' travelogue.[366] These factors all contributed to simmering tensions which crystallised into the Tobacco protests. The expansive Reuter Concession (1872) had already been cancelled after a year, following backlash from Iranians and the Russian legation, who feared the full consolidation of British economic hegemony over Iran.[367] In 1890, the same year that Bird travelled through Iran, Naser al-Din granted a tobacco monopoly to the British Major G.F. Talbot and his 'Imperial Tobacco Corporation of Persia'.[368] In protest, a *fatwa* against the consumption of tobacco was issued by the Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Hassan al-Shirazi which was adhered to not only by the *ulema* and *bazāris*, but by a sizeable swathe of the population, who in some instances engaged in street protests.[369] Even Qajar elites, including the Queen mother, Malek Jahan Khanom, alongside members of Naser al-Din's own harem, actively boycotted the consumption of tobacco until the concession was ultimately cancelled in January 1892.[370] Though the protest did not directly relate directly to the collection of tribute by the Shah, or any of his traditional prerogatives, they demonstrated that, by the 1890s, the manner in which natural resources and the wealth associated with them were exploited by the British through the Qajar monarchy could inspire widespread resistance across Iranian society. This would prove crucial to Anglo-Iranian relations following the discovery of oil in Iran in 1908; the most contentious and lucrative ‘concession’ of all.

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[359] S. Mahdavi, 'Shahs, Doctors, Diplomats and Missionaries', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 32 no.2, (2005), 177.

[360] J. Scarce, 'East and West: Three Encounters between Iranians and Europeans during the Qajar Period', *Iranian Studies* 40 No.4, (Sep. 2007), 459.

[361] W. Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia,* (New York NY, 1912); Shahnavaz, (2005), 29-35, 41-2.

[362] Browne, (1893), 99.

[363] C.J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and Sun,* (London, 1883), 371.

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[364] Amanat, (2017), 458-61.
[365] Matin, (2016), 90; J. Lovell, *The Opium War,* (London, 2011), 24-5.
[366] Lyman Stebbins, (2012), 155; Wills, (1883).
[367] Amanat, (2017), 283-7.
[368] Amanat, (2017), 306-13.
[369] Amanat, (2017), 311.
[370] Amanat, (2008), 413.

Doctors as ‘Imperial Agents’ in Qajar Iran

Along with those of European doctors generally, Wills’ medical services were in high demand by Iranians in the late 19th Century. Initially scorned by the Qajar elite, who resented foreign interference in their personal affairs, they had become popular during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, particularly as they allowed Iranians to obtain contacts within the respective embassies of the physicians.[371] This applied particularly to the Qajar harem which was a source of information and influence highly coveted by European diplomatic missions. They actively cultivated connections through the aegis of doctors, who functioned as extraordinary diplomats while having unparalleled access outside conventional channels.[372] This was particularly crucial for the British and Russians who were intent on accessing information on the internal workings of the state, and seeking assistance in securing favourable concessions, by gaining the confidence of key royal family members. The importance placed on this strategy by the British is illustrated by a letter from Sir Mortimer Durand to the private physician of Mozaffar ad-Din in Tabriz, Dr Hugh Adcock, who was reminded that ‘it is important for us to have an Englishman always by the *Vali ‘Ahd’s* (crown prince's) elbow.'[373] Though portrayed as a 'civilising' influence on Mozaffar ad-Din, the aim of this relationship was the acquisition of information and the subtle extension of political influence over the Crown Prince. Naser al-Din, however, became aware of this ulterior motive, and began using doctors to spread convenient misinformation in all directions to strengthen his own negotiating position with the Europeans.[374] Out with the upper classes, charitable clinics were increasingly established in the vicinity of the expanding system of British consulates; calculated to encourage goodwill among the wider populace who could not afford a personal physician.[375] European travellers were also commonly implored for medicine, particularly in rural areas and among the nomadic tribes and, consequently, often carried medicine chests with them as an additional means of ensuring a warm reception.[376]

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[371] Amanat, (2008), 172, 188.
[372] Mahdavi, (2005), 170.

Through his status as a medical doctor, Wills engaged more closely with a wider range of Iranians than was typical for British travelogue writers. This included more contact with women than other British travelogue writers except for Isabella Bird, though she predominantly encountered women in the tribal areas where social etiquette relating to gender was generally somewhat less rigid.[377] Wills' account of close interactions with high-status urban Iranian women is thus unparalleled among the travelogues of the period. In the Victorian imagination the harem was already a quasi-fantastical setting; suffused with intrigue, decadence, and illicit sexuality. This perception was stoked further during the 19th Century by the uptake of the harem as a popular subject matter for British painters such as John Frederick Lewis, Arthur Melville, and Frank Dicksee.[378] They produced innumerable paintings of odalisques, reclining Sultans, and bathing scenes, which brought views of the imagined ‘Orient’ into galleries and British homes en-masse for the first time.[379] As with classical mythology and allegory, the imagined harem acted as an outlet for Victorian sexuality and sensuality while maintaining a ‘safe’ distance between viewer and subject.[380] The British fixation on the inner-workings of the harem is, thus, primarily indicative of Victorian attitudes and obsessions rather than the actual nature and function of the harem itself. Though Wills had limited contact with the royal harem and, as far as is currently known had no concrete directives from the British mission to gather information, he was certainly aware of much of the royal gossip circulating through the court and the upper echelons of society.[381] This led him to particularly fixate on the Queen mother Malek Jahan Khanom, who he describes as 'celebrated for her intrigues,' before recounting how she arranged for the murder of a renowned dancer: '[the queen mother] caused her to be first handed over to her servants’ mercies, and then to be rolled in a carpet and jumped on by *farrashes* until she was dead.'[382] Wills gives no motive for this brutal killing, beyond vague suggestions of envy regarding the dancer’s beauty. The casual manner in which it is relayed implies such events were commonplace in the Qajar harem, with Wills filling the role of a British Ctesias, providing his readers a private window into a world of scandal. While Wills’ classical comprehension was too limited to draw comparisons between himself and the Greek doctors serving the Achaemenids, others were not so reticent. Edward Treacher Collins, the English consulting doctor at the Qajar court, styled himself ‘the new Democedes of Croton’, while Curzon would draw his own parallels between these men and their alleged ancient precedents.[383]

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[373] Durand to Adcock, F.O. 60/581.
[374] Mahdavi, (2005), 182-3, 191.
[375] Lyman Stebbins, (2012), 155.
[376] Mahdavi, (2005), 187-8.
[377] Barfield, (2010), 62.
[378] A. L. Croutier, *Harem: The World Behind the Veil,* (London, 1989), 160.

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[379] Said, (1994), 139-41.

[380] M. Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran,* (New York NY, 2001), 75.

[381] Wills, (1883), 271.

[382] Wills, (1883), 202-3.

[383] E.T. Collins, *In the Kingdom of the Shah,* (London, 1896), 270-1.

Wills made relatively few direct references to the ancient history of Iran, or its interactions with the Greeks and Romans in his travelogue. However, as Harrison emphasises, this did not render him unusual among the broad sweep of imperial bureaucrats: ‘antiquarian pursuits were a minority hobby in an overwhelming environment of heat, disease, boredom and excessive drinking.’[384] It was not uncommon for the British employees of the telegraph company to succumb to the latter in particular, often securing themselves premature graves in the rural cemeteries of Iran.[385] Despite his uneven interest in antiquities, Wills nonetheless undertook the customary tour of ancient sites in Iran, including visits to Naqš-i Rustam, Persepolis, and the tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae.[386] On a return visit to Pasargadae with his new wife, Wills made it clear that he regarded the site as a somewhat mundane tourist stop, referring to the tomb itself, dismissively, as a ‘huge dog kennel.’[387] It was instead through a mythicised view of ancient Iran that Wills attempted to evoke some degree of comprehension of the spirit of Iranian culture; viewing the status-quo as unchanged from the time of the Achaemenids, and resistant to all attempts to cultivate or modernise it.[388] While at points Curzon’s travelogue displays undisguised contempt for the literary efforts of this less-cultured man, it nevertheless relies extensively upon *In the Land of Lion and Sun*. This underscores the fact that Wills’ prolonged residence in Iran rendered his travelogue indispensable for someone like Curzon, who sought to quantify the country after speeding through it on horseback in just three months.[389]

In the Land of the Lion and Sun is further notable for its descriptions of tortures and executions, though these were exclusively in an urban context. In contrast to Layard and

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[384] Harrison, (2011), 93.
[385] Harrison, (2011), 93.
[386] Wills (1883), 119, 217.
[387] Wills, (1883), 355.
[388] A. Amanat, *Introduction to the New Edition: C.J. Wills in his Land of Lion and Sun,* (London, 2004), xii-iii.
[389] Ross, (2009), 392.

Bird, Wills elaborated on these practices at length, describing his attendance at hangings in Isfahan and cataloguing the more outlandish and convoluted tortures. These seem to have fascinated him and would, likely, have simultaneously fired the imagination of Victorian readers.[390] The fate of Naim Mirza exemplifies this, with the frail and elderly land-owner subjected to the 'snow chair.' He was placed on a metal frame exposed to the elements of the Tehran winter, doused in cold water, and left to freeze until he agreed to pay large 'fines' to the government.[391] Along with recounting grisly anecdotes of this nature, Wills himself occasionally became involved in the performance of executions. He claims to have attempted to intervene at an execution by appealing to the presiding *mirza* and officers who, appearing to humour him, debated the merits of clemency while simultaneously ordering the hapless prisoner to be blown from a gun.[392] Wills also ended up on the other side of proceedings when a member of a gang of bandits who had robbed him, and crushed a passing *seyyed* to death, was captured and sentenced to be executed. With no intention of intervening or seeking mercy on this occasion, Wills watched with apparent satisfaction as the bandit was walled up alive in a pillar by the roadside as a warning to others.[393] Due to the length of his residency, Wills became embroiled in the 'bullying' of local politics and, himself, became accustomed to violence as a means of protecting his person and property.[394] This included reacting aggressively to any perceived slight, such as locking a Shirazi man in a coal cupboard because Wills refused to share a communal room with him in a caravanserai.[395] While attending a communal meal hosted in a village during the same journey, Wills felt slighted that he was not served the best dishes first and launched a platter of rice at the village headman in disgust.[396] He was also, by his own admission, prone to perpetrating violence: the travelogue includes a description of Wills giving his groom 'the thrashing he deserved'; a treatment he also meted out to a merchant he considered to have swindled him.[397] Wills was pleased with the deference he was subsequently shown by the subdued merchant, describing how 'he then of course called me ‘aga’ (sir) and held my stirrup when I mounted.'[398] His acceptance of violence in Iran as systemic, which thereby benefitted him indirectly as a comparatively wealthy high-status individual, coupled with his own capacity for physical aggression, seems to have restrained Wills from explicitly condemning the Iranians as inherently cruel. Instead, Wills often remained coolly dispassionate, dismissing these events as impenetrable aspects of Qajar society. In *In the Land of Lion and Sun,* not only is Iran inured to violence and exploitation as commonplace, but also Wills himself.

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[390] Wills, (1883), 201, 204-5.
[391] Wills, (1883), 272.
[392] Wills, (1883), 203.
[393] Wills, (1883), 265, 269.
[394] Wills, (1883), 238.
[395] Wills, (1883), 246.

2.4 – Religious Attitudes: Rising Islamophobia and Missionaries in Iran

Following the devastating Afghan sack of Delhi, and loss of previously integral imperial territories in the late 1700s, the Mughal Emperor became reliant on British military support to retain his throne.[399] This shift in power was encapsulated in the person of Arthur Wellesley, Governor-General of India from 1789-1805, whose tenure marked a clear change in tone from the EIC administration in India. Moving beyond the vague narrative of bringing ‘civilisation’; which became increasingly widespread at the start of the 19th Century, his tenure encompassed an influx of evangelical Christian missionary efforts and a hardening of attitudes to cross-cultural interactions, which prefigured the systematisation of 'racial hierarchies'.[400] Intermarriage, predominantly between British men and Indian women, known colloquially as *bibis,* declined and became more socially taboo.[401] Meanwhile the 'Anglo-Indian' offspring of these marriages and relationships, once adept at navigating both Indian and British cultural and social spheres, were increasingly excluded from the latter.[402] These cross-cultural relationships were steadily superseded by the 'fishing fleet', an influx of unmarried women from Britain seeking husbands among the upwardly mobile employees of the EIC, and later the civil and military administrators of the Raj.[403] The increasing focus on propagating 'civilisation' in Asia increasingly reflected back on the British themselves, as maintaining European standards of dress, deportment, food, and entertainment became expected. Those who digressed were excluded and denigrated for 'going native'. The imperialist cult of the *Pukka (Mem)Sahib,* the idealised British master or mistress who had tight control of their Indian servants while remaining aloof from them, became increasingly central to the British view of their 'proper' role in India, and a key component of 'imperial femininity'.[404] This also impacted heavily on British attitudes to the religions of India, with Reverend Jennings in Delhi notorious for his anti-Hindu and anti-Muslim diatribes from the pulpit.[405] This demonstrated that, though the Uprising undoubtedly accelerated and consolidated the trend, religious intolerance among the British was already on the rise from the early 1800s, contributing to the alienation of British officers from their *sepoys* and governors from the governed.[406] Engaging with non-European languages was increasingly viewed as a corrupting influence by staunch Christians, as illustrated by a speech to the 1836

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[396] Wills, (1883), 268.
[397] Wills, (1883), 137.
[398] Wills, (1883), 209.
[399] W. Dalrymple, *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company,* (London, 2019), 263-5.

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[400] E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies,* (Cambridge, 2001), 50-61.
[401] Olusoga, (2021), 141.
[402] Gopal, (2020), 47.
[403] Olusoga, (2021), 142.
[404] Collingham, (2018), 156.
[405] Dalrymple, (2006), 58-61, 68-70, 72.
[406] Said, (1987), 25.

General Assembly of the Church of Scotland by Reverend A. Duff, who claimed that Eastern languages ‘greatly darken the mind and vitiate the heart’, rendering them unfit for the discussion of theology, science, or literature.[407] Christian sensibilities also increasingly impacted on the actions of imperial administrators, beginning with the banning of *sati* in Bengal in 1829 which broke earlier guarantees of Hindu practises and the general strategy of non-intervention which had previously prevailed.[408]

The Indian Uprising was, however, the principal watershed in the 19th Century British perception of Islam. While this also hardened attitudes against Hindus, Muslims were particularly singled out as instigators of violence and cruelty, as contemporaneous descriptions of religious fanaticism, and resulting atrocities in the context of the Uprising, were succeeded by more expansive Islamophobic diatribes.[409] *Reminiscences of Imperial Delhie* by Emily Metcalfe, daughter of the British Governor General’s agent at the Mughal court, capture the contemporaneous impact of the Uprising on the British view of the ‘Other’ and their own status in India. Emily expressed particular admiration for the Islamic architecture of Delhi; ‘those beautiful ruins and buildings’ around which she explored and picnicked in her youth.[410] The Diwan-i Khas in particular received praise: ‘a more beautiful building does not exist in the world’; followed by complains of British soldiers destroying the mosaics with their bayonets while using the building as a church post-Uprising.[411] Sections of these mosaics and other plunder were subsequently sold privately, including to the India Office who displayed them in the South Kensington Museum, setting a precedent for the public exhibition of imperial loot in Britain.[412] Descriptions of Delhi landmarks, and the damage and recontextualization they underwent in the course of the Uprising and its aftermath, constitute a key theme in the *Reminiscences*, though Emily also describes significant societal changes. Her description of St James' church, a focal point of British life in Delhi, also highlights that it had been funded by the influential Anglo-Indian Skinner family, who epitomised the influence held by this demographic prior to the Uprising.[413] Adjacent to the church was a mosque, also funded by the Skinners, supposedly for their 'Mohammedan friends' according to Emily, though it likely reflected the heterodox nature of the Skinners themselves.[414] Emily conceded that 'it was difficult to say what religion the family was' while also highlighting 'most of them were named after the royal family; but they were all black', a juxtaposition which appeared particularly vulnerable in the wake of the Uprising, when surviving Anglo-Indians increasingly became objects of suspicion and racial prejudice.[415] Generally, Emily Metcalfe's reflections on her pre-Uprising time in Delhi stress the complete lack of concern for her safety, as 'everyone was very simple and kindly' and 'in the happy days of which I speak, no anxiety or fear of any such trouble ever entered anybody's mind, and we considered ourselves as safe there as if we were in London.'[416] Similarly, journeying outside the city similarly did not provoke the slightest anxiety pre-Uprising, as 'there was no idea of danger anywhere, and we travelled quite unprotected, little thinking that less than ten years later, that very road would be the scene of such awful tragedies as were enacted in 1857.'[417] The sense of traumatic dislocation from an idyllic past, and the hardening of suspicion and anxiety surrounding the 'Other' as a potential threat, are palpable in her writing.

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[407] A. Duff, ‘Address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland’, *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register* 18 (1836), 86-8.

[408] Gopal, (2020), 45-7.

[409] Dalrymple, (2006), 477.

[410] M.M. Kaye (ed.), *The Golden Calm: An English Lady’s Life in Moghul Delhi,* (London, 1980), 122, 128.

[411] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 168, 207.

[412] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 208.

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[413] Gopal, (2020), 47.

[414] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 165-6.

[415] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 166-7; Gopal, (2020), 47.

[416] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 145, 212.

[417] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 121.

The second half of the book largely deals with the aftermath of the Uprising, informed by Emily Metcalfe's return to Delhi in 1859; to search for keepsakes in the ruins of her father's house, which had been looted and burned.[418] She described how Rev. Jennings was killed by the rebels, targeted along with his daughter Margaret who had been Emily's school friend, recalling the dried blood still spattered around their now-empty rooms.[419] Anglo-Indians, now viewed with suspicion by the British, had also been targets of violence for the rebels, for their complicity with the EIC, along with Indian converts to Christianity.[420] Emily lamented the abandoned, quiet, and scarred nature of the Delhi she returned to, though this largely excluded acknowledgement of the role the British army had played in its final, violent depopulation.[421] The exception to this comes in her description of the capture of the Red Fort which Emily, heavily influenced by her father's complaints, described as 'really a den of thieves and murderers and criminals of all classes, a source of never-ending difficulty and annoyance to the British Government… arrangements had been made to completely alter this state of affairs at the death of the King of Delhi. But the Mutiny did this for us, in that it cleared out this den of iniquity, as everyone fled the Palace when our soldiers entered it, and thousands were killed.'[422] The extent of the reprisal massacres in the context of the British sack of Delhi are thus underplayed, in contrast to the individual fates of Emily Metcalfe's friends and acquaintances. The *Reminiscences* encapsulates the direct impact of the Uprising on British women and the intersection with growing Islamophobia. Having become targets of the rebels by merit of their whiteness, newfound feminine apprehension of the violent potential of the 'Other', particularly the fanatical Muslim 'Other', became ingrained as an imperial anxiety.

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[418] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 127.
[419] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 140, 167-8.
[420] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 141.
[421] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 162-3.
[422] Kaye (ed.), (1980), 208.

Though often superficial in their descriptions of Shi'a practice in Iran, British travelogues of Iran agree in generic terms on the fanaticism of the Muslim population should their prejudices be aroused. Other than describing some of the more notable mosques or warning off British travellers seeking to gain admission in disguise, there are notably few extended discourses on Shi'ism in Iran contained in these sources.[423] While this in-part indicates a lack of interest on the part of the travellers, it may also reflect Shi'a Islam's status in the Qajar era. Thomas Barfield describes how, in Afghanistan, Islam remains incorporated into virtually all facets of life, its ubiquity appearing mundane to British eyes and, thus, less worthy of notice or description in travel writing.[424] This all-encompassing form of Islamic adherence is distinct from its more specified application in the context of a political ideology, such as the Pan-Islamism of Jamal al-Din Asadabadi which was emergent in the late-Qajar period.[425] Curzon, Browne, and Sykes all stemmed from comparable Anglican religious backgrounds, thoroughly conventional by the standards of their class and the period.[426] Christianity however does not play a significant role in any of their discourses on Iran, aside from some contextual Biblical references in Curzon and Sykes, or Browne's assertion that, by contrast with Islam, Christianity had prevailed 'in spite of the sword, rather than because of it.'[427] By contrast, Isabella Bird was explicitly motivated by her own evangelical Christian faith. She expressed interest in missionary efforts and the conditions of Christian minorities across Iran and Asia generally, though this did not preclude harsh criticism of the latter's perceived failings. While she maintained the British imperial predilection for focusing on minorities, Bird did make some comment on the role of Shi'a Islam in Iranian society. Following her visit to Hamadan, Bird remarked upon the stark contrast and close proximity of wealth and poverty in the Iranian urban context, which was significantly more pronounced than in Britain where neighbourhoods tended to be more segregated by class and affluence.[428] Yet she also observed that this divide was 'bridged by constant benevolence on the part of the rich, profuse charity being practised as a work of merit by all good Moslems.'[429] Not only does this produce a more nuanced view of inter-class relations in Iran, but also acknowledges the importance of *zakat* (almsgiving, charity) as the third pillar of Islam.[430] This manifestation of social cohesion was largely ignored by other travelogue writers, as it conflicted with their tropes of ‘Oriental avarice.’ Bird’s opinion of Islam was otherwise largely unfavourable, going so far as claiming that her journey had led to her 'fully recognising their [the Muslim Persians’] faults.'[431] This makes her account ideal for assessing the impact of evangelical adherence on the perception of Iran, determining how it intersected with stereotypes absorbed from the classical corpus, orientalist literature, and racial theories. All of these factors had the potential to create unbreachable divides between European travellers and the people they encountered; for example the only individual Bird described as a ‘friend’ in her entire two-volume travelogue was Boy, the horse she acquired for her journey.[432] Despite her frequently unflattering portrayals of the Iran she perceived, and the undoubtedly tough conditions she endured travelling through the Zagros mountains in Winter, Bird’s travelogue captured the public imagination and was an instant commercial success, unlike other travelogues assessed here. Receiving over one hundred published positive reviews, its publication added to her already considerable reputation as among the most accomplished and influential Victorian travel writers.[433]

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[423] Curzon, (1892), I, 161; Sykes, (1902), 458.
[424] Barfield, (2010), 40-2.
[425] Amanat, (2017), 309-10.
[426] Ross, (2009), 386; Wynn, (2003), 5.
[427] Browne, (1893), 334.

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[428] Heffer, (2017), 169-70.
[429] Bird, (1891), II, 150.
[430] *Qur’an,* 2:260-76.
[431] Bird, (1891), II, 259.
[432] Bird, (1891), II, 185.
[433] Stoddart, (1906), 244.

Christian missionary efforts, driven particularly by evangelical churches, had been proselytising in Asia since the late-1700s, with their presumption that the non-Christian peoples of India required salvation matching the growing sense of imperial supremacy and emphasis on propagating ‘civilisation’.[434] Missionaries also increasingly joined explorers and soldiers in the pantheon of British imperial heroes, exemplified by the fame of David Livingstone, for whom Bird expressed great personal admiration.[435] This impacted directly on *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* as, unlike her contemporaries, Bird actively sought out missionaries during her travels, utilising them as informants and focusing on their activities. It is worth considering whether this could be considered a manifestation of ‘imperial femininity’; the long-underestimated role which women played in the formation of imperial mentalities and the practical aspects of colonial life, such as the organisation of indigenous domestic servants.[436] Though Bird’s experience contrasts sharply with the domesticity described by Emily Metcalfe in Delhi, or indeed by Percy Sykes’ sister Ella in Iran, patronage of missionaries was often a considered a ‘fitting’ occupation for middle and upper class British women.[437] While this generally applied in the context of Britain or the Raj, Bird’s focus on missionaries, in a country largely indifferent and sometimes hostile to their presence, prompted particularly stark contrasts in her travelogue, especially with regards to her perception of women.

Bird espoused a relativistic conception of modesty, arguing that women from Iran would likely be offended by the dress and manners of English women. This did not, however, restrain her from also harshly criticising the appearance of Iranian women, whose supposed 'slovenliness, slipshodness, and generally tumbling-to-pieces look' she detested.[438] This description is particularly striking as it is juxtaposed with her reaction to being welcomed to Hamadan by an unnamed female European missionary, who Bird dubbed 'a radiant vision.'[439] In her travelogue, any improvement in standards of dress, deportment, or education among women are very deliberately tied to the efforts of British and American missionaries. This is clearly observable in Bird's praise of the Fiske seminary at Orumiyeh, in the west of Azerbaijan province: 'I have seen several women whose tone would bear comparison with that of the best among ourselves, and who owe it gratefully to the training and influence of the Fiske Seminary. I like the women much better than the men.'[440] This bears comparison with Bird's portrayal of Armenian women who had not experienced a European-style missionary education: 'the ordinary uneducated Armenian woman is a very stupid lump, very inferior to the Persian woman'; a particularly cruel characterisation considering Bird's derogatory view of Iranian women.[441] It is apparent that she believed women in Iran, regardless of ethnic identity, could only be elevated by exposure to a European education, preferably within the framework of Christian missions, which would simultaneously instil desirable morals. Bird however did not hold out hope for this succeeding on a large scale, describing the education at the Fiske seminary as 'too high and too Western for the requirements of the country and the probable future of the students.'[442] Bird's travelogue thus presents the barriers between East and West, in this case those facing women, as inherently unbreachable.

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[434] Dalrymple, (2006), 58-65.

[435] Bosworth, (1989), 86; Mackenzie, (1984), 30-3.

[436] Henes, (2012), 86.

[437] Mackenzie, (1984), 158-60.

[438] Bird, (1891), II, 147.

Other religious minority groups also received Bird's condemnation, intersecting with already-held biases. This is particularly apparent in her description of the Jewish community in Hamadan: 'the accursed vices of low greed and low cunning are fully developed in them.

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[439] Bird, (1891), II, 147.
[440] Bird, (1891), II, 241.
[441] Bird, (1891), II, 161.
[442] Bird, (1891), II, 223.

They get their living by usury, by the making and selling of wine and *arak*, by the sale of adulterated drugs, by peddling in the villages, and by doing generally the mean and dishonest work from which their oppressors shrink.' Representative of the anti-Semitic stereotyping prevalent among Victorian writers, this was further heightened in Bird's case by her zealous evangelical Christianity.[443] The Syrians of the plains, though largely Christian themselves, were little better according to Bird who considered them afflicted by intense avarice. However, in their case, she offered an explanation in the form that 'ages of misrule have developed in them many of the faults of oppressed Oriental peoples.'[444] This explanation was also presented almost verbatim in the case of the Armenian communities of Kurdistan: 'ages of wrong have developed in them some of the usual faults of oppressed Oriental peoples.'[445] As these were the kind of communities which missionaries typically targeted, there was implicit in this a suggestion that living under Persian administration was itself a corrupting factor, not only for those who willingly participated in it for their own enrichment but also those who suffered as a result of it. To the list of rapacious officials who administered this system were added judges, who Bird despaired of as hopelessly unjust and corrupt. This perception was reinforced by Canon Maclean, a missionary at the Fiske Seminary at Orumiyeh, who argued that 'the multiplication of judges in Persia means the multiplication of injustice, and of the number of persons who can extort money from the unfortunate people.'[446] Somewhat uniquely for *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, an Iranian perspective is included, stemming from Bird's conversation with Mirza Yusuf at Isfahan about modernising Iran. She recounts how they agreed on the need for education, religious liberty, and modern infrastructure in the form of roads and railways. However, they diverged when she advocated for 'equal laws for rich and poor, administered by incorruptible judges;' something which even a reformist Iranian, who was presumably able to converse with Bird in English or French, viewed as either impractical or undesirable for those of his class.[447] While Bird’s interest in the practicalities of missionary efforts in late-Qajar Iran sets her apart from her contemporaries, the impact on her travelogue ultimately mirrors the irreducible binaries established across multiple aspects of cross-cultural interaction between the British and the various peoples of Iran.

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[443] Bird, (1891), II, 155.
[444] Bird, (1891), II, 241, 250
[445] Bird, (1891), II, 373.
[446] Bird, (1891), II, 236.

2.5 – Language, Scholarship, and Race: Defining the ‘Other’

Language Acquisition: Enabling Interaction

As David Olusoga has stressed, the empires of Safavid Persia and Mughal India were at the height of their power when first encountered by English expeditions. These were culturally confident empires whose armies far outnumbered and outgunned the European traders who arrived on their shores, necessitating a diplomatic approach to secure the trade links which were rapidly enriching any European power capable of securing them.[448] Early travel accounts indicate the extent to which classical learning and associated conceptualisations of the East influenced the perceptions of travellers, including the language employed in diplomatic approaches. Initial English attempts to reach Persia and establish trade relations took place overland, following an accommodation with Ivan IV of Russia to allow the Muscovy Company free passage to Safavid Iran.[449] This was first achieved by Anthony Jenkinson in 1561, who bore letters from Elizabeth I to Shah Tahmasp I (r.1524-

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[447] Bird, (1891), I, 265.

[448] Olusoga, (2021), 78-92.

[449] R. Batchelor, *London: The Selden Map and the Making of a Global City,* (Chicago IL, 2014), 40.

1576) which demonstrate the contemporaneous English contextualisation of the Safavids, and Persia more generally, through classical and biblical histories. Addressing the Safavid Shah in a manner befitting an Achaemenid Great King, the letter began: ‘To the right mighty and right victorious Prince, the great Sophy, Emperor of the Persians, Medes, Parthians, Hyrcanes, Carmanarians, Margians, of the people on this side, and beyond the river Tigris, and of all men, and nations, between the Caspian sea, and the gulf of Persia.’[450] These archaic Greek geographic terms were completely unknown to the 16th Century Persians, a rift in comprehension solidified by the fact that the letters were written in Latin, Italian, and Hebrew, which neither Tahmasp nor his courtiers could read. Jenkinson’s own travel account approached Safavid Persia in a similar fashion: at Derbent he wrote of the ancient satrapy of Hyrcania and the ‘Wall of Alexander’, while he claimed Ardabil as the site of Alexander’s court, as well as the burial site of Persian princes.[451] Whether resulting from the incomprehensible and archaic overtures of Elizabeth I’s letter, or that Tahmasp identified Jenkinson as a Christian, this initial attempt to formalise trading relations with Safavid Persia failed.[452] British travelogues from this period strongly demonstrate conceptualisation of Persia through its ancient past, as portrayed by the Greco-Roman sources, encouraged by the barriers to direct communication. Robert Stodart’s account of the diplomatic mission of Dodmore Cotton, for example, includes multiple references to the Achaemenid rulers; including ‘Cirus’ and ‘Cambices’, and a description of ‘James Sheate’, a rudimentary transliteration of the mythical Jamshid.[453] Familiar tropes are also evident; Stodart characterising the Persians as ‘slaves by breeding’ who ‘seldom meaneth what [they] promiseth’, while his description of a banquet ‘with wyne and women and bugring boyes for to dance before us beside divers other lascivious sports,' evokes Greco-Roman descriptions of Persian excess and sensuality.[454]

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[450] Morgan and Coote (eds.), *Travels to Russia,* Vol. I, 112-13.

[451] J. Brotton, *This Orient Isle,* (London, 2017), 51-4.

[452] Brotton, (2017), 54.

[453] R. Stodart, *The Journal of Robert Stodart,* E. Denison Ross (ed.), (London, 1935), 76.

This power-imbalance in favour of the Mughals and Safavids, and this initial overreliance on classical and Biblical points of reference, subsequently necessitated a significant degree of language learning to enable negotiations, the agreement of trade accords, and the acquisition of lucrative *firmans.*[455] Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, and particularly Persian, thus all became indispensable for EIC interlocutors. This stimulated rapid expansion of language learning in England, with professorships in Arabic at Cambridge and Oxford established in 1632 and 1636 respectively, while the first English translation of the Qur'an was published in 1649.[456] Initial English engagement with Persian language was tied to these first, flawed appearances of the Arabic alphabet in print, until interactions with Indian literary culture prompted the first accurate reproduction of the Persianate *nasta'līq* script.[457] Translations by English orientalists, in both directions, were produced in the 1640s and 50s: John Greaves translated the astronomical and geographical works of Ulugh Beg, Mahmud Shah Khulji, and Nasir al-Din Tusi into English, while Abraham Whelock translated the gospels into Persian.[458] Persian acquired greater importance when English (and subsequently British) interests in India intensified during the 18th Century, as it enabled communication with the Mughal court. William 'Oriental' Jones, his sobriquet denoting his status as the foremost English Orientalist of the 18th Century, was also an epitome of what would become the idealised imperial career trajectory: public school (Harrow, where he was considered a prodigy), then classics, Hebrew, and Arabic at Oxford, before departing for administrative service in India. His creation of the first Modern Persian grammar in English marks a notable step in the evolution of British 'Persophilia', as beyond simply facilitating trade, this expansion in language learning enabled access to literature, sparking interest in Persian religion, mysticism, history, and cultural practices.[459]

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[454] Stodart, (1935), 23, 31, 78; H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'Through Travellers' Eyes: The Persian Monuments as Seen by European Visitors' in *Achaemenid History VII,* (Leiden, 1991), 14.
[455] G. Roper, 'Persian Printing and Publishing in England' in *Iran and Iranian Studies,* K. Eslami (ed.), (Princeton NJ, 1998), 321.
[456] Roper, (1998), 316.
[457] Roper, (1998), 316-7, 322.
[458] Roper, (1998), 317-9.

Practical language-learning enabled the administration of growing EIC-administered territories in India and the Gulf while becoming less crucial for securing trade rights, as the balance of power had shifted decisively away from Indian and Iranian rulers by the close of the 18th Century.[460] India ultimately became the primary hub for the production, reproduction and translation of Persianate texts in this period, as the collapse of the Safavid empire and violent upheavals which followed had disrupted knowledge production in Iran itself.[461] As the EIC settled into its role of supremacy in India in the 19th Century, however, there was a steady decline in terms of engagement with Asian languages and literatures: 'England, in spite of her vast opportunities, has done the least for Oriental literature of the learned nations of Europe; France and Germany have…left her far behind; and this reflexion is truly humiliating when one visits the library of East India House and sees the stores of Oriental lore which lie on their shelves unread and almost unknown. German scholars come over to London and study the MSS., to correct their own editions; but hardly a solitary English scholar can be found to avail himself of the treasures which his countrymen have brought from the remote East almost to his very door.'[462] The widening of the 'colonial divide' in the aftermath of the Uprising further disincentivised British engagement with Asian languages.[463]

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[459] Dabashi, (2015), 39.

[460] Johnson, (2012), 33-5.

[461] J.R. Perry, 'The Waning of Indo-Persian Lexicography' in *Iran and Iranian Studies,* K. Eslami (ed.), (Princeton NJ, 1998), 339.

[462] E.B. Cowell (1850): quoted from M. Gail, *Persia and the Victorians,* (London, 1951), 35-6.

[463] Pratt, (2022), 241.

Much of the philological and linguistic research carried out on these languages, in the latter half of the 19th Century, instead emanated from France and Germany rather than Britain.[464]

Browne defied this trend, with an interest in Asian literature directly driving his enquiries and encouraging his initially self-taught efforts to learn Persian and Turkish.[465] During his medical studies in London he undertook lessons in Persian from Mirza Mohammad Baqir, an Iranian scholar residing in Limehouse.[466] This level of language learning distinguished him from other contemporary British travelogue writers, and granted him access to a range of Sufi poetry and metaphysical treatises which further heightened his romantic interest in Iran.[467] While Browne's specific focus on Asian languages marked him out from his contemporaries, private tuition remained common during the Victorian era. By 1893, almost 20% of Cambridge undergraduates were educated in this way, with many more receiving tuition supplementary to their schooling.[468]

In 1887, Pembroke College, Cambridge offered Browne a Fellowship and potential lectureship in Persian, which convinced him to break off his medical studies and undertake a journey to Iran from 1887-8.[469] The journals he kept during this time provided the material for *A Year Amongst the Persians*, the first travelogue of Iran written by a British academic.[470] Other than a post-graduation trip to Constantinople, this constituted his only significant travel outside Britain, again setting him apart from the other travelogue writers examined here.[471] Upon his return from Iran, Browne was heavily involved in the creation of a department of modern Asian languages at Cambridge which, along with his publications, brought him to the attention of the consular service of the foreign office.[472] This was particularly ironic since his earlier application for a diplomatic posting had been roundly rejected by the Levantine consular service. His knowledge of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian were considered unnecessary for the post, while he was unable to pass the examinations in German, Greek, Latin, Spanish and Italian which were required of all candidates.[473] This is indicative of a wider decline in language learning among imperial administrators as, by the late-19th Century, it was no longer necessary to negotiate extensively with local rulers or merchants and terms were generally dictated with the aid of interpreters.[474] Additionally, as British engagement with Persian language and literature largely occurred through the 'Iranised periphery' (primarily India, but also Central Asia and the Ottoman empire), the Persian spoken in Iran itself remained comparatively less well-known, rendering Browne's aptitude even more distinctive.[475] The language of administration in India had already been changed from Persian to Urdu in 1837, while English steadily became enshrined as the language of the ruling class, and thus, an aspirational acquirement for Indians, particularly following the establishment of the Raj.[476] Thomas Babington Macaulay's highly controversial 'Minute on Indian Education' (2 February 1835) had advocated the wholesale co-optation and 'Anglicisation' of the Indian middle and upper classes, particularly through the adoption of English, in direct imitation of the Roman citizenship model.[477] In the post-Uprising Raj such a potentially integrative policy was inconceivable. The transition from EIC to direct British administration was instead consolidated through the establishment of the ICS which utilised a small number of Indians, from favoured ethnic groups, as middlemen which increasingly insulated higher-ranking British officials from protracted direct interaction with the Indian populace.[478] Even this limited delegation of power prompted imperial anxiety, including from Curzon who, during his time as Viceroy, closely scrutinised the ICS admissions and expressed disquiet at even the tiny number of Indian candidates successfully gaining admission.[479]

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[464] Said, (1994), 125-7, 194.
[465] Bosworth, (1995), 115.
[466] Bosworth, (1995), 116.
[467] Bosworth, (2001), 79.
[468] S. Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons,* (London, 1968), 60.
[469] Ross, (2009), 389.
[470] Browne, (1893), 91; Bosworth, (1995), 115.
[471] Nash, (2005), 26.

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[472] Denison Ross, (1926), xii.
[473] Browne, (1893), 17.
[474] Tavakoli-Targhi, (2001), 106.
[475] Perry, (1998), 338-9.
[476] Perry, (1998), 330, 337.
[477] Kumar, (2012), 83.

Imperial Scholarship and Qajar Iran

Intellectual engagement with Asia and its peoples expanded as British power became more confident and formalised in the later 18th Century, while interest in contemporary languages extended into more academic areas of linguistic study, such as Sanskrit. Its study inspired William Jones to hypothesise about a 'proto-Indo-European' root language, encompassing Old Persian and subsequent Iranian languages 'as well as Greek, Latin, and Gothick', was accompanied by emergent ideas of a prehistoric 'Aryan invasion' from the Central Asian steppe.[480] Reflecting on British attitudes to literary traditions, Jones highlighted that 'while the excellent writings of Greece and Rome are studied… the works of the Persians, a nation equally distinguished in ancient history, are wholly unknown to us, or considered as entirely destitute of taste and invention.' He also highlighted attitudes among continental European writers, as when he described Voltaire's comparison of the poetry of Sa'di to Petrarch.[481] Such comparisons subsequently became widespread in British scholarship: Ferdowsi was typically compared with Homer, Hafez with Anacreon, Sa'di most commonly with Horace but also Petrarch, and Rumi's *Masnavi* with Plato's *Republic*.[482] Pairings of Persian literature with classical 'equivalents' often constituted the full extent of

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[478] Vasunia, (2005), 67-9.

[479] Said, (1994), 194.

[480] W. Jones, 'The Sixth Discourse: On the Persians' in *The Works of Sir William Jones,* A.M. Shipley Jones (ed.), (London, 1799), III, 92.

[481] W. Jones; quoted from Gail, (1951), 16-17.

[482] Gail, (1951), 150.

‘analysis’ of these texts; consolidating the perception that ingenuity emanated solely from the West.[483] Jones was also instrumental in the establishment of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784, one of a number of organisations founded in this period with the aim of understanding the various cultures of the populations its members now found themselves ruling over.[484] Persianate historiography also became an increasing topic of interest. Its cultural impact was felt through the legacy of the Mughal Court, coupled with the emergent Qajar state’s increasingly strategic position in relation to growing British influence over the Gulf and the expansion of the Russian empire into Central Asia.[485]

John Malcolm occupied the role of ‘imperial historian’ of Iran for much of the 19th Century. His *History of Persia* (1815) was regarded as the seminal British work on Iran by Curzon, with its influence observable in *Persia and the Persian Question* through direct quotation and historiographical construction.[486] Informed by his two diplomatic visits to the court of Fath’ Ali Shah on behalf of the Indian Government (1799-1801, 1808), and his participation in the 1810 British mission, Malcolm presented a far more expansive and coherent historical narrative than earlier monographs had attempted.[487] While Curzon was heavily influenced by Malcolm’s writing, it is necessary to highlight distinctions between the two men who, arguably, played the greatest part in shaping the 19th Century British perception of Iranian history. Malcolm’s education was utterly distinct from the public school-university-imperial administration trajectory; unlike even the majority of Scots who participated in the EIC, Malcolm was from a relatively poor rural family from Eskdale in the Borders, rather than the mercantile class or minor aristocracy.[488] He received his initial education at the Westerkirk Parish school, before being tutored in London for a year while preparing to join the Madras army of the EIC.[489] While this education included a rudimentary grounding in Greco-Roman history, it was both looser, and more practically oriented, than the rigid public school system experienced by Curzon, Browne, and Sykes.[490] It also clearly had its limitations: his superiors in India described Malcolm as 'quite illiterate' upon his arrival; though he quickly showed an aptitude for learning Asian languages, studying Persian from 1788 and becoming an official interpreter in Hyderabad by 1790, while translating the poetry of Hafez in his spare time.[491] His linguistic skills secured him a place on the delegations to the Qajar court, illustrating their acquisition as a path to promotion in this period; particularly for Malcolm and others who otherwise lacked the status or wealth to achieve advancement in the EIC.[492] Language acquisition simultaneously facilitated Malcolm's engagement with Persian literature and historiography, which would shape his *History of Persia*.

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[483] Roper, (1998), 321.

[484] M.J. Franklin, ‘JONES, William’, *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* Vol. XV, accessed 15.12.23.

[485] Perry, (1998), 330-1.

[486] J. Malcolm, *History of Persia,* 2 Vols., (London, 1815); Curzon, (1892), I, 20, 425.

[487] J. Malcolm, *Malcolm: Soldier, Diplomat, Ideologue of British India,* (Edinburgh, 2014), 359.

[488] Devine, (2004), 335.

According to Malcolm, Iran had endured long periods of decline since the Achaemenid empire which, along with the Sassanians, he considered the apogees of Iranian civilisation.[493] This extended to the characteristics of their populations: 'the ancient Persian must, from his climate and food, have been athletic and strong, and of good personal appearance… whatever treasures in science and learning the ancient Persians might have possessed, are lost or destroyed.'[494] This positivity extended to the Parsi communities of Mumbai, who Malcolm considered the last remnants of an earlier, superior Persian race, in contrast to the contemporaneous inhabitants of Iran who constituted the product of 'a hundred mixed races', chiming with contemporaneous Parsi disdain for the remaining Zoroastrian communities in Iran.[495] This prefigured later Victorian regard for manifestations of ‘Aryan’ survival in Iran, coupled with fears of miscegenation. Just as Malcolm demonstrated admiration of these dynasties, he equally disparaged others; particularly the Parthians, Ghaznavids, and Safavids.[496] The Parthians were frequently described as inferior to their predecessors and succesors, both in Iranian historiography and by British historians such as Gibbon, and the Turkic Ghaznavids were considered among the various ‘interloper’ dynasties of Iran, perhaps encouraged by Malcolm’s regard for Ferdowsi, whose fractious relationship with Mahmud of Ghazna was legendary.[497] It was, however, uncommon for British writers to express such a negative view of the Safavids.[498] This attitude stemmed directly from Malcolm’s reading of Iranian historiography, particularly the manuscript of Iskandar Munshi which he owned, coupled with the travelogue of Jean Chardin, which stressed both continuity and decline in Iran.[499] Iranian historiography tended to judge the Safavids based on their failures: from Shah Ismail’s defeat by the Ottomans at Chaldiran to the dynasty’s decline and dissolution, which had enabled ruinous Afghan invasions and subsequently the rise of the warlord Nader Shah, whose constant campaigning impoverished Iran and decimated its population.[500] Malcolm claimed to be the first British writer to consult such indigenous Iranian sources to inform his historiography; a false and plainly self-promotional assertion which further underlines the career implications of language acquisition as an EIC employee.[501] The manner in which Iranian dynasties were described by British writers elucidates their reliance on various source traditions, prompting drastically differing receptions. Malcolm's selective critiques extended to specific rulers, some of whom he explicitly described as 'despotic'. The Safavid Shah Abbas I was particularly singled out in this regard, along with Khosrow I and Cambyses II, though in the case of the latter Malcolm was reporting Herodotus' view rather than necessarily his own.[502] As he became increasingly versed in Persian historiography, and observed the disparities between textual traditions, Malcolm conceded that the Greek historians were more than capable of embellishment, aligning with his contemporary Mitford's critiques of blind reliance on classical sources.[503] As Malcolm himself was not extensively versed in classics, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* provided a useful narrative framework for his overview of the ancient Persian empires in the first volume.[504]

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[489] Malcolm, (2014), 15-17.

[490] Bamford, (1967), 62.

[491] Malcolm, (2014), 31.

[492] Malcolm, (2014), 38-9.

[493] Malcolm, (1815), II, 621.

[494] Malcolm, (1815), I, 273.

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[495] D. Sheffield, ‘Iran, The Mark of Paradise or the Land of Ruin? Historical Approaches on Reading Two Zoroastrian Travelogues’ in *On the Wonders of Land and Sea: Persianate Travel Writing,* R. Micallef and S. Sharma (eds.), (Boston MASS, 2013), 30-1.

[496] Malcolm, (2014), 358.

[497] Gibbon, (1875), Vol.I, Cap. VIII; Malcolm, (2014), 356.

[498] Malcolm, (1815), I, 247.

[499] Malcolm, (1815), I, 273.

[500] M. Axworthy, *The Sword of Persia,* (London, 2006), 18-20.

[501] Ansari, (2005), 14.

Moving from the historical to the contemporaneous, Malcolm also critiqued the Qajar administration, particularly the power of the Shah and his court; considering despotism an inherent feature of government among the 'nations of Asia'.[505] He tied this to the intellectual limitations of Persian political discourse, which he characterised as inherently static: 'a Persian author… is in general exempt from a political bias… Asiatic historians seldom speculate upon changes in the manners of men…or on the form of governments. They are entire strangers to the science of political economy…' The Persians' 'defects' were attributed to the conditions of their society which had been subjected to a 'quick succession of absolute monarchs and servile ministers.'[506] This is particularly observable through Malcolm's engagement with the dishonesty trope. Rather than an intrinsic characteristic of the Iranians or 'Asiatics' generally, he considered dishonesty a direct product of the environment of the Qajar court, with fear of the absolute power of the Shah encouraging ministers and subalterns to scheme and deceive to maintain their positions.[507] Similarly, while Malcolm complained of the inherently 'avaricious and sordid' behaviour of lower-class merchants, this was a near-universal complaint of travellers rather than a uniquely Persian trait.[508] A poem entitled *Persia*, which Malcolm wrote to his wife Charlotte in 1810, further illustrates the formation of his view of Iranian kingship: 'Ne'er on that land has freedom shed one ray/ by fate decreed to feel tyrannic sway/ When cruel power provokes th'avenging sword/ The slaves but seek to raise another lord.'[509] This accorded with Gibbon's negative generalisations about the Iranians as a distinct race.[510] In Gibbon's framing, Iranians (as well as Arabs and Turks) were, by their very nature, susceptible to 'Oriental despotism,' which in its contemporary iteration still carries weight in the current British political discourse and is used to 'explain' the proliferation of authoritarian rulers across Asia.[511] Malcolm's verdict on Iran's future prospects under the Qajars was judged so bleak from an Iranian perspective, that Naser al-Din was allegedly dissuaded by his vizier, Amir Kabir, from having the text translated into Persian in the late 1840s, lest it infuriate or demoralise the young Shah.[512]

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[502] Malcolm, (1815), I, 147, 266, 547, 560, 566.

[503] Malcolm, (1815), I, 5-13; Malcolm, (2014), 109.

[504] Malcolm, (1815), I, 104, 111, 119, 135, 155, 162, 247, 273.

[505] Malcolm, (1815), I, 315.

[506] Malcolm, (1815), I, 276.

The immense scope and authoritative tone of Malcolm's *History of Persia* epitomises Pratt's 'master of all I survey' mentality in a literary context: mastery of indigenous sources and indigenous languages contributing to a growing belief in a white European monopoly on the comprehension of non-European cultures and histories.[513] Production of academic writing on Iran thus consolidated belief in British intellectual supremacy. Curzon extensively utilised and reshaped Malcolm's *History* within *Persia and the Persian Question*, which ultimately superseded it as the 'definitive' British text on Iran. What Curzon clearly lacked, in comparison with Malcolm, who received a personal farewell from Fath' Ali Shah and the newly created Order of Lion and Sun upon departing Iran in 1810, was any interest in actively engaging with Iranians or considering history from an Iranian perspective.[514] While Malcolm's *History* demonstrates some elements of a 'decline narrative', idolising the Achaemenids and Sassanians by comparison with certain later dynasties, this became central to Curzon's writing, particularly emphasised through his heavy reliance on Greco-Roman sources with their own assertions of inexorable Persian decline since the reign of Cyrus.[515] Yet regardless of the quality of sections of Malcolm's writing or his ability to engage on amiable terms with Fath' Ali Shah or members of the Qajar court, he was fundamentally and primarily a soldier, in the employ of the EIC. The creation of a mercantile and naval base on Kharg Island was originally his idea, which proved strategically important during temporary British incursions to Iran, during 1838 and 1856, in response to Qajar advances on Herat.[516] Malcolm was instrumental in the defeat of the Maratha Confederacy in India, and an early advocate of the 'forward position' in Iran and Afghanistan as a means of countering Russian expansion, which would define Curzon's political outlook on Asia and, ultimately, the motivation for writing *Persia and the Persian Question*.[517] The ICS entry regulations would seek to exclude careerists like Malcolm from its ranks, confining entry increasingly to graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, thereby also accentuating its Englishness as an institution, a trend observable in other aspects of imperial administration during the 1880s and 90s.[518]

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[507] Malcolm, (2014), 106, 309.
[508] Malcolm, (1815), II, 630.
[509] J. Malcolm to C. Malcolm (1810), cited from Malcolm, (2014), 316.
[510] Gibbon, (1875), Vol. I, v-vi.
[511] Cannadine, (2013), 225-232.
[512] Amanat, (2008), 130.
[513] Pratt, (1992), 7-11.

In the context of linguistic barriers between British administrators and their colonial subjects in the late-19th Century, Browne's fluency and engagement with Iranian literary traditions was particularly distinctive. This helped him gain unique access for a British traveller, along with insight into the contemporary circumstances of Qajar Iran; assisted by his ability to form relationships among intellectual circles during his year of travelling. Browne was capable of both appreciation for Persian literature and awareness of its relativity for British audiences.[519] In describing Jalal al-Din Rumi's *Masnavi*, which he believed to 'rank among the greatest poems of all time', Browne also observed that 'it contains a great number of rambling anecdotes of the most various character, some sublime and dignified, others grotesque and even (to our ideas) disgusting.'[520] His publication of the first volume of *A Literary History of Persia* in 1902 cemented his position as Britain's foremost scholar of Iran in this period, though the gap between his optimistic view of the potential future of the nation and those of the British imperial establishment continued to inexorably widen. According to Mansour Bonakdarian, the Farsi serialisation of Browne's *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909*, which appeared in Iranian newspapers, created an opportunity for the Iranians to occupy their own space in Western discourse while stimulating vigorous political debate within Iran itself.[521] The outbreak of the Constitutional Revolution further galvanised Browne's efforts to influence British policy on Iran and, in October 1908, he became the co-founder of the extra-parliamentary Persia Committee, alongside the Liberal MP H.F.B Lynch.[522] This more strident approach however attracted the ire of staunchly imperialist Tory commentators, particularly those writing in *The Times* such as David Fraser and A.T. Wilson, who in 1911 noted smugly that 'no one in British official circles in Persia pays any heed to Browne's politics.'[523] Fraser meanwhile firmly believed that the Iranians were incapable of successfully reforming their country without British intervention due to their inherently corrupt and cowardly nature, deriding Browne's optimism regarding the Constitutional movement.[524] Even E. Denison Ross, who wrote the preface to the 1926 edition of *A Year Amongst the Persians*, emphasised the distance between the views of Browne and the 'average Englishman', characterising him as naïve in relation to British political priorities and at times overly-idealistic, though uniquely well informed.[525] Browne believed that British orientalist depictions of 'Asiatic peoples [such] as the Persians as entirely decadent and degenerate', the view of Iran held by the Foreign Office and parroted by the Tory press, was motivated purely by political aims rather than academic stringency or any depth of insight into the country or its people.[526] Though he approached the subject of Iran from a diametrically opposed position, Nash points out the inherent irony in this accusation. Browne himself was motivated by factors well beyond academic enquiry: critique of him as 'an Orientalist professor who played politics' is not unfounded, while the label of 'anti-imperial radical' which has been posthumously applied is also an uncomfortable fit.[527] This has been particularly cultivated due to is divergence from the mainstream British consensus which, assuming the position of the Shah to be unassailable and the Iranian people inextricably intertwined with the institutions of despotism, dismissed the potential of the Constitutional movement exerting a lasting impact on the political landscape, and fundamentally the possibility of meaningful change in Iran.

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[514] Malcolm, (2014), 306-7.
[515] Johnson, (2012), 34-5, 37-9.
[516] Malcolm, (2014), 259, 263.
[517] Malcolm, (2014), 198-200; Harrison, (2011), 107.
[518] Vasunia, (2005), 67-8.

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[519] B.W. Robinson, 'An Illustrated Masnavī-i Ma'navī' in *Iran and Iranian Studies,* K. Eslami (ed.), (Princeton NJ, 1998), 258.

[520] E.G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia,* (Cambridge, 1928), Vol.II, 520.

[521] Bonakdarian, (1993), 16.

[522] Nash, (2005), 19, 139.

[523] J. Marlowe, *Late Victorian,* (London, 1967), 57.

Browne was not alone in building an intellectual reputation based on engagement with Persian culture, as can be seen in the case of Robert Murdoch Smith who, while serving as a military officer and administrator, devoted much of his energy to the study of Iranian art. It was due to his efforts that the British public were, for the first time since the Great Exhibition of 1851, exposed en masse to Iranian ceramics, metalwork, miniature painting, and textiles, through an exhibition he organised at the South Kensington Museum in 1877.[528] This was in part facilitated by Murdoch Smith's friendship with Naser al-Din Shah, who donated carpets and other textiles for the exhibition.[529] Murdoch Smith's admiration for the beauty of Iranian aesthetics also, superficially, coloured his relations with Iranians themselves, who he described in complimentary terms in his private correspondences, though this also stemmed from his desire to be viewed as a 'benevolent Orientalist'.[530] Where Browne crucially differs from Murdoch Smith is that his positivity and open-handed engagement with Iranians has contributed to his enduring influence in Iran; attested to by the continued translation and publication of his works in Persian, with recent editions of not only his writings on the Constitutional Revolution and Persian literature but also *A Year Amongst the Persians*.[531] This distinguishes Browne from any of the other writers examined here. His scholarship retains the status of 'living texts'; encouraging new generations of Iranians to consider issues of tyranny, liberty, identity, and their relationship with the West; no less relevant under the Islamic Republic than they were in the late-Qajar period.

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[524] D. Fraser, *Persia and Turkey in Revolt,* (London, 1910), 290-1.

[525] Denison Ross, (1926), xiv-xv.

[526] E.G. Browne, *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia,* (Cambridge, 1914), xv.

[527] Nash, (2005), 165.

Race: the Aryan-Turkic Divide

While both language and scholarship contained the potential means to diminish the intellectual distance between Britain and Iran, this divide was exacerbated by hardening of racial attitudes, which accelerated in the 1880s as a manifestation of imperial anxiety.[532] The Burgess letters offer insight into more nuanced mid-century British perceptions in Iran:

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[528] J.M. Scarce, 'Major-General Sir Robert Murdoch Smith' in *Anglo-Iranian Relations since 1800,* V. Martin (ed.), (Abingdon, 2005), 30-31; Scarce, (2007), 459.

[529] Scarce, (2007), 464-5.

[530] Scarce, (2005), 26.

[531] Dabashi, (2015), 189.

[532] MacKenzie, (1984), 2, 4, 6-7.

'Greek merchants are with one or two exceptions a most outlandish set, the Persians are a much more intelligent set of men than they are, that is the gentry. Yet these fellows call themselves Europeans and have the insolence to call the Persians barbarians; in Europe also, the Persians are called barbarous, I think without justice. A people who have Euclid and algebra surely can not be called barbarous, and these the Persians have, not having learnt them from the Europeans but from the Arabs.'[533] Informed by his extended residence in Iran and convivial relationships with various Persians, Edward Burgess also described the Russians by contrast as 'stupid, barbarous and tyrannical… who with unbounded resources at their command appear to do less for agriculture and commerce than even the Asiatics.'[534] By the late-19th Century, 'scientific' racism had become pervasive throughout the British Empire; suppressing nuanced interactions while reinforcing perceptions of unbridgeable divisions between white rulers and their colonial subjects, based upon the intrinsic deficiencies of the latter. In the context of Iran, this was particularly stoked by the writings of Comte Arthur De Gobineau (1816-1882), the aristocratic French diplomat who has acquired the dubious epithet 'the father of scientific racism'.[535]

De Gobineau held a number of diplomatic posts in Iran, appointed as secretary to the French legation in Tehran in 1855 before serving as *chargé d' affaires* 1856-59 and then, following an interlude in Newfoundland, holding the office of French minister in Tehran from 1861 to 1864.[536] During his time in Iran he cultivated a simultaneous fascination with the Achaemenid Empire and a disdain for Islam and the influence of Arab culture, which he characterised as overwhelming a 'pure' Aryan society with 'degenerate Semitic imports.'[537] This also encompassed Turkic influences on Iranian culture, which extended to thinly-veiled critique of the Qajars and their pretensions to the greatness of Cyrus and Darius, a theme echoed in the travelogues of Curzon and Browne.[538] The term 'Aryan' itself, in its modern context, was particularly popularised by German scholars. This included Max Müller's 1861 lectures in London, where he proclaimed the Aryans 'the fourth distinct race', as well as Friedrich Spiegel's *Eranische Altertumskunde* (1873), which mapped the history of the 'ancient Aryans' while also popularising the terms 'Iran' and 'Iranian' in German and then wider European academia.[539] British racial perceptions of Qajar Iran were thus significantly shaped by developments in continental European scholarship.

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[533] Edward Burgess to George Burgess. Tabriz. 6. April 1844: in Schwartz, (1942).
[534] Edward Burgess to George Burgess. Tabriz. 6. July 1847: in Schwartz, (1942).
[535] Nash, (2005), 140.
[536] M.D. Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology,* (London, 1970), 182.
[537] R. Irwin, 'Gobineau the Would Be Orientalist', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* (2016), 324.

Though receptive to such developments and clearly enamoured with the 'Aryan' Achaemenid and Sassanian dynasties, De Gobineau's racial thinking also drew direct inspiration from Greco-Roman sources, which contained clear precedents for the description and classification of 'Other' peoples. Greek belief that they resided at the centre of the world, a view shared by many cultures, was coupled with the perception that the physical, moral, and intellectual characteristics of different peoples were inherently shaped by their geographical location, with the Greeks supposedly occupying the position of a perfect mean. Hippocrates' *On Airs, Waters and Places*, for example, proposed that exposure to heat or cold, sunlight or cloud and rain, were believed to impact directly upon the development of distinct and observable physical characteristics, distinguishing 'hard' from 'soft' peoples.[540] Herodotus' comparison of Persian and Egyptian skulls on the battlefield of Pelusium, where he supposedly observed the former to be fragile and brittle while the latter refused to shatter even when smashed with large stones, perfectly illustrates adherence to this belief and has been cited by some scholars as an example of ancient proto-anthropology.[541] The Egyptian skulls were allegedly hardy as a result of their custom of head shaving and constant exposure to the sun, while the Persian skulls were weakened by the widespread use of hats and other head coverings.[542] Herodotus would go so far as to ascribe similar beliefs to the Persians themselves; having Cyrus declare to his descendants that 'Soft lands breed soft people', an exhortation not to abandon their martial ways lest they fall victim to a 'harder' people.[543] Aristotle's *Politics* would echo these assertions of essential characteristics, laying the groundwork for Tacitus' later discourse on the differing features of Northern and Southern peoples. [544] This was an anxiety common in imperial contexts, including the British; namely that unchallenged supremacy would lead to decadence and eventual destruction at the hands of a comparatively uncivilised, and thus uncorrupted, foe.

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[538] Curzon, (1892), I, 395; Browne, (1893), 109.

[539] M. Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language,* (London, 1862), 213; F. Spiegel, *Eranische Altertumskunde,* (Leipzig, 1871), Vol.I.

[540] Hippoc. *Aer.* 16.

[541] F.M. Galassi, L. Lazzarini, and H. Ashrafian, 'Herodotean Anthropology' *SHEMU* 19 no.3, (2015), 1-4.

De Gobineau produced numerous publications relating to Iran, including descriptions of the Qajar state, a travelogue, two incredibly flawed essays on cuneiform and a general history of Iran which did not distinguish between myth and established fact. His most influential monograph, *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale,* railed against Islam and characterised Shi'ism as a uniquely Iranian reaction to it, while also describing the rise and suppression of the Babis.[545] He also taught some private Iranian students the foundational concepts of European philosophy, hoping to both encourage their engagement with new concepts and improve his own understanding of Iranian philosophical traditions in the process.[546] To this end he commissioned a translation of Descartes' *Discourses* published in Tehran in 1862 and entitled *Hikmat-e Nasiriyya*, denoting its dedication to Naser al-Din Shah.[547] While Browne's writing did not follow De Gobineau's harsh style, the impact on his perception of race in Qajar Iran was clear and direct. The persecution of the Babis, in particular, aroused Browne's sympathies and led him to develop an interest in other minority religious communities, particularly Zoroastrians and Sufis.[548] While he did not have a strong grounding in ancient history, this amalgamated with appreciation for the pre-Islamic Iranian empires as manifestations of Iran's 'true' Aryan character prior to the Arab conquests. This also aligned his historical conception of Iran with that of Malcolm who, drawing from Iranian sources, was especially critical of the Turkic Ghaznavid and Safavid empires, with both men additionally being ambivalent and occasionally critical of Shi'a Islam.[549] Fundamentally, Browne displayed favouritism towards anything he regarded as Aryan, while criticising the Turkic Qajar dynasty for perceived degeneration and decline.[550]

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[542] Hdt. 3.12.1-4.

[543] Hdt. 9.122.

[544] Arist. *Pol,* 1372b; Tac. *Germ.*

[545] Irwin, (2016), 325-6.

[546] R. Seidel, 'Early Translations of Modern European Philosophy' in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906,* A.M. Ansari (ed.), (London, 2016), 206-7.

[547] Seidel, (2016), 207-8.

The divide between the Turkic Qajar Shahs and the Aryan Iranians only hardened Browne's dislike of the monarchy, believing that 'however grievous their fate and however cruel their destiny, [the Iranians were] a chosen people, unique and apart from all other nations.'[551] Browne however maintained a significant degree of optimism that this decline could be reversed through the revivification of engagement with Iran's Aryan past. In this he, to some degree, echoed De Gobineau but was demonstrably more optimistic regarding the intellectual potential of the Iranians. Curzon was, by contrast, entirely pessimistic regarding the intrinsic 'racial qualities' of the Iranians, though his travelogue was significantly less engaged with the Aryan-Turkic debate. In agreement with Malcolm, he judged the pre-Islamic empires of Iran to represent its historical and cultural apogee, though they were nonetheless portrayed as inherently inferior to ancient Athens or Rome and were not specifically lauded for their Aryan character.[552] Curzon additionally credited some of Naser al-Din's more redeeming characteristics to his Oghuz Turkic ethnicity, further distancing himself from the praise of every perceived manifestation of 'Aryanism' in Iran.[553] Instead, Curzon adhered to a broader theory of a 'hierarchy of races': white Europeans (with some exceptions, i.e. the Irish) were inherently superior to all other peoples, who could be quantified based on their inherent characteristics, often pertaining to how they might best be controlled and utilised by imperial administrators.[554] For example, British perceptions of the Sikhs as a 'martial race', compounded by their loyalty during the Uprising, encouraged their subsequent utilisation as soldiers and constabulary in service of the Raj.[555] Coupled with the standard British tactic of 'divide and rule', this encouraged the exploitation of caste, religion, and ethnicity as a means of administering the empire in India and spurred Curzon's disastrous decision to partition Bengal in 1905. This prefigured the trauma of Indian partition and inadvertently sparked the revival of the Congress Party and retaliatory *Swadeshi* boycotts of British goods which followed, while Curzon proceeded with greater press censorship and educational restrictions in India.[556]

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[548] Nash, (2005), 26.
[549] Malcolm, (1815), I, 147, 266, 547, 560, 566; Browne, (1893), 334.
[550] A.M. Ansari, 'Introduction: Developing Iranian Intellectual History' in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906,* A.M. Ansari (ed.), (London, 2016), 3-4.
[551] Bonakdarian, (1993), 22.

Sykes was strongly influenced by the popularisation of 'Aryanism' particularly in relation to the pre-Islamic past, although adherence to an Aryan (positive) – Turkic/Semitic (negative) dichotomy is less pronounced in *Ten Thousand Miles* than in Browne's travelogue.[557] This was likely due to his close working relationship with various Qajar officials, coupled with his general regard for Naser al-Din, who he credited as the primary stabilising force in Iran.[558] This correlated with Bird's assertion that Iran was fundamentally unsuitable for British occupation or colonisation, despite the insistence of the Bakhtiari and other nomadic groups that they would find this preferable to the rule of the Qajars.[559] Bird instead contended that 'all Orientals prefer the tyrannies and exactions, and the swiftness of injustice or justice of men of their own creed and race to good government on the part of unintelligible aliens.'[560] Bird viewed the hierarchical Qajar system of government as inherently fixed, in part due to perceived cultural and racial uniformity: 'governors and the governed are one. They are of one creed, and there is no ruling alien race to interfere with ancient custom or freedom of action, or to wound racial susceptibilities with every touch.'[561] This discounted not only growing discontent with the monarchy but also the fact that, particularly in the south and among the nomadic tribes, antipathy towards the Qajars existed specifically on the basis of their Oghuz Turkic ethno-cultural identity; considering them uncouth primitives and the latest in a long line of 'foreign' invaders of Iran.[562]

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[552] Curzon, (1892), II, 153-4.
[553] Curzon, (1892), I, 395.
[554] Curzon, (1892), II, 54.
[555] Dalrymple, (2006), 377.
[556] Gopal, (2020), 178-9.
[557] Sykes, (1902).
[558] Sykes, (1902), 240.

Bird's travelogue also describes what she considered the improving impact of exposure to British 'values' upon 'lesser races'; paralleling her assertions about the impact of missionaries on those they educated. Abdul Rahim, an Arab who served as the British Agent at Kermanshah and with whom Bird stayed during her visit, provides a key example of this. Bird wrote that Abdul Rahim possessed 'an honesty of character and purpose rare among Orientals,' an impression likely resulting from his ability to converse with her in English, coupled with his family's long relationship with the British in Iran. [563] His grandfather, Hajji Khalil, was Henry Rawlinson's servant and saved his life when he fell from scaffolding while copying the Bisitun inscription, though Rawlinson himself later downplayed this event.[564]

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[559] Bird, (1891), II, 7, 25, 86, 92-3, 110-11, 132.
[560] Bird, (1891), I, 171.
[561] Bird, (1891), II, 251.
[562] A. Matin-Asgari, 'The Academic Debate on Iranian Identity: Nation and Empire Entangled' in *Iran Facing Others,* A. Amanat and F. Vejdani (eds.), (New York NY, 2012), 177.
[563] Bird, (1891), II, 99.
[564] Adkins, (2004), 79-80.

Bird’s perception of Abdul Rahim as ‘a man apart’ from his surroundings stemmed, primarily, from his absorption of British habits and dress, rather than his status as an Arab among Iranians, since she was far less generous with other minority groups she encountered. The Syrians for example were described as corrupted by their proximity to other Oriental peoples, having become dishonest and untrustworthy as a result. The Syrian community of Kotranis in Kurdistan received a particularly unflattering portrayal in this vein: 'they have the Oriental failings of untruthfulness and avarice, and the cunning begotten of centuries of oppression, but otherwise they are simple, grossly ignorant, helpless shepherds and cultivators; aliens by race and creed, without a rich or capable man among them'[565] Bird’s Persia thus appears as a place of corruption and miscegenation, mitigated solely by the limited opportunities for Europeans to impart improving morals on the population. At their core, British racial anxieties reflected not only apprehensions of the ‘Other’ but, ultimately, also apprehension of the influence the ‘Other’ might exert upon them and, thus, upon the character of their empire.

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[565] Bird, (1891), II, 241, 324.

3. Case Studies: Engagement with Tropes and Stereotypes in the Iran Travelogues of Curzon, Browne, and Sykes

‘He who has travelled and seen the world tells many a lie.’[566]

Sa’di

3.1 – Decline Narratives: Persian Pasts, Iranian Futures

Having determined the range of imperial anxieties weighing on British travellers in Iran during the late-Qajar period, which encapsulated overlapping factors both practical and intellectual, it is necessary to assess to what extent the travelogues of Curzon (1892), Browne (1893), and Sykes (1902) display the influence of tropes and stereotyping in their conceptualisation of Iran. While observable across a range of preceding writings, it is in these travelogues of that engagement with the ‘decline narrative’ became central to their political discourses regarding the past, present, and potential futures of Iran. Unable to directly interrogate the circumstances of Qajar Iran without assistance, due to his lack of Persian language skills, George Nathaniel Curzon relied particularly heavily on the Greco-Roman sources to shape his perspective. Curzon primarily cites Herodotus’ *Histories*, Xenophon’s *Anabasis* and *Cyropaedia*, and Arrian’s *Anabasis of Alexander* as influential, supplemented with what he himself deemed less reliable sources; including Diodorus’ *Bibliotheca*, Quintus Curtius Rufus’ *History of Alexander*, Strabo’s *Geographia*, and the fragments of Ctesias’ *Persica* preserved in the writings of Photius and Nicolas of Damascus.[567] Curzon’s view of Iran’s history, informed by and filtered through the lens of these ancient writers, fixated particularly on the nation’s great age: ‘If Persia had no other claim to respect, at least a continuous national history for 2,500 years is a distinction which few countries can exhibit' - as well as its perceived decline into decadence and ruin.[568] Curzon considered the glory of Iran to lie in its pre-Islamic past under Achaemenid and Sassanian rulers; Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, Shapur and Khosrow, 'whose handwriting still echoes their fame from the halls where they ruled and feasted… few echoes ring more loudly than the clash of Persian and Grecian onset upon the fields of Marathon and Thermopylae, of Cunaxa, of Issus and Arbela.'[569] Yet, according to Curzon, even at the height of its power and splendour, the achievements of the Achaemenid Empire never reached parity with those of the Greeks. He compared Persepolis unfavourably with the *acropoleis* of Athens and Pergamon while disparaging earlier travellers' awed accounts of the site as 'exaggerations.'[570] Curzon also warned prospective British travellers, potentially enthralled by the artefacts in the South Kensington Museum, that the conditions of Qajar Iran, home of 'the degenerate heir of the glories of Cyrus and Darius,' would leave them disappointed.[571] Nonetheless, Curzon was convinced of significant continuity between the essential characteristics of the Iranians and those of their ancient forebears.[572]

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[566] Sa’di Shirazi, *The Gulistan of Sa’di,* trans. W.M. Thackston, (Bethesda ML, 2008), 81.
[567] Curzon, (1892), I, 5, 10, 550, 564, 571, 593; II, 71, 78-9, 81, 85, 188, 190, 197, 628, 633.

By Curzon's reckoning, Iran had declined through a 'succession of meteoric phenomena, the wonder or the scourge of humanity, an Alexander, a Jenghiz Khan, a Timur, a Nadir Shah, [who] pass, at different epochs, in a trail of fire and blood across the scene.'[573] This decline narrative is constantly reiterated throughout the travelogue, with Qajar Iran degraded as 'only a shadow and a lament... in eloquent juxtaposition to these piles of modern ruins, occur at intervals the relics of a grander imagination and a more ancient past.' Curzon imposed a hierarchy of precedence upon these ruins, affording the remains of medieval Iran superiority over contemporary Iran, while ‘the Persia of Herodotus and Xenophon’ was exalted above all as ‘immeasurably superior… even now more respectable in its ruins.’[574] Adherence to similar narratives was already apparent in Curzon’s earlier writings: in Palestine, Syria, and Egypt he continuously compared the former grandeur of historical sites with their neglected contemporary condition, for which he blamed the ignorance of the Muslim populace.[575] The constant comparison of ancient and modern, to the detriment of the latter, influenced Curzon and other aspiring imperial politicians to the extent that, according to Irwin, who generally defends the exploits of Victorian orientalists, ‘their mind-set and the ways in which they thought about the native peoples owed more to their reading of Caesar, Tacitus and Suetonius than it did to any substantial familiarity with Orientalist texts.’[576] Curzon was also not immune from misinterpreting Greco-Roman sources or ignoring them when they contradicted his imperialist view, as demonstrated by his claim that roads were first introduced to Asia by the Romans and that, by constructing road and rail networks in India, the British were inheriting their legacy.[577] This assertion had already appeared in Bird’s travelogue when, in Bakhtiari territory, she observed the remnants of what she supposed were Greek and Roman bridges and roads. Wishfully tying them to the campaigns of Alexander and Valerian, she disparaged the nomads for believing their ancestors could have constructed such enduring works of infrastructure.[578] Curzon had little excuse for such a distortion, as the Achaemenid royal road between Susa and Sardis, with its various offshoots, was well documented by multiple Greek writers as an integral facet of the empire’s communication, military, and mercantile systems.[579] It highlights his inability to even conceive of Iran as a source of ingenuity; further emphasised by his characterisation of the Sassanian revival as having been enabled solely through the absorption of Roman influence.[580] These are examples of Curzon's imperial ideology, combined with his idolisation of the classics, leading to an insistence that the West was the source of all material progress. Privileging the ancient past, while lamenting subsequent developments as symptoms of decline and degradation, demonstrates the influence of Malcolm's *History of Persia*, though Curzon's historical narrative is significantly more negative regarding both Iran's past and potential future.[581] He believed the dilapidated and partially-ruined cities served as 'visible records of faded magnificence, of unabashed misrule, and of internal decay,' a downward trajectory which Curzon assumed could only be reversed through European-style modernisation.[582] Foremost among his targets for reform was the role of the Shah, whose exactions and caprice Curzon compared to the effect of wars, earthquakes, and pestilence. In a particularly melodramatic passage he argues that through these excesses, 'the glory of [the monarchy's] sun has now set, and deserted spaces and crumbling remains mark the spot that once teemed with busy life and glittered with the pageantry of royal rule... the dirty, desecrated cemeteries that stretch for hundreds of yards outside every town of any size, in which the tombstones are defaced and the graves falling in, are not more lugubrious than is the interior, where the living seem to be in almost as forlorn a plight as the dead.'[583] This damning assessment exemplifies both Curzon's elegiac prose on Iran's vanished past and his pessimistic outlook for its future.

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[568] Curzon, (1892), I, 7.
[569] Curzon, (1892), I, 571.
[570] Curzon, (1892), II, 153-4.
[571] Curzon, (1892), II, 526.
[572] Curzon, (1892), II, 628.
[573] Curzon, (1892), I, 6, 11.

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[574] Curzon, (1892), I, 10.

[575] D. Gilmore, *Curzon,* (London, 1995), 23, 36-7.

[576] R. Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing,* (London, 2006), 288.

[577] Curzon, (1892), I, 485.

[578] Bird, (1891), I, 239.

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[579] Hdt. 5.52-3; Diod. 19.17.5-6.

[580] Curzon, (1892), II, 129-134.

[581] Ross, (2009), 394.

[582] Curzon, (1892), I, 9.

[583] Curzon, (1892), I, 35, 43, 255.

Edward Granville Browne also emphasised the decline narrative in his travelogue, though rather than the Greco-Roman sources he took inspiration from the writings of Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, particularly *Les religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*.[584] This text evidently enthralled Browne, inspiring his belief in the ancient pedigree and elevated qualities of the Aryan origins of Iran. However the persecution of the Babis also aroused both his sympathy for their egalitarian beliefs and fascination with the messianic qualities of the Bab.[585] This represented a marked departure from the views of de Gobineau, who supported the harsh backlash of Naser al-Din against what he considered a 'communist cabal', which offended his conservative aristocratic sensibilities.[586] While eschewing the hyperbolic racism of de Gobineau's writing, Browne's preference for all things Aryan, in the context of Iran, is evident in *A Year Amongst the Persians.* It is clearly observable in his characterisation of the inhabitants of the south as the remnants of an 'almost pure Aryan race,' while expressing his desire to acquire a 'genuine Persian of the South' as his servant.[587] In an almost Manichean binary, Browne's Iran is thus split into an Aryan/Iranian South and a Turanian/Turkic North, with the latter then dominant through the rule of the Qajars.[588] This fixation is equally observable in his regard for the Zoroastrian communities of Yazd and Shiraz, who he praised for their manners, preservation of ancient customs, and appealing physical traits. He attributed their attractiveness to their religious proscriptions which prevented intermarriage with Arabs, Turks, or other ethnic groups, which he believed ensured their survival as 'the purest Persian type, which in physical beauty can hardly be surpassed.'[589] This view was reinforced through interaction with their communities, with

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[584] Bosworth, (1895), 119.
[585] Nash, (2005), 37, 142.
[586] Biddiss, (1970), 186.
[587] Browne, (1893), 109, 169.
[588] Nash, (2005), 144.
[589] Browne, (1893), 410.

Browne quoting a Zoroastrian resident of Yazd who compared Arabs and Jews to 'ravening beasts of prey,' while the Aryans were 'the peaceful and productive animals' of the plains. However, he also conceded that the Parsis in India regarded the few remaining Zoroastrian communities of Iran as 'little better than savages.'[590] The intertwining of historical and racial concepts is observable in the engagement of Zoroastrian communities in both Iran and India with Achaemenid and Sassanian motifs and, from the mid-1800s, academic scholarship, with some Parsis going so far as to advocate for direct British annexation of Iran, so as to relieve the suffering of 'the descendants of Cyrus and the ancient Parthians' under the rule of 'Turks' and 'Moguls'.[591]

Despite believing in an essentialised Iran with ancient characteristics, Browne did not consider this an inherent weakness or cause of decline. Rather, it was a potential source of cultural strength from which inspiration and regeneration could be drawn.[592] This could, he believed, overcome the negative view of the Iranians engendered by so much of the European discourse, which 'stigmatised [them]... as selfish, mercenary, avaricious, egotistical, sordid and cowardly;' tropes found across travelogues, Orientalist literature, and the Greco-Roman sources.[593] For Browne, the bravery and self-sacrifice of the Babis, the unifying and ultimately successful resistance of the tobacco protests and boycotts, and the emergent Constitutionalist movement all gave lie to the perception of a static unchanging Iran. By emphasising these events, Browne made a concerted effort to break away from common tropes; with translation and adaptation of his texts contributing to the discourses of modernity emanating from Iranian intellectuals. For the first time they could see themselves, and their aspirations, sympathetically reflected in the writings of a European.[594]

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[590] Browne, (1893), 316, 432.

[591] Sheffield, (2013), 31.

[592] Nash, (2005), 148; P. Abdolmohammadi, 'The Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the Influence of Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani's Political Thought' in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906,* A.M. Ansari (ed.), (London, 2016), 118-25.

[593] E.G. Browne, 'Introduction and Notes' to *A Traveller's Narrative, Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab,* (Cambridge, 1891), Vol.II, viii-ix.

Browne's discourse on the ancient sites he visited further underlines his sympathy for the pre-Islamic Aryan Iranians, and his dislocation from unquestioning reverence for the Greco-Roman sources. At Pasargadae he expressed admiration for the architectural achievements of the Achaemenids before launching into a romanticised passage whereby 'a vision arose in my mind's eye of gorgeously apparelled horsemen spurring in hot haste with messages to or from the 'Great King' through the rock-cutting. I pictured to myself the white temples and lofty halls of Pasargadae first bursting on their sight, and sighed inwardly as I thought of that departed splendour, and of the fickleness of fortune, which has taken away the very tomb of Cyrus from him to bestow it upon Solomon,' this last comment referencing the contemporary Farsi name for the site, *Takht-i Soleiman*.[595] Browne's visit to Persepolis prompted a similarly imaginative and quasi-mystical description: 'I wandered through its deserted halls, trod its silent stairs, and gazed in admiration… on the endless succession of lofty columns, giant statues and delicate traceries (whose beauty long ages, kinder than the besotted Macedonian who first stretched forth his impious hand against them, have scarcely marred).'[596] Browne's condemnation of Alexander III of Macedon is unsurprising when viewed within the broader scope of his affection for the Iranians and comparative indifference towards the ancient Greeks. However, these passages also fall into the category of 'aesthetic Orientalism', wherein he echoes the writings of Bird, Curzon, and Sykes, who tended to reconstruct the glories of the past to compensate for the perceived deficiencies of the present.[597] The distinguishing factor is that the overall narrative of *A Year Amongst the*

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[594] Nash, (2005), 154.

[595] Browne, (1893), 265-6.

[596] Browne, (1893), 276.

[597] Henes, (2012), 244-5.

Persians remains optimistic regarding the prospects of a coming revival, which in relation to the ancient history of Iran is best encapsulated by the conclusion of Browne's visit to the former Achaemenid capital: 'The stony-eyed lions of Persepolis look forth in their endless watch over a nation which slumbers, but is not dead.'[598] This directly contrasts Curzon's pronouncement on the 'forlorn plight of the dead', exemplifying the gulf in perception between the two men regarding Iran's future. Both prefigured Lord Salisbury's 1898 speech dividing nations into 'living and dying', with the latter supposedly declining due to the 'moral corruption' of its people, among which he included the Iranians.[599]

On the condition of the ancient sites themselves there is similarly a notable divide between Curzon and Browne. While Curzon admired the European graffiti at Persepolis, which included John Malcolm's name among many others, considering it of greater interest than the actual ruins, Browne found the defacement distasteful and declined to add his own name.[600] While debating the justification for Europeans carving their names into the stonework of Persepolis, both Curzon and Browne overlooked the fact that several later Iranian rulers and aristocrats from the Sassanian period onwards had done the same in a range of scripts and calligraphic styles; associating themselves directly with ancient power.[601] Curzon's examination of the site, in conjunction with earlier travelogues and the descriptions of Diodorus, Arrian, and Curtius, constitutes the most thoroughly and directly researched chapter of his travelogue.[602] Coupled with his conclusive identification of the Tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae, this perhaps constitutes the sole piece of accomplished scholarship within the otherwise deceptively superficial *Persia and the Persian Question*.[603] Its influence is confirmed by an Iranian publication from 1954 by Ali Sami, Director of the Archaeological Institute of Persepolis, who still credited Curzon's description of the ruins as 'the best to-date', underlining the longevity of *Persia and the Persian Question* as an 'authority' on aspects of Iran.[604] Apart from Curzon's extensive description, travelogues offered a means of monitoring the condition of Persepolis and its degradation over time, for example regarding the columns: Pietro della Valle (1621) describes 25 standing, Herbert (1627) and Olearius (1628) describe 19, Kämpfer (1698) and Niebuhr (1765) 17, and Kerr Porter (1821) 15. There were only 13 standing by the time Curzon, Browne, and Sykes visited the site.[605]

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[598] Browne, (1893), 239.
[599] A. Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan,* (London, 1999), 691-2.
[600] Curzon, (1892), II, 156-7.
[601] A. Sami, *Persepolis (Takht-i Jamshid),* (Shiraz, 1954), 30, 36.
[602] Curzon, (1892), II, 115-95.
[603] Curzon, (1892), II, 71-90; Sancisi-Weerdenburg, (1991), 18.

Browne also recorded the reaction of Iranians themselves to the European preoccupation with antiquities, describing an interaction with a shepherd on the road to Shiraz who observed Browne scrutinising rock inscriptions and knowingly concluded that he was yet another of the 'many Firangís come here seeking for treasures.'[606] This was the common Iranian perception of the European obsession with locating and studying rock carvings, long a focus of travellers in Iran. Similarly, upon visiting Kangavar in Kermanshah province, where the ruins of a temple of Anahita attracted Browne's interest, the headman of the village remonstrated with him regarding his desire to acquire souvenirs: 'It would be a pity that you would come here at so much trouble and expense, and should take back nothing with you but a collection of those curiosities and antiquities with which your people seem for the most part to be so strangely infatuated.'[607] Browne thus makes light of the European desire (his own included) to acquire pieces of Iran's past while often overlooking the realities of its present. Percy Sykes however was just such an amateur archaeological enthusiast; his diplomatic and military excursions throughout Iran providing the opportunity to make his own examinations of sites. Outside Kerman he inspected structures erected during the rule of the Kermani Seljuqs, including the *Qubba-i Sabz* which Curzon had dated to 1155.[608] Employing the assistance of a local informant who was able to decipher the relevant inscriptions, Sykes instead dated the structure to between 1183 and 1187, after which the city had been taken by the invading Oghuz.[609] Though this correction did not diminish his general deference towards the Tory statesman, Sykes clearly considered himself better equipped to settle such questions due to his linguistic skills which enabled collaboration with Iranians, something Curzon had been unwilling to entertain. Sykes also attempted to find parallels between Iranian mythistory and folk-memory. While camping in the shadow *Kuh-i Chehel Tan* volcano in Baluchistan, he was informed by the local inhabitants that excavation of the cliff-sides dated from the reign of 'Kudru Pádsháh', who Sykes identified as the legendary Kay Khosrow from the *Shahnameh.*[610] In the vicinity of Khinaman, in Kerman province, he even made his own superficial excavations which however yielded no finds. This led Sykes to vent his disdain for the neglect of the ancient past in Iran: 'To the Oriental mind, our thirst for knowledge seems uncanny, and in out-of-the-way places we were thought to be looking for mines of buried treasure,' thus, echoing Browne's observation though ignoring the role of European plundering in stoking Iranian resentment.[611]

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[604] Sami, (1954), 63.
[605] Sami, (1954), 21.
[606] Browne, (1893), 268.
[607] Browne, (1893), 274.

Due to rioting in Shiraz during his time in Fars province, Sykes only made a brief visit to Persepolis, typically the focal point of historical reflection for British travellers. Consequently, he appears to have relied heavily on Curzon's extensive description of the site to direct his examinations and recommended it to subsequent visitors.[612] Similarly to Browne however, Sykes perceived an almost-metaphysical quality to Persepolis, describing the

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[608] Curzon, (1892), II.
[609] Sykes, (1902), 195.
[610] Sykes, (1902), 134.
[611] Sykes, (1902), 442-3.
[612] Sykes, (1902), 80, 324.

‘magic weirdness' of the site by moonlight. This atmosphere was recreated upon observing Yazd during a sandstorm, which gave Sykes ‘a weird sense of unreality, recalling the *Arabian Nights*’ and the influence of orientalist literature.[613] These examples of aesthetic orientalism demonstrate that, though the Greco-Roman texts provided historical context for Iran, the creative works of British writers simultaneously shaped its reception: Burton’s *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night,* Arnold’s *Sohrab and Rustum,* and FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam* are all quoted in relation to antiquities in Sykes’ travelogue.[614] His visit to Persepolis also caused Sykes to reflect upon the rise of the Achaemenids, who ‘from being a tribe of needy nomads, succeeded to the wealth and civilisation of Media, and to the rule of Western Asia... prey[ing] on the effeminate inhabitants of Babylonia.’[615] Yet Persepolis was also evidence of what Sykes considered an ingrained cycle of rise and decline among oriental monarchies, reflecting in a melancholy tone that ‘this pillared waste’ was ‘formerly the palace, where the Sháh-in-Sháh showed himself to adoring multitudes from every clime.’[616] Such observations played into British imperial paranoia: the realisation that no empire, whether backed by the military might of Rome, or displaying its greatness through monumental architecture such as Persepolis, could endure eternally.

In order to further assess the Iranian past, Sykes attempted to address the divide between East and West in the ancient world, acknowledging that it was not as monolithic as once thought: even in Periclean Athens there were trade connections as far as India and Sri Lanka, by which rice and peacocks reached the Greek *poleis* where they were known by derivatives of their Tamil names.[617] Sykes drew parallels between the heroes of the *Shahnameh* and the Homeric epics and Greek mythology more widely, noting particular similarities between Herakles and Rustam.[618] While not unreasonable comparisons, the trend of consistently finding Greek or Roman equivalents for aspects of Iranian history and culture, which can also be observed in *Persia and the Persian Question,* promoted Europe as the source not only of civilisation, but also of creativity. Sykes is clearly mistaken when he claims an anachronistic pedigree for Sufism: ‘The Sufi creed is a form of religious mysticism which has from earliest times deeply appealed to Mankind in the East. Even Plato drank of its fountain and thereby influenced all Western thought.’[619] Advocating its doctrines as means of counteracting ‘the ignorance and fanaticism still so rife in Asia,’ Sykes’ attempt to draw connections with Plato ignored Sufism’s Islamic nature and distorted the fact that the legacy of the Greek philosophers had been, in part, preserved through the translations and treatises of Islamic Iranian and Arab scholars.

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[613] Sykes, (1902), 324, 423.
[614] Sykes, (1902), 72, 361.
[615] Sykes, (1902), 321, 328.
[616] Sykes, (1902), 325.
[617] Sykes, (1902), 84.

Beyond these few examples, Alexander dominates Sykes’ discourse on relations between East and West: ‘We, as Europeans, may feel proud that a Greek conqueror should have made a deeper impression on the imagination of Asia than any Persian, Arab, Mongol or Turk... in the East perhaps the greatest name of all is that of Alexander the Great.’[620] Sykes even interpreted this status as the root-cause of an upsurge of Sunni militancy following Ottoman victory in the Greco-Turkish war of 1897: ‘for the Sultán to have conquered the world-conqueror’s nation meant an enormous addition of prestige, of which the fanatical mullás would take the fullest advantage.’[621] Alexander/Iskander/Sikander was certainly prominent in Iranian mythistory, though his ‘greatness’ was far from settled. Some (including Browne) regarded him as a reckless force of destruction which swept away the glory of the Achaemenid empire, while in contrast Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh* created a partly-Iranian lineage for him to soften the blow of foreign conquest and embellished his historical background with fantastical elements, such as his quest for the fountain of life.[622] The Qur'anic figure of *Dhu al Qarnayn*, 'the two-horned one' whose journey encompassed both East and West, also likely reflects Alexander's legacy.[623] Similarly fanciful additions permeated the English portrayal of Alexander, with medieval iterations of the *Alexander Romance* and Jenkinson's Elizabethan epic *Albion's England* transmuting him into a knight-errant and philosopher king. Sykes quoted from both in his chapter headings.[624] Within the Persianate cultural sphere however, the character of Iskander never reached the popularity of Rustam or Zal, respective examples of the idealised Iranian warrior and ruler.[625] Such contradictions did not dispel Sykes' perception of Alexander as the most prominent figure in Asian history; his ignoring of the revered status of Muhammad, Ali, and Hossein in Iran further demonstrating his dismissive attitude towards Shi'a Islam. Contorted and anachronistic in execution, Sykes' motivations for elevating Alexander's position in Iranian history are clear: he provided precedence for a 'European' holding the military mastery of Asia.

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[618] Sykes, (1902), 361.
[619] Sykes, (1902), 197.
[620] Sykes, (1902), 166.
[621] Sykes, (1902), 275.

Sykes also exemplifies what might be dubbed 'Alexander Syndrome', the tendency of European travellers in Iran and South Asia to obsessively identify with the ancient conqueror and conceive of their journey as an enaction of his legacy. This phenomenon continues to influence contemporary travel-writing in terms of European self-perception and representation.[626] Many examples occur throughout *Ten Thousand* Miles, such as Sykes claiming that he and his party were the first Europeans to take the route from Bazman to Rudbar since Alexander and his army.[627] While travelling in Karmania, he was 'almost certain that we were treading in the steps of Krateros,' one of Alexander's generals, while his party's navigation of the Minab river (described by its Greek name, Anamis) was compared to the voyage of Nearchos, from whose fragmentary *Indika* Sykes also quoted.[628] He further equated his travels to those of Alexander while in Sistan, Kerman, and Qaen, and referred to the *ichthyophagi* while in Baluchistan; a direct reference to the Macedonian's crossing of the Makran desert.[629] He also made more detailed claims about Alexander's progress, believing that he had 'proved the extreme probability of Alexander the Great forming a standing camp in this valley' at Bagh-i Babu. This he attempted to corroborate by reference to a small Greek unguent pot which had been recovered there and dated by scholars at the British Museum to the 4th Century BCE.[630] The classical nomenclature for geographical locations is frequently used, further underlining his belief in significant continuity with the ancient past. Baluchistan is thus referred to as the 17th satrapy of Darius, the village of Tiz as the 'Talmena' described by Arrian, and the Helmand River as 'the classic Etymander.'[631] This has the effect of archaising Iranian topography, diminishing the importance of the present and privileging the ancient past, defined predominantly by Greek nomenclature. Sykes also attempted to include Alexander in the development of Iranian cultural practices with which he had no clear connection: for example, in his discussion of polo, he tentatively dates it to the reign of Ardeshir I (r. 211/2-224 CE), while pointing out that Ferdowsi considered it even more ancient. To this end, Sykes extensively quotes the *Shahnameh*, before attempting to conflate polo with the mounted pastimes of Alexander and his generals, citing the *Alexander Romance* as evidence.[632]

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[622] D. Davis, 'Introduction' to A. Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh,* trans. D. Davis, (London, 2007), xxiv.
[623] *Qur'an*, 18:83-101.
[624] Sykes, (1902), 153, 321.
[625] Davis, (2007), xxii
[626] Dabashi, (2015), 166; R. Stewart, *The Places in Between,* (London, 2014).
[627] Sykes, (1902), 142.

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[628] Sykes, (1902), 247, 302-3, 313, 417

[629] Sykes, (1902), 109, 362, 407.

[630] Sykes, (1902), 445.

[631] Sykes, (1902), 90, 111, 381.

[632] Sykes, (1902), 335-6.

Sykes viewed Iranian history post-Alexander as one of long decline punctuated by temporary resurgences which, however, never regained the splendour encapsulated in Persepolis. His adherence to the theory of Aryan superiority, present to a degree in Curzon but particularly prominent in Browne's travelogue, further reinforced this perception. Sykes posited that only the Zoroastrians were 'pure Iránians, in opposition to the mixture of Arab, Mongol and Turkish blood which successive invasions have brought into Persia. On this account… they are a finer and healthier race than their Mohammedan fellow-countrymen.' Yet he also believed their large-scale emigration to India had resulted in the decadence and degeneration of the community.[633] This fails to explain Sykes' dismissive attitude towards the Zoroastrian Sassanian dynasty who, echoing Curzon, he considered 'evidently men of few ideas, the submission of captives… in particular, the captive Valerian, playing the chief part in most of their sculptures.'[634] This may stem from their diminished status within the Greco-Roman sources, as well as the paucity of contemporary scholarship. While Cyrus and Darius long epitomised royal grandeur in Europe the Sassanian rulers, like the Parthians, were more obscure and largely served as literary foils to the eastward ambitions of the Roman Empire whilst remaining relatively shadowy in terms of the details of their rule, with George Rawlinson's *Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy* constituting the only dedicated English-language study in this period.[635]

Sykes believed the Arab conquests, and later influx of Turkic peoples, to have diluted the 'Aryan purity' of Iran, and identified the conquests of Timur, and the rule of his son Shah Rukh, as having 'dealt a lasting blow to Persian civilisation… one which has changed the course of history,' despite Iranian historiography remembering the latter as a pious ruler and patron of arts and sciences.[636] Nonetheless, Sykes' reference to the destruction wrought by Timur, compounding as it did the impact of the Mongol invasions which had destroyed important urban centres like Merv and Balkh, as well as the *qanat* irrigation systems which ensured agricultural sustainability in otherwise arid regions, at least provides some context for the material decline without ascribing it to the alleged tendency towards decadence in the Iranian character.[637] This view was however not consistently applied throughout the areas of Iran that Sykes traversed. With regards to Baluchistan, he concluded 'the outlook is not very bright. The laziness and unprogressive nature of the people is such that… a hundred years hence, a style of life not far removed from that of the patriarch Job will still characterise Baluchistan,' a rare Biblical reference in Sykes' travelogue.[638] This assertion also consciously mimics a similar passage in *Persia and the Persian Question*, where Curzon observed little advancement among the nomadic peoples from the lifestyle of Abraham and Sarah wandering in the desert. The quality of workmanship is the final yardstick which Sykes used to judge the degree of decline. Comparing the finely carved tombstones he observed in Sarhad with the contemporary architecture, he concluded that 'the country has not advanced in the path of civilisation;' while, in appraising the still-extant ancient mines near Kala Zari in Qaen, he described how 'the degenerate successors of these mighty men of yore content themselves with re-smelting the slag.'[639] The impression of Iranian history which emerges from Sykes' *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia* is thus one of steady decline since the gilded heights of the Achaemenid empire, with the modern Iranians left to scrabble over the ruins in a fruitless attempt to remake its former glories.

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[633] Sykes, (1902), 1, 94, 198.

[634] Sykes, (1902), 317-18.

[635] Rawlinson, (1875); Bridges, (2015), 162.

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[636] Sykes, (1902), 388; H. Katouzian, *The Persians,* (London, 2009), 108-9.
[637] Katouzian, (2009), 100-11.
[638] Sykes, (1902), 108.
[639] Sykes, (1902), 135, 413.

3.2 – The Shah: Kingship and Tyranny

Curzon and the Qajar Monarchy: A ‘Moderated’ Portrayal

Curzon’s description of the Qajar monarchy, particularly Naser al-Din Shah, his successor Mozaffar ad-Din, and a range of other Qajar grandees such as the Zil es-Sultan, attempts to present a superficially positive impression despite this not reflecting the British MP’s initial assessment. Curzon was urged to re-write large sections of his travelogue at the behest of Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, who worried that a damning portrayal of the Shah would undermine British diplomatic efforts and jeopardise the granting of further economic ‘concessions’ at a time of intense imperial competition with Russia.[640] This resulted in conflicting views being espoused in different sections, particularly in relation to the Shah. Acquiescing to the Prime Minister’s wishes, *Persia and the Persian Question* portrays Naser al-Din as a ‘moderate despot’ who, with some skill, consolidated his authority throughout Iran, possessed a ‘firmer hold upon the provinces than any previous member of his dynasty, and is as unquestionably sovereign at Meshed as he is at Tehran,’ and dispensed his duties as monarch, and arbiter of factions, in a manner ‘imperious, diligent, and fairly just.’[641] Infrastructure projects, particularly the expansion of telegraph lines and construction of railroads, were also attributed directly to Naser al-Din’s personal consolidation of authority, which Curzon claimed had elevated him to the ‘most powerful monarch of Persia since Nadir Shah.’[642] Though emphasising that Naser al-Din usually commanded the power of life and death over his subjects, whether applied directly or delegated to officials, Curzon does concede that, in general, he was more peaceful and humane than his predecessors in its application: ‘He is the first king of his race, and one of the few kings in Persian history, against whom the charge of cruelty and arbitrary indifference to injustice or suffering cannot be fairly brought.'[643] There were exceptions to this, with Curzon highlighting the murder of the vizier Amir Kabir and the persecution of the Babis as examples, however he considered that there was sufficient cause to at least contextualise these actions, if not entirely justify them.[644] Curzon ultimately agreed with George Rawlinson on the relationship between the Iranians, royal authority, and violence, namely that 'the Oriental will generally kiss the hand that smites him, if only it smite him hard enough.'[645]

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[640] Ross, (2009), 393.

[641] Curzon, (1892), I, 181, 391, 401.

[642] Curzon, (1892), II, 615.

Curzon endeavoured to convince his readers that the Iranians themselves shared these views regarding Naser al-Din, claiming there was 'a consensus of opinion in Persia that he is the most competent man in the country, and the best ruler that it can produce.'[646] This view presumably emanated from members of the court and aristocracy, since Curzon lacked the linguistic ability to converse outside that sphere, or from other British orientalists and diplomats who interpreted the lack of European-style political resistance, through newspapers or political parties, as tacit support for the Shah. One of these sources is directly identified as the Zil es-Sultan, who Curzon met at Tehran in an audience hall furnished in a 'comic mixture of the European and the Oriental' where he was the recipient of a long lecture on the benevolent rule of the Naser al-Din. His administration had supposedly disavowed oppression and torture while ensuring the life and security of all subjects, abolishing the *jizya* tax on the *dhimmis* (religious minorities) in 1882 and issuing the proclamation guaranteeing private property in 1888, the latter a particular concern for British trade.[647] It was emphasised, however, that this was an ongoing process, with Iran depicted by the Zil es-Sultan as 'hungering and thirsting for civilisation,' thus bolstering the British belief that they were responsible for propagating this civilisation.[648] Curzon, unsurprisingly, characterised European influence as far more effective than any form of native political movement or attempt to reform from within. This manifested itself both through the influence of the numerous representatives of imperial powers at the Qajar court, with Britain and Russia dominating, as well as the power of the European press to present criticism without fear of reprisal.[649] The Iranians themselves supposedly lacked any form of public opinion, at least none that Curzon could access, and were deemed either ignorant-of or ungrateful-for the 'protection' afforded them.[650] Curzon also describes Naser al-Din Shah as generally accessible to his people, restraining the urges of his retainers to beat back the crowds which attended his progress through cities.[651] This view is, however, undermined by an anecdote presented later in the first volume, which describes how the Shah ordered petition boxes to be exposed in the larger towns and cities where the respective governors, fearing their position might be undermined, ordered anyone attempting to deposit a petition to be beaten. Unsurprisingly, the boxes remained empty, and the Shah felt reassured of the universal happiness of his subjects, undermining Curzon's characterisation of him as an 'omnipotent' ruler.[652]

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[643] Curzon, (1892), I, 402, 433.

[644] Curzon, (1892), I, 404; II, 16.

[645] G. Rawlinson, (1885), 433.

[646] Curzon, (1892), I, 401.

[647] Shahnavaz, (2005), 15, 22.

In practice, Naser al-Din's authority did encounter challenges from the general population, as in the case of anti-Jewish rioting which took place in Barfrouch (now Babol) in Mazanderan province in 1866. Though the disorder was rapidly suppressed on the Shah's orders, Curzon concedes that Naser al-Din was unable to punish the ringleaders due to the strength of public opinion, contradicting his own claims of total political apathy and acquiescence to Qajar rule.[653] In the conclusion of the second volume, Curzon also conceded that, in recent years, the Shah had received threats from those who opposed expanding 'concessions' to the European empires. They are however largely dismissed as the result of courtly intriguing and the inevitable spasms of bigotry present 'in a country still so fast bound in the manacles of Mohammedan prejudice and superstition.'[654] Earlier in his travelogue Curzon had declared that 'there is not a single man in the kingdom who dare venture either his voice or his position against the sovereign.'[655] This was a serious misjudgement of the political mood in Iran considering that, a mere four years after the publication of *Persia and the Persian Question*, Naser al-Din Shah would be shot dead by Mirza Reza Kermani, a home-grown assassin inspired by the pan-Islamism of Jamal al-Din Asadabadi.[656] Curzon's belief in the complete political apathy of the Iranians blinded him to change in late 19th Century Iran. The 'Qajar pact', involving accommodations between the Shah, the *ulema*, landowners, and the mercantile classes was eroded with growing resistance to European imperial influence, particularly the hated economic 'concessions'. The assassination of Naser al-Din would finally shatter this status quo.[657] While the *bazāris* and *ulema* sought to maintain their traditional rights and privileges, and the secular nationalists favoured more radical societal transformation, both wings of the nascent Constitutional movement increasingly identified Qajar rule as the key obstacle to the revival of Iran.[658] The decade between the assassination and the outbreak of the Constitutional Revolution was a particularly fluid period in Iranian politics; according to Malayeri constituting 'a complex but major transitive stage from reformist efforts to radical and revolutionary positions.'[659] Curzon's naïve assessment of the Iranians as entirely apathetic, coupled with his dismissal of the Tobacco Protests as the 'last gasps of Oriental fanaticism,' led him to discount the impetus for change which would ignite the Constitutional Revolution; providing a clear example of how inflexible and stereotype-laden British writing obscured the actual conditions in Iran.

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[648] Curzon, (1892), I, 418-19.
[649] Curzon, (1892), I, 391, 404.
[650] Curzon, (1892), I, 435.
[651] Curzon, (1892), I, 396.
[652] Curzon, (1892), I, 465.

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[653] Curzon, (1892), I, 380.
[654] Curzon, (1892), II, 629.
[655] Curzon, (1892), I, 406.
[656] H. Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran,* (London, 2000), 4-12.
[657] A. Gheissari, 'Iran's Dialectic of the Enlightenment' in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906,* A.M. Ansari (ed.), (London, 2016), 35.
[658] Matin, (2016), 90-1.

Though Naser al-Din's power did not extend to the despotic heights which Curzon expected, based on comparison with the representation of the Achaemenids in the Greco-Roman sources, he did concede that the pacification of the country, particularly the suppression of the nomads and the Babi movement, had been largely successful. This contrasted with the reigns of the previous Qajar Shahs, characterised by 'internal warfare, yearly renewed against insurgent tribes or recalcitrant chieftains, of tribute refused, of brigandage rampant and unpunished, of ambitious nobles struggling with each other for the ascendancy, of the royal authority frequently insulted and sometimes wholly ignored. Such is not the picture which is presented by the Persia of to-day.'[660] This transformation is also reported in Curzon's description of the pacification of the provinces of Khorasan and Azerbaijan, which he credits to the 'firm and not unpopular rule of the reigning Shah' as a result of which 'the sins of his great-uncles, the sons of the prolific Fath' Ali Shah, been forgotten and forgiven,' a claim about public sentiment which again is unsupported by evidence.[661] Restraining the tribes was certainly not achieved peacefully, observable in the travelogues of Layard and Bird. Curzon utilises Livy's story of the Roman king Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, striking the heads from the tallest poppies in his garden, as a metaphor for the suppression of tribal rulers, describing how the 'Arab sheikhs and Lur chieftains alike have vanished into compulsory retirement, or more frequently into the silent prisons of Tehran.'[662] Curzon further references Rome in this context, describing the Shah's strategy for pacifying the tribes as '*Divide et impera*... a good enough motto for the *imperator*, but it is a fatal one as applied to his victims; and the Kajar kings will have the mischievous distinction in history of having sapped and decimated the manhood of their country.'[663] He fails to acknowledge this was also the mantra of British colonial administrators in India and would later define Curzon's own tenure as Viceroy. Casting the centralisation of power, away from the nomadic tribes, as one of the great successes of Naser al-Din's reign also belies the role they would play in the eventual collapse of the Qajar dynasty.

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[659] S.E. Malayeri, 'Iranian Enlightenment and Literary Self-Consciousness' in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906,* A.M. Ansari (ed.), (London, 2016), 130.
[660] Curzon, (1892), I, 405.
[661] Curzon, (1892), I, 219, 523.

Curzon's predictions regarding the succession proved to be somewhat more accurate, foreseeing a smooth transition of power which would preclude widespread popular uprisings or usurpation of the throne by another claimant. The assertion that 'the Heir Apparent would succeed without firing a musket or shedding a drop of blood' proved baselessly optimistic, however, as unrest certainly did flare up in provinces such as Baluchistan, elaborated on in Sykes' travelogue.[664] Curzon conceded that there was little direct information on the character and sympathies of Mozaffar ad-Din available to British travellers and diplomats. Accounts of the crown prince varied widely, painting him as an urbane and educated gentleman, an ignorant and petulant recluse, or a harmless puppet.[665] Wills' description, for example, was particularly dismissive: '[the] heir-apparent... is physically weak, and mentally imbecile, being a bigot in the hands of a few holy men, and as impracticable as he is obstinate.'[666] Curzon chose to believe the positive reports, describing the prince as 'a man of good intelligence and considerable instruction, being well read in history, professing an interest in botany… being withal of an amiable and unassuming disposition,' and criticised Wills for espousing a far more critical opinion and describing the Zil es-Sultan as the more qualified successor.[667] It is unlikely that either British commentator had particularly reliable information regarding the Crown Prince. Without having ever met Mozaffar ad-Din, Curzon's summation of his character will have been formed, largely, by absorbing the propaganda of the Qajar ministers and accounts of earlier travellers, and may also have been moderated following Lord Salisbury's request for a more diplomatic tone.

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[662] Curzon, (1892), II, 326.
[663] Curzon, (1892), II, 272.
[664] Curzon, (1892), I, 406.
[665] Curzon, (1892), I, 413-15.
[666] Wills, (1883), 366.

Attempting to redirect criticism of Naser al-Din Shah or his likely successor, Curzon cast the institution of monarchy itself as the major hurdle to reform, portraying it as ossified and weighed down by historical baggage while simultaneously stuck in perpetual decline and stasis. Iran is described as 'the most Oriental in the East,' a sphere within which great continuity exists, with direct comparison made between the behaviour of the Qajar Shah and the illustrious Achaemenid rulers: 'the Shah displays himself to the people in a fashion not essentially different from that in which Darius and Xerxes appeared in royal state before their subjects in the *talars* of Persepolis 2,300 years ago... he remains the Shahinshah or King of Kings.'[668] The education of the Shah is also portrayed as consistent with ancient modes, with Curzon paraphrasing Herodotus and Xenophon when he describes how Naser al-Din 'was taught to read, write, pray, ride and shoot.'[669] This view of the Iran not only stresses continuity but also consciously archaises its institutions, describing the provinces as satrapies and their respective governors as satraps which, though it creates a neat parallel with the Achaemenid empire, obscures the actual nature of Qajar administration.[670] The performative trappings of the court, be it the uniforms of the *shatirs* or the elaborate fanfares which accompanied royal processions, are as in Wills' travelogue characterised as ludicrous and ostentatious, though Curzon concedes that 'what is apt to look ridiculous in a semi-modernised court and capital was… in thorough keeping with an age and a ceremonial of almost barbaric splendour.'[671] The life of the Qajar sovereign is thus summarised as one of 'mingled splendour and frippery, and of the taste, half cultured and half debased,' with Curzon assuming that Naser al-Din was essentially powerless to institute meaningful reform when faced, not only with a decadent court culture, but also the 'petrified ideas and prejudices of an Oriental people.'[672]

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[667] Curzon, (1892), I, 414.-17.

[668] Curzon, (1892), I, 9, 312, 434; II, 165.

[669] Curzon, (1892), I, 396; Hdt. 1.136-7; Xen. *Cyrop.* 1.6-9, 1.31.

[670] Curzon, (1892), I, 435.

Simultaneously absolute and oblivious, the Shah is consequently depicted as filling his time primarily with trivial pastimes including the expansion of his collection of European technology, acquired during diplomatic visits.[673] Naser al-Din's love for collecting animals for his personal menagerie is particularly highlighted, a proclivity which aligned neatly with the orientalist trope of the eastern despot surrounded by exotic, often deadly creatures. Curzon instead compares this to Caligula's threat to appoint his horse Incitatus as consul, an equally unflattering comparison with a notorious and debauched tyrant's relationship with animals.[674] When Naser al-Din's attention did, occasionally, turn to more serious matters, such as reform or the expansion of infrastructure, Curzon describes how 'half the schemes authorised by him are never brought any nearer to realisation, the minister or functionary in charge trusting to the oblivious caprices of the sovereign to overlook his dereliction of duty.'[675] The Shah is thus depicted as largely submerged in his own frivolous pleasures, his limited energy for progress blunted by indolence and the efforts of his officials to maintain their positions at the cost of subverting reform. Curzon claims to present these anecdotes about the Shah because they ‘illustrate the bent of a character which could hardly have been moulded in any other surroundings than those of an Asiatic throne,’ an assertion which exposes his pessimism regarding the capacity of the Iranian monarchy to reform. This is compounded in the final chapter of the second volume, where he asserts that left to its own devices, the Qajar government would ‘prefer the outworn furniture of Oriental existence to the novel paraphernalia of European commerce and culture,’ ensuring a continued decline and ossification of the institutions of the nation.[676]

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[671] Curzon, (1892), I, 309, 332.
[672] Curzon, (1892), I, 328, 401.
[673] Curzon, (1892), I, 398.
[674] Curzon, (1892), I, 399.
[675] Curzon, (1892), I, 402.

Curzon’s portrayal of Naser al-Din Shah thus leaves the reader with a contradictory impression. Characterised as an all-encompassing despot, the Shah was restrained by the machinations of his underlings and by the press of foreign nations. Inheritor of the glorious legacy of Achaemenid and Sassanian kingship, he presided over a country of ruins in a state of advanced decadence. Abrahamian explains that, while British travellers perceived the Qajar Shah as the ‘epitome of ancient oriental despotism’, they were in fact witnessing ‘a failed imitation of such absolutism’, a clear case of orientalist expectation colliding with and obscuring reality.[677] Despite supposedly being a unique example of humane Iranian kingship, Naser al-Din oversaw the violent suppression of the Babis, the decimation of tribal leadership, and the murder of two viziers. Described as the most able man to lead Iran, he also apparently spent most of his time engaged in frivolous pastimes; experimenting with photographic equipment or playing with his cats.[678] Unable to access the candid opinions of ordinary Iranians, Curzon’s occasional positivity reflects the propaganda of Qajar ministers and the opinions of other British commentators who, similarly, lacked insight into the sentiments of those outside the rarefied atmosphere of the court. Curzon certainly adjusted his portrayal of Naser al-Din at the behest of Lord Salisbury, yet his true disdain shines through when he concludes that Iran possessed ‘governing institutions and a national character so foreign to the civilised idea [and subject to] the tyranny of immemorial custom,’ of which, in his assessment, the Qajar Shah was undoubtedly a major symptom.[679]

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[676] Curzon, (1892), I, 400; II, 628.

[677] E. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions,* (Princeton NJ, 1982), 35-47.

[678] Helbig, (2016), 53.

Browne’s Anti-Qajar Sentiment and the ‘Aryan Revival’

In contrast to Curzon’s unflattering though moderated portrayal, Browne’s depiction of Naser al-Din is unreservedly negative and among the shortest of the travelogues examined here. He openly acknowledged his bias in this regard, admitting he was ‘conscious of a prejudice against him in my mind arising from the ineffaceable remembrance of his horrid cruelty towards the Babis,’ a view he held, before travelling to Iran in 1887, through engagement with the writings of de Gobineau and contact with Iranian expats in London.[680] Browne’s conceptualisation of the conflict between the Babis and the Shah was also noticeably coloured by his racial thinking, casting the religious revolutionaries as a ‘party of light’, representatives of an Aryan past reasserting itself by joining ‘the old, old battle against the powers of tyranny and darkness.’[681] Browne’s view of earlier Qajar monarchs was hardly more favourable: Agha Muhammad Khan was ‘as implacable as he was cruel, as mean in spirit as he was hideous in aspect,’ while he considered Fath’ Ali Shah a vindictive philanderer with a proclivity for mutilating his many rivals, typically by blinding them.[682] Browne’s time in Iran only intensified his disdain for Naser al-Din Shah, who he deemed ‘a selfish despot, devoid of public spirit, careful only of his personal comfort and advantage.’

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[679] Curzon, (1892), I, 463, 580.
[680] Browne, (1893), 110.
[681] Browne, (1893), 163-4.
[682] Browne, (1893), 310-12.

He also considered the Shah to represent the primary barrier to material and intellectual progress, as he was ‘averse to the introduction of liberal ideas amongst a people whose natural quickness, intelligence, and aptitude to learn cause him nothing but anxiety. He does everything in his power to prevent the diffusion of those ideas which conduce to true progress, and his supposed admiration for civilisation amounts to little more than the languid amusement which he derives from the contemplation and possession of mechanical playthings and ingenious toys.’[683] While Curzon similarly derided the Shah for his preoccupation with trivial pastimes, Browne’s assertion that Naser al-Din actively stymied reform to maintain his own grip on power differentiates the two travelogues. Browne’s thoughts on Qajar despotism align with the writings of Iranian intellectual Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, who identified the accommodation between the conservative institutions of the monarchy and *ulema* as constituting the greatest barrier to reform and the creation of an Iranian modernity: ‘the breath will be taken away from the people, now subjugated. Its evolution will be suspended and its future annihilated.’[684] The most positive claim that Browne makes for Naser al-Din is that his rule represented a period of relative calm for Iran, his tenure being ‘on the whole, mild, and comparatively free from the cruelties which mar nearly every page of Persian history,’ an assertion replicated across British travelogues in this period.[685] Yet Browne’s extended description of the persecution of the Babis, examined in the following section, undermines any suggestion that Naser al-Din was truly peaceful, other than by comparison with the violent excesses of Nader Shah or Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar.

Browne’s description of the monarchy also highlights the conflicts and power-struggles within the extended Qajar clan itself. He records a conversation with an unnamed Qajar prince on the road from Persepolis to Shiraz, where the *mirza* laments his inability to find any form of productive position and that he is reduced to an itinerant life of relative poverty, subsisting on a small stipend. The reason given is that the state was ‘distrustful of us because we are of kingly race. They prefer to employ persons of lowly origin, whom they can chastise for any fault. But suppose it were us, suppose we were to neglect our work or help ourselves to the public money, they could not punish us because we are so distinguished, so they decline to employ us at all.’[686] This speaks both to the proliferation of members of the Qajar family, attributed to the fecundity of Fath’ Ali Shah and his harem, and Naser al-Din’s inherent distrust regarding the potential machinations of his family members, demonstrated by his efforts to prevent them from building up their own autonomous power bases. Where this proved impossible, more direct measures were undertaken on the Shah’s orders. Browne describes how the Sarim al-Dowlat, the Zil al-Sultan’s influential minister, was disposed of with ‘a cup of Kájár coffee.’[687] Indicative of Browne’s dislocation from Greco-Roman sources, these power struggles, particularly the use of poison in the context of the court, were not immediately sensationalised or tied to any Achaemenid precedents.[688]

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[683] Browne, (1893), 99.

[684] Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, quoted from Abdolmohammadi, (2016), 123.

[685] Browne, (1893), 110.

Beyond his disdain for Naser al-Din and condemnation of his treatment of the Babis, Browne’s criticism of the Qajars more generally displays the influence of his racialised perception of Iran, formed through the influence of De Gobineau. He particularly emphasised the Qajars’ Turkic origins, deriding publications in England which, during the Shah’s visits, referred to him as a ‘descendant of Cyrus,’ a claim Browne considered ‘about as reasonable as if one should describe our own Prince of Wales as a descendant of King Arthur.’[689] Browne instead incorporated the Qajars into a historical framework of Turkic rulers, such as the Ghaznavids and Seljuqs, who had conquered Iran and imposed their rule upon its Aryan peoples, ‘the kinsmen of Cyrus and Shápúr,’ though he simultaneously believed the latter had retained a remarkable degree of cultural integrity in the face of these foreign impositions.[690] Browne held an erroneous impression of the pre-Islamic Iranian plateau as ethnically and culturally homogenous, disrupted by the arrival of Arab and Turkic invaders. This belief became prevalent among the emergent Iranian nationalist movement and was later embraced by the Pahlavis who, with limited success, attempted to utilise the ancient past to construct a cohesive national identity.[691] Browne believed that the Turkic-Aryan dichotomy particularly manifested itself in the Qajars’ neglect of the south of Iran, the ‘cradle of Persia’s ancient greatness,’ while prioritising development of their northern power-centres in Tehran and Tabriz.[692] Relics of Iran’s pre-Qajar past were meanwhile left to decay or actively eradicated, as in the case of a Safavid caravanserai which Browne observed being demolished with gunpowder to make way for new construction.[693] This prompted one of Browne’s few assertions about the universal characteristics of ‘Oriental monarchs’, namely that they had no interest in the preservation of the past, actively reconfiguring it to suit their own ends.[694] The latter is observable in the addition, by Qajar grandees, of inscriptions and images to Achaemenid and Sassanian rock carvings.[695] This juxtaposition demonstrates that, to them, there was no fundamental contradiction in a Shi’a Turkic dynasty emphasising its legitimacy to rule Iran through association with a pre-Islamic Aryan one. Browne however concluded that removal of the Qajar monarchy was necessary for the ‘Aryan renaissance’ he envisioned as the sole means of Iranian revival. He attributed all problems in Iran to the Qajar monarchy and bureaucracy underpinned by the *ulema*; believing that the Iranians would flourish in an atmosphere of individual liberty and rights, which Ali Ansari identifies as Browne's fundamentally 'Whiggish' view of history. [696] This view, as Ansari argues, introduced numerous fallacies to the Iranian reception of British political theory; rather than steady progress and accompanying liberation, the piecemeal evolution of the British 'constitution' had entailed civil wars, the execution of a reigning monarch, frequent religious persecutions, and two major Jacobite revolts.[697] The subsequent course of the Constitutional Revolution illustrates both the naïveté of Browne in this regard, and the issues created by the uncritical adoption of 'Whiggish' ideas by the Iranian nationalist intellectuals who were influenced by his discourse.

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[686] Browne, (1893), 302-3.

[687] Browne, (1893), 218.

[688] Llewellyn-Jones, (2013), 141-3.

[689] Browne, (1893), 109.

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[690] Browne, (1893), 109-10.
[691] Abdi, (2001), 57-9.
[692] Browne, (1893), 110.
[693] Browne, (1893), 211.
[694] Browne, (1893), 238.
[695] Abdi, (2001), 55.

Sykes: Pragmatic Approaches to Power in late-Qajar Iran

Due to his extended postings in Iran Sykes experienced the administration of multiple Qajar rulers, the constitutional interregnum, the restoration of the monarchy under Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar (r.1907-1909), along with his subsequent overthrow and replacement by his pliable son Ahmad Shah Qajar (r. 1909-1925).[698] *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia* was published while Mozaffar ad-Din was still on the throne, though he is conspicuously absent from the text. This reflects that, while attempting to imitate his father's imperious manner and appearance, he lacked the associated political astuteness. Real authority now lay with other Qajar grandees, primarily 'Abd al-Hossein Mirza Farman Farma who had quickly ousted Mozaffar ad-Din's vizier Atabak-e Azam in 1896 and personally assumed command of the army, and thereby effective control of Iran.[699] Rather than devoting text to Mozaffar ad-Din, who served merely as a royal figurehead, Sykes instead focused on his earlier interactions with Naser al-Din, of whom he had formed a largely favourable impression and credited as the key stabilising force in Iran. A meeting between the two in Tehran is recounted, where Naser al-Din enquired about Sykes' observations during his travels, particularly in the more remote provinces, 'and was graciously pleased to remark that I had given him much useful information.'[700] This echoes Bird's view of Naser al-Din, to whom she attributed any semblance of good order in Iran. Bird praised him as 'possibly the ablest man in the country which he rules, and probably the best and most patriotic ruler among Oriental despots,' recounting how the Shah had personally implored her to write favourably of Iran and 'and not crush the aspirations of our struggling country as some have done.'[701] The assassination of Amir Kabir, which usually drew condemnation from British writers, who viewed it as epitomising the Shah's despotism, is dispassionately passed over by Sykes. He rationalised it as 'Persia at that point not being prepared for a Vizier of liberal views,' without laying any particular blame on Naser al-Din.[702] Sykes was however in agreement with Curzon and Browne that the pressure of European public opinion, and the telegraph network, had come to act as restraints on arbitrary rule, though primarily in relation to governors rather than the Shah himself.[703] This view of the Qajars, as enlightened oriental rulers, appears to have been confirmed whilst travelling in the Mian Kangi on the border with Afghanistan: 'The tales that we heard of Afghán tyranny made one reflect on the great contrast between it and Persian rule,' which to Sykes appeared comparatively mild.[704]

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[696] A.M. Ansari, 'Iranian Nationalists and the Perils of Whig History', mapping the Role of Intellectuals in Modern and Contemporary Iranian History: conference, SOAS, University of London, (1. Dec 2018).
[697] Ansari, (2018).
[698] Amanat, (2017), 337, 383-5.
[699] Amanat, (2017), 413.

Though clearly concerned with the contemporary circumstances of the Qajar administration, Sykes also made numerous observations about the historical continuity of modes of etiquette and ceremony in the context of the court. The royal reception typified this, with Sykes describing it as having a very ancient pedigree, while complaining of its tediously slow pace: ‘most Englishmen do not enjoy processions.’[705] However time consuming it may have been, its role was clear: to provide a public opportunity for high-ranking ministers and members of the Qajar elite to demonstrate their loyalty to the Shah and thus reassure his subjects that the heavenly-ordained order remained intact. Such hierarchical display convinced Sykes of the endurance of the ‘master-slave’ relationship between the ruler and his subjects, regardless of rank, maintaining a key stereotype attached to the Achaemenid court.[706] This was most clearly illustrated, not through any interaction with the Shah, but through Sykes’ meeting with ‘Abd al-Hosain Mirza: ‘all the Fárman Farma’s inferiors were his servants, generals and majors acting as waiters, like noblemen in medieval Europe… everything, even to a dispute among the suite, was settled by His Highness, whose whole day was thus occupied.’[707] It further highlights that ‘Abd al-Hosain Mirza had assumed not only administrative power, equivalent to a Shah, but also maintained the associated levels of courtly decorum and hierarchy to emphasise his authority. Though the brash Sykes struggled to contain his boredom during these elaborate proceedings, he recognised in them the traces of the Achaemenid court ceremonials as described in the Greco-Roman sources, and acknowledged their continued significance for the Iranian monarchy: ‘our officials are somewhat apt to forget how great a power display still is in the East.’[708] Continuity with the ancient past, in spite of decline and degradation, was a key assertion which Sykes made regarding the display of royal authority in Qajar Iran.

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[700] Sykes, (1902), 159.
[701] Bird, (1891), I, 203.
[702] Sykes, (1902), 179.
[703] Sykes, (1902), 114.
[704] Sykes, (1902), 391.

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[705] Sykes, (1902), 186.
[706] Llewellyn-Jones, (2013), 49-50.
[707] Sykes, (1902), 76.
[708] Sykes, (1902), 292.

Sykes learned of the death of Naser al-Din by telegram while on route to Shimla, styling him posthumously as ‘the kindly Shah’ while denouncing the assassin as ‘dastardly.’[709] The assassination is stressed as a key moment of disaster for Iran, not least because it disrupted Sykes’ work on the Perso-Baluch Commission. Baluchistan became unstable and increasingly dangerous during the resulting power vacuum with attacks launched not only on bastions of Qajar authority there but also against British telegraph stations, resulting in the death of a communications officer.[710] Despite previously crediting British influence with keeping the peace in the notoriously wild border region, Sykes now blamed the sudden absence of a powerful Shah, or any significant Iranian military force, for the unravelling of the status quo.[711] Northern Khorasan is similarly described as becoming destabilised following the assassination, with a particular upsurge in raiders from the Sarhad area seizing livestock from the surrounding settlements.[712] He outlined the criteria for the Sarhad becoming pacified and developed as ‘a greater sense of security, combined with just rule,’ neither of which were presumably delivered by Mozaffar ad-Din.[713] Sykes thus articulated a sentiment which would become a cornerstone of British foreign policy in the 20th Century, namely support for ‘strongman’ rulers who would keep tight control of their domestic populations while creating favourable conditions for British trade and strategic influence.[714] In Iran, the British would later come to find just such a figure in Reza Khan who, at least initially, fulfilled their criteria.[715]

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[709] Sykes, (1902), 107, 240.
[710] Amanat, (2017), 312-3.
[711] Sykes, (1902), 274-5.
[712] Sykes, (1902), 355.
[713] Sykes, (1902), 137.
[714] C. Jones, ‘A Guiding Hand or Controlling Grasp? Britain, Intelligence, and the War in Oman’ in *Imperial Crossroads,* J.R. Macris and S. Kelly (eds.), (Annapolis MD, 2012), 93.
[715] Amanat, (2017), 443-4.

3.3 - Cruelty and Violence

A History of Violence: The ‘Pacification’ of Iran

Curzon’s conceptualisation of violence within Qajar-era Iranian society, and the inherent cruelty of its people, drew extensive precedent from ‘the crime-stained and bloody pages of Persian history.’[716] He described crucifixion, flaying, burning alive, being blown from guns, impalement, being shod like horses, and being torn asunder; with the latter considered particularly ancient as it was the punishment allotted by Alexander to Bessus, the assassin of Darius III.[717] Curzon’s explanation for the proliferation of these tortures rests on his essentialised and stereotyped view of the Iranians, claiming that their nature had ‘ever been fertile in device and indifferent to suffering... the record of savage punishments and abominable tortures, testifying alternately to the callousness of the brute and the ingenuity of the fiend.’[718] This led Curzon to give credence to historical accounts of extreme cruelty, such as Shapur I’s alleged degradation, execution, and post-mortem mutilation of the captured Roman emperor Valerian, following the battle of Edessa in 260 C.E.[719] Though these stories were, by his own admission, potential inventions by later historians hostile to the Sassanian dynasty, Curzon justified repeating them as ‘there was little in Persian character or habits at the time to render them intrinsically improbable;’ an explicit admission of his belief in cruelty as an essential characteristic of the Iranians, and thus a trope.[720] The slaughter unleashed by Agha Mohammad Khan in overthrowing Lotf Ali Khan Zand, and establishing the Qajar dynasty, is also recounted as a historical example of extreme bloodletting, with Curzon describing how the Qajar Khan demanded 35,000 pairs of eyes be presented to him on a plate. Meanwhile, at the spot where Lotf Ali Khan was captured and blinded by a eunuch before being sent to Tehran for execution, a pyramid of 600 skulls of the Zand's supporters was erected.[721] Undoubtedly a turbulent and violent period, as any transfer of absolute power is likely to be, the presentation of suspiciously round numbers suggests the influence of later mythologising of these events. Manuchehr Khan, the Georgian eunuch and de facto antagonist of Layard's *Early Adventures,* also reappears in Curzon's summary of historical violence in Iran: his execution of 300 members of the rebellious Mamasani tribe in 1840, by walling them up alive in a tower, is rationalised by Curzon as the 'glutting [of] his naturally ferocious appetite,' indicating he held similar views to Layard on the inherent cruelty of eunuchs.[722]

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[716] Curzon, (1892), I, 456.

[717] Curzon, (1892), I, 456.

[718] Curzon, (1892), I, 456.

[719] E.B. Anderson, *Cataphracts,* (Barnsley, 2016), 90-1.

[720] Curzon, (1892), II, 120-21, 376.

The impression of Iran's past in Curzon's travelogue is one of widespread and indiscriminate bloodshed, of cruel tortures inflicted by crueller men and eunuchs. Curzon however stresses that this had ceased to be the case, claiming Iran had entered a period of unparalleled peace and clemency under the rule of Naser al-Din Shah. It is likely this assertion received further emphasis due to Lord Salisbury's intervention, though the greater centralisation and stability of the monarchy did indeed lessen the need for violent suppression of rival claimants or rebellious tribes.[723] The transformation is emphasised by contrast with Edward Burgess' pronouncement on the chaotic and violent state of the country in the decade prior to Naser al-Din's accession: 'Persia is in much the same state as it has been for years back, that is as bad as possible. The army and government servants unpaid, some provinces in open revolt and others close upon it; if it was any other country in the world it could not last, but with Persia all this is nothing; like the eels they are used to it.'[724] Curzon suggests the primary driver for this amelioration was the corrective impact of the morals of Western civilisation, absorbed during the Shah's visits to Europe and reinforced by the growing influence of the European press on public opinion in Iran itself. The latter, allegedly, 'had a wonderful effect in mitigating the barbarity of this truly merciless and Oriental code... cases of unnecessary torture are now rarely heard of.'[725] He also asserts that 'the old fashion which made the kings of Persia the executioners of their subjects, the deed of blood being enacted before their very eyes, has been abandoned.' Yet the royal executioner, whose role Curzon compared to the Roman office of *lictor*, was still a fixture at the court of Naser al-Din, equipped with the implements for administering the bastinado, the most-commonly inflicted punishment involving beating the soles of the feet.[726] Meanwhile, in *Naqsh-e Jahan* square in Isfahan, the *kapuk* (execution pole) was notable by its absence.[727] Curzon emphasised, whether he chose to exercise it or not, that the Shah still retained the right of *qisas* (retaliation), essentially the power of life and death over his subjects, and viewed attempts to subvert this as a challenge to his authority. Nor did Naser al-Din entirely escape Curzon's criticism for personal cruelty, his brutal reaction to being petitioned by groups of discontented soldiers in 1878 receiving condemnation. Much as with the murder of Amir Kabir, rather than fully blaming the Shah, Curzon portrayed this an inevitable outcome of 'the abuses of the Persian administrative system and the perils attaching to the irresponsibility of an Oriental sovereign.'[728] For the supposedly humane and mild-tempered Shah he is generally portrayed by Curzon, the violence carried out on his direct orders and in his presence is particularly startling: ten of the soldiers were strangled and dragged through the streets while the rest were mutilated, having their earlobes severed before being subjected to the bastinado.[729] Despite Curzon's claims of pacification, *siyāsat*, 'afflictive royal authority' remained a key foundation of absolute Qajar rule, with mutilation, in particular, a 'political signature'.[730] Judicial violence also clearly continued in spite of the 'civilising' and 'restraining' influence of European opinion, with the central tenet of Iranian justice remaining, by Curzon's own admission, the *lex talionis* or law of retaliation.[731] Bandits continued to be walled up alive as late as 1884 and others were strangled, decapitated, or had their throats cut, while petty robbery was still typically punished by the severing of fingers, hands, and ears.[732] Ferhad Mirza, the Hissam es-Sultanah, is singled out as remaining 'only too glad of an excuse for his favourite method of punishment,' the live-burial of bandits and rebels.[733] This litany of punishment contradicts Curzon's assertion that 'provincial governors are no longer allowed the immunity of savage punishment which made the rule of some of the king's uncles and great-uncles... adept in the proper use of the bastinado, the bowstring, and the executioner's knife... so dreaded although so superficially successful.'[734]

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[721] Curzon, (1892), II, 243-53.

[722] Curzon, (1892), II, 319.

[723] Amanat, (2008), 351.

[724] Edward Burgess to George Burgess. Tabriz. 3. February 1842, in Schwartz, (1942).

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[725] Curzon, (1892), I, 457.
[726] Curzon, (1892), I, 324, 404.
[727] Curzon, (1892), II, 27.
[728] Curzon, (1892), I, 403.

The pacified image of Qajar Iran under Naser al-Din which Curzon sought to convey is therefore repeatedly undermined by references to the continued proliferation of violence. The bastinado, epitome of swift and brutal Iranian justice across the breadth of British travelogues, is frequently referred to by Curzon, reiterating the narrative that its infliction was universally employed, even upon the Shah's sons and ministers. It was supposedly received with '[not] much greater indignity than does an English public-schoolboy the birch-rod,' though its use apparently declined in the late 19th Century.[735] Nonetheless, instances of individuals receiving as many as 6,000 blows, involving the breaking of 2,000 canes, are also recorded by Curzon.[736] Parallels with the public-school system extended to discipline at the *Dar ul-Funun* in Tehran, where punishment ranged from standing sentry with a shouldered rifle for long periods, to whippings or the bastinado.[737] The latter was apparently the only punishment which truly intimidated the students, contradicting Curzon's characterisation of the beatings as somehow mundane due to an intrinsically Iranian capacity for tolerating violence. Extra-judicial violence and unrest also flared up intermittently, such as following the change of governor of Shushtar on Nowruz of 1891, whereupon 'everyone armed himself, and started out to wreak his private vengeance. Business was suspended; the shops were closed…rival chiefs seized…tortured and mutilated each other.'[738] Attempting to convey the impact of European influence in pacifying Iran, whilst largely curtailing his own criticism of Naser al-Din's more brutal excesses, Curzon's continual reference to contemporary violence and torture; royal, judicial, and extra-judicial, undermines this effort and rather underscores his underlying belief in an unchanging and inherently cruel Iran.

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[729] Curzon, (1892), I, 403.

[730] D. Rejali, *Torture and Modernity: Self, Society and State in Modern Iran,* (Boulder CO, 1994), 136, 146.

[731] Curzon, (1892), I, 457.

[732] Rejali, (1994), 132-8.

[733] Curzon, (1892), II, 200.

[734] Curzon, (1892), I, 404, 414.

[735] Curzon, (1892), I, 404, 457; II, 356.

Sykes' thoughts on the prevalence of violence and cruelty in Iran offer a unique perspective compared to the other travelogues examined here. With military training and experience and occupying the roles of soldier, spy, and diplomat, he was both more inured to violence and expected to encounter it, regardless of where he was stationed. Unlike Wills, who focused on the formalised state-applied violence he witnessed at length, Sykes describes executions primarily within the context of the turbulent 18th Century and the creation of the Qajar dynasty, suggesting the waning of violence as a form of public spectacle in Iran towards the end of the 19th Century. Having described the violent rise of Agha Mohammad Khan, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia* omits any significant discussion of the intervening decades of Qajar rule, Sykes stresses that, compared with its violent foundational years, the dynasty had subsequently brought relative peace to Iran. Neither Naser al-Din nor Mozaffar ad-Din neatly fitted the archetype of bloodthirsty tyrant, though, in the case of the former, Sykes also actively downplayed some of his more ruthless actions, such as the killing of Amir Kabir.[739] In Sykes' view it was really the governors who were the last bastions of this traditional authoritarian mode of violence, though its application was not uniform. Writing of Ibrahim Khan, the Qajar-appointed governor of Baluchistan, Sykes records that 'his methods were said to be cruel and he had a propensity for slave-dealing,' highlighting that he had broken his 1891 promise not to harass or undermine the status of local notables by imprisoning and torturing a number of Baluch khans.[740] At Borazjan in Bushehr province, Sykes became reacquainted with Soleiman Mirza, who he knew from the Perso-Afghan boundary commission (1884-6), and who he describes as being 'on the warpath, blowing brigands from guns, and generally endeavouring to inspire the Tangistánis with terror.'[741] Both Ibrahim Khan in Baluchistan and Soleiman Mirza in Bushehr were involved in the suppression of local tribal groups, yet Sykes did not identify this as part of a larger initiative to impose greater central authority on the part of the Qajar government, characterising it instead as the actions of self-interested officials. Governors also occasionally received backlash for their heavy-handed behaviour, as in the case of the unpopular Kawam al-Mulk who was deposed from his position as governor of Shiraz. As the ex-governor departed the city, the Shirazis taunted him by wishing him the same fate as his great grandfather Hajji Ibrahim, who had been boiled to death on the orders of Fath' Ali Shah Qajar. One of the deposed governor's retainers was then 'hacked to bits' in the ensuing riot.[742] The transfer of power was frequently a time of instability, with Sykes also recording how Abdul Wahab, the newly appointed governor of Sistan, was assassinated at the behest of his predecessor Mir Masum.[743] Though governors were still the originators of much of the repressive violence in Iran, the impression which Sykes' travelogue presents is of this primarily being employed to suppress rural and tribal communities. Meanwhile the Qajar authorities were forced to exercise greater restraint in urban centres as they were under scrutiny from the European powers and were not immune from themselves becoming the targets of violent backlash. As with Curzon's discourse on the pacification of Qajar Iran, Sykes thus fails to convince the reader of a genuine amelioration of violence across society, indicating that his belief, in an inherent predisposition to cruelty within the Iranian character, remained intact.

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[736] Curzon, (1892), I, 455.

[737] Curzon, (1892), I, 495.

[738] Curzon, (1892), II, 370.

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[739] Amanat, (2008), 118-9, 445.

[740] Sykes, (1902), 106-7.

[741] Sykes, (1902), 314.

[742] Sykes, (1902), 81.

In a rare moment of agreement with both Curzon and Sykes, Browne conceded that Iran had indeed become more peaceful to the extent that, at the time of his visit, 'executions and cruel punishments, formerly of almost daily occurrence, have become very rare.' He further agreed with the other travelogue writers that this primarily resulted from the restraining influence of European public opinion, transmitted through the press, upon the Shah and his ministers.[744] While visiting Shiraz, Browne was hosted by the aforementioned Ferhad Mirza, the former governor of the city and Fars province (1876-80), who Curzon described as having garnered a reputation for brutality during his time in office.[745] The friendship which developed between the two prompted criticism by Denison Ross in his introduction to the 1926 edition of *A Year Amongst the Persians*. He interpreted their relationship as another manifestation of 'the great toleration the author shows towards the weaknesses of the Persians. The fact that one of his hosts had become the terror of those he governed and was guilty of a thousand unjust executions and judgements, does not in any way lower [Browne's] admiration of his gracious manners or his fine library. He so loved his

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[743] Sykes, (1902), 377.
[744] Browne, (1893), 110.
[745] Curzon, (1892), II, 200.

Persians that he forgave everything, and only stayed to praise and admire.'[746] This accusation is not borne out by the travelogue itself, where Browne does not minimise or excuse the violence inflicted on the governor's orders, recounting how he was reported to have had at least 700 hands amputated for a variety of crimes.[747] The governor was notorious for employing the often remarked-upon punishment for banditry, of being walled up alive in pillars of mortar by the side of the roads they had terrorised. Browne himself observed a dozen or so of these grisly monuments: 'there they stood, more or less disintegrated and destroyed, exposing here and there a whitened bone, to bear grim testimony to the rigour of the redoubtable Ferhad Mirza.'[748] The governor was also involved in the suppression of rebels in southern Iran, most notably Sheikh Madhkur, who had offended the Qajars by daring to mint his own coinage: 'Ferhad Mirza first compelled the Sheykh to eat one of his own coins, and then caused him and his followers to be strangled and suspended from a lofty gibbet as a warning to the disaffected.'[749] Even ancient sites played host to violent spectacles, with the guides at Persepolis telling Browne how the former governor had commanded a rebel to be hanged from the parapet of the *apadana* terrace.[750] However, Ferhad Mirza's interest in Persepolis extended beyond its use as a gibbet, as he was also the first Iranian to commission excavations at the site in 1875.[751] Crucially, the juxtaposition of the ancient past with almost-contemporary violence, did not extract from Browne the condemnation which Curzon would have expressed regarding the 'unchanging' violent character of the Iranians.

Though they do seem to have had a convivial relationship, it is hard to credit Denison Ross's assertion that Browne deliberately obscured Ferhad Mirza's brutal style of administration. Rather he appears to have considered these excesses consigned to the past, to an era with far less accountability or European scrutiny, while not attempting to justify the former governor's actions. Other Qajar bureaucrats are compared with Ferhad Mirza, such as the Sahib-i Diwan who, according to Browne, was a worse administrator, but 'he was not cruel... love for his garden appears to me a pleasing trait in his character.'[752] This further illustrates the degree of nuance found in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, where even corrupt or incompetent individuals were considered capable of exhibiting positive traits, and were not totemic of an inherent predilection for cruelty or violence. Progress was, of course, not uniform: Browne agreed with Bird and Curzon that the *darogas* of Tehran were consumed by their own power and brutal in their administration of justice. Their former commander Hajji Kambar was notorious for having Sufis and Seyyeds bastinadoed, after the removal of their ceremonial turban, and waged a puritanically violent campaign against adultery, which resulted in the beating of many young women.[753] However, such instances were becoming rarer and, generally, there were better protections against the arbitrary infliction of violence as Browne illustrates with the case of Hawz-i Sultan, who refused to sell his caravanserai to the state: 'in the rough days of yore it might have been possible to behead or poison him, or at least confiscate his property, but such an idea could not for a moment be seriously entertained by a humane and enlightened minister of the Fourteenth Century of the *hijra.*'[754] Unlike Wills, Layard, and Sykes, Browne did not participate in violence in the belief that it would gain him the respect of a population for whom, according to most British writers, it was a mundane occurrence. This was poignantly illustrated when some of Browne's clothes were stolen by a group of boys and, having identified one of the culprits, his servant Hajji Safar retrieved the items: 'I should like to have given [them] a good thrashing… but I thought you would not like it.'[755] While only a minor incident, this illustrates how Browne's humane outlook prevented the commission of violence on his behalf. Though over-optimistic regarding the likelihood of Iran completely turning its back on a past of arbitrary violence, especially under the rule of the Qajars, Browne's travelogue makes no assertions as to an inherent cruelty in the Iranian character; distinguishing it from the other British travelogues and their pattern of stereotyping.

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[746] Denison Ross, (1926), xxi.
[747] Browne, (1893), 117.
[748] Browne, (1893), 118, 299.
[749] Browne, (1893), 118.
[750] Browne, (1893), 278.
[751] Sami, (1954), 63.

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[752] Browne, (1893), 308.
[753] Browne, (1893), 450-1.
[754] Browne, (1893), 177.

Babis and Zoroastrians: Persecution of Minorities

The conflict between the Babi movement and the Qajars presents an obvious exception to the portrayal of Iran as increasingly eschewing the use of violence and torture. The aftermath of the 1852 uprising was punctuated by 'terrible acts of cruelty' which flared up intermittently. Curzon described this repression as one of 'ferocious brutality', and expressed little surprise that some 'fanatical hands were found ready to strike the sovereign down,' though he simultaneously asserted that this had abated: 'at the present time the Babis are equally loyal with any other subjects of the crown.'[756] How Curzon justified these conflicting claims is unclear but, as with his other declarations regarding the sentiments of the Iranian people, this is likely Qajar propaganda, with the regime concerned by the European condemnation of their violent suppression of the Babis. The Qajar reprisals however were considered largely justified by Curzon, due to the Babi's attempted assassination of Naser al-Din and the existential threat this posed to the entire Qajar dynasty.[757] Cruelty, as an essential characteristic of the Iranians, is also restated as a justification for these acts, with Curzon emphasising that 'it must be remembered that studied refinements of torture are an immemorial tradition of the East.'[758] Curzon, indeed, viewed the violent repression of millenarian and anti-monarchy movements within a longer historical context, describing the alleged display of the flayed skin of the prophet Mani above the Gates of Shapur by the Sassanian *Shahanshah* Bahram I, during the persecution of the Manicheans in the 3rd Century CE.[759] The recurrent purges of suspected Babi sympathisers were harder for Curzon to justify. He describes the 1878 murder of two wealthy Isfahani merchants, at the instigation of the *ulema,* as 'brutal and unprovoked,' and luridly describes the execution, mutilation, and immolation of Mirza Agha Ashraf, 'a re-spectable elderly man,' who had refused to curse the name of the *Bab*.[760] Harbouring little sympathy for their ideology himself, though he considered it superior to Shi'a Islam, Curzon cynically used such outbreaks of sectarian violence against the Babis, and their Baha'i offshoot, to demonstrate his belief that Iran still lacked much in the way of modernity and thus 'stagger the tall-talkers about Iranian civilisation.'[761]

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[755] Browne, (1893), 385.

[756] Curzon, (1892), I, 501.

[757] Curzon, (1892), I, 402.

Browne's thoughts on violence in Iran are best contextualised by his own introductory statement on the nature of perception, namely that 'wherever one goes, one sees in great measure what one expects to see (because there is good and evil in all things, and the eye discerns but one when the mind is occupied by a preconceived idea).'[762] Browne certainly expected to find Qajar Iran a place of arbitrary violence and torture, influenced by his early interest in the Babi movement and horror at its violent persecution. He was confident, however, that their continued existence, though diminished, was proof that 'all the torments which the tyrant can devise or the torturer execute are impotent to subdue the courage born of faith and enthusiasm.'[763] Browne lauded the bravery of the Babis in resisting the tyranny of the Qajar monarchy, inspired by their leader Seyyed Ali Mohammad Shirazi, the *Bab* (gate or door, a reference to the return of the *Mahdi*). His execution by firing squad in Tabriz in 1850, preceded by being dragged through the streets before large crowds, aroused Browne's sympathy for the messianic figure, with the failure of the first volley to kill him interpreted as an indication of divine favour.[764] That the execution took place under the direct orders of Amir Kabir may explain why praise for the reforming vizier, so often hailed by British writers as the sole moderniser in what they perceived as an otherwise stagnant period of Iranian history, is conspicuously absent from Browne's travelogue.[765]

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[758] Curzon, (1892), I, 402-3.
[759] Curzon, (1892), II, 209.
[760] Curzon, (1892), I, 500.
[761] Curzon, (1892), I, 501.
[762] Browne, (1893), 13.

Browne further underlines his admiration for the Babis by describing in grisly detail their 'heroic fortitude under the most cruel tortures' which they endured throughout Iran.[766] To secure confessions, adherents were routinely subjected to the bastinado, mutilated, and often exiled or executed.[767] In Isfahan, two Seyyeds who refused to renounce their belief in the *Bab,* 'had their throats cut; cords were then attached to their feet, and their bodies were dragged through the streets and bazaars to the gate of the city, where they were cast under an old mud wall, which was then overthrown upon them.'[768] The fate of Usta Mahmud of Kashan was no less brutal. Upon being turned over to the executioners: 'they forced open his mouth, crammed a wet handkerchief rolled into a ball into his gullet, and drove it down his throat with a wooden peg and mallet. For a minute or two, with gaping mouth, blackening face, and eyes staring from his head, he continued to struggle; then he fell back on the floor, and one of the executioner's assistants sat on his face till the last quiver died away.'[769] In

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[763] Browne, (1893), 65.
[764] Browne, (1893), 68-70.
[765] Amanat, (2008), 133-4.
[766] Browne, (1893), 111.
[767] Browne, (1893), 66, 529.
[768] Browne, (1893), 233-4.
[769] Browne, (1893), 564.

Yazd meanwhile, following the wholesale slaughter of allegedly as many as 750 male Babis, it was the turn of the women and children to suffer. Stripped of most of their clothes and possessions, they were confined in squalid conditions at an old caravanserai outside the city and exposed to abuse by the soldiers. The surviving captives were then forced to pass 'through the avenue of heads severed from those who had been their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons' on their way to imprisonment in Shiraz.[770] The torture and execution of Suleiman Khan, who had 'his body pierced with well-nigh a score of wounds, in each of which was inserted a lighted candle [and] went to the place of execution singing with exultation,' was utterly horrifying and yet, such a remarkable display of the victim's courage that, according to Browne, it inspired the admiration of even his executioners.[771] This led him to conclude that the executions 'were not merely criminal, but foolish. The barbarity of the persecutors defeated its own ends.'[772] Though the suffering of the Babis undoubtedly elicited sympathy when reported in Europe, as it did for him, Browne exaggerated the degree of popular regard for them and the Baha'i in Iran itself. His championing of them also further highlights Browne's ambivalence to Islam. Though he greatly admired its mystical aspects, embodied by Sufi rituals, he considered its proliferation solely 'due to the force of arms rather than the force of argument.' He contrasted this with Christianity, which he claimed 'steadily advanced in spite of the sword, not by the sword,' and in which he observed clear parallels with Babism.[773] Despite his distinctly partisan regard for the Babis, and his ,possibly, naïve failure to acknowledge the significant threat they initially posed to the survival of the Qajar monarchy, Browne's portrayal of the violence they subsequently endured humanises their suffering and elicits sympathy for them as individuals; preventing their torture from appearing as the mere spectacle so often observable in other travelogues.

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[770] Browne, (1893), 317, 441.

[771] Browne, (1893), 111-12.

[772] Browne, (1893), 111.

[773] Browne, (1893), 334.

Sykes, similarly, expressed his sympathy for the suffering of the Babis, stating how he 'hoped that the doctrines of the Báb will eventually aid the cause of civilisation;' demonstrating the strong impact which Browne's writings exerted on him.[774] He recounts the story of the *Bab's* disappearance from the first firing squad and the subsequent second execution, as well as the brutal treatment of the *Bab's* followers, in 1852, following the attempted assassination of Naser al-Din; 'the victims being allotted to the officials of all classes to be done to death.'[775] Sykes' support for Naser al-Din, however, prevents any vociferous criticism of the state's retaliation and brings his discourse on the treatment of the Babis in line with that of the more reactionary Curzon. The periodic harassment of Zoroastrians was a greater matter of concern for Sykes who, in agreement with Browne, regarded them as the last remnant of the 'pure Aryan' population of Iran. When, during his time in Yazd, a member of the community was shot dead in the street, he was alarmed to observe no concrete action taken by the authorities to apprehend the 'dastardly assassin.'[776] Sykes' visit to Yazd coincided with a palpable rise in anti-European sentiments, including the posting of an anonymous notice which threatened that Europeans who, not without justification were believed to sympathise more with minorities than the Shi'a majority, would be shot.[777] This tension is a crucial aspect of the most illuminating aspect of Sykes' discourse on violence in Iran in *Ten Thousand Miles*, namely the account of his own involvement in military expeditions against tribal insurrections which threatened British interests.

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[774] Sykes, (1902), 196.
[775] Sykes, (1902), 196.
[776] Sykes, (1902), 155.
[777] Sykes, (1902), 155.

Sykes on Campaign: Conquering the 'Contact Zone'

In response to the killing of a telegraph officer, Mr Graves, Sykes was tasked by Mortimer Durand, the Minister Plenipotentiary at Tehran, to lead a party of troops to Makran in Baluchistan in November 1897 to investigate.[778] Unrest in the border province, which Sykes believed stemmed primarily from Naser al-Din's assassination, intensified further following his arrival, with the news of the 'cutting up' of Captain Burne's survey party which had likewise been travelling through Makran.[779] Sykes' expedition relied heavily upon cooperation with Qajar authorities, primarily Darya Beg who commanded a force of sixty troops which had similarly been dispatched to pacify the region. Earlier joint-operations, such as the 1896 Perso-Baluch Boundary Commission, had already highlighted potential issues with collaboration. A wrestling contest, between Iranian and British troops, descended into a brawl which resulted in the Qajar commissioner, the Asad ad-Dowlat, threatening to bastinado the entire regiment. The troops, subsequently, sought *bast* at Sykes' tent, and it fell to him to have one transgressor from each side punished in order to defuse the situation.[780] This event foreshadowed what would become a widespread tactic of resistance against the Qajar government, namely the use of specifically British spaces of diplomatic immunity, the embassy and consulates, as protest sites to effectively block state retaliation.[781] Sykes and his party already feared violence from anonymous *ghazis* during their time on the boundary commission, and carried shotguns everywhere with them, as they did not believe revolvers were sufficient to stop a frenzied attacker. The following year, the atmosphere of paranoia became even more tense, further-heightened due to the killing of British officials.[782] Sykes however attempted to salvage some form of prestige from these setbacks, arguing it was only due to the respect which British power was afforded by the tribes, that such attacks had not occurred sooner.

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[778] Sykes, (1902), 275.
[779] Sykes, (1902), 291.
[780] Sykes, (1902), 231.
[781] Amanat, (2008), 237.
[782] Sykes, (1902), 234.

Having concluded that the perpetrator of Graves' murder was Shai Mohammad, Khan of the Shahozai clan (generally referred to under the umbrella 'Karwanis'), Sykes and Darya Beg's combined troops went on campaign to capture or kill their target, acting as a force of retribution. The tribesmen were ordered to surrender and threatened that, failing to do so, would result in the destruction of their villages and date groves, a crucial aspect of subsistence agriculture in the arid conditions of Makran.[783] Although the Shahozai chose to withdraw, rather than fight or surrender, Sykes describes how 'needless to say… the villages were all fired, as the force marched through each portion of the district,' wreaking destruction upon other clans who had not been directly involved in the attack upon the telegraph.[784] Arriving at Chahbar, Sykes discovered that the destruction of the villages had been completely unnecessary: Shai Mohammad had already been captured, and his accomplice Malik Jind had been shot while trying to escape. The Shahozai chief was subsequently taken to the town of Jask, the foothold of Qajar authority in the region, where he was hanged before an assembly of Baluch leaders, 'thereby painting the indelible moral that British officials cannot be murdered with impunity, and that the Persian Government is both ready and able to ensure that stern retribution follows upon all such outrages.'[785] This spectacle, however, did not end Baluch resistance. Another khan, Abdi Khan from the Dashtiari district, subsequently threatened to burn British telegraph installations, prompting their garrisoning with Indian troops. Sykes records how another British official, Mr Ffinch, told him he would give 'anything in the world to be shut up in the same room as Abdi with a thick stick,' a wish he may well have been granted following the chief's subsequent capture and imprisonment.[786] These events clarify why Sykes made no criticism of the brutality of the contemporary Qajar state and its exactions: he was directly-complicit in their enaction and regarded them as an effective means of protecting British imperial interests, presaging the increased use of proxies in the 20th Century.

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[783] Sykes, (1902), 278.
[784] Sykes, (1902), 285.
[785] Sykes, (1902), 310.

It was not only in Baluchistan that Sykes found himself under threat of violence. Travelling through Hormozgan province, Sykes was warned that bandits and rebellious tribes were active in the area and was advised to request an escort from the governor of Bandar Abbas. No forces were forthcoming so, in desperation, he paid some villagers to guard him and his camp, but the situation quickly deteriorated as Sykes had drawn the attention of the Bashakirdi tribe, who had been monitoring his progress through the countryside, and preparing to attack. Sykes feared his few guards would desert him and attempted to control the situation with drastic action: ‘I kept the head of the escort close to me, telling him that I should shoot him if his people bolted, but they were in such a state of panic, that even this ‘encouragement’ would have been of little avail, had I ever dreamed of carrying out my threat.’[787] Though described in an almost nonchalant tone, this essentially constituted the press-ganging of Iranian civilians into the service of a British diplomat, and sheds some light on how he earned the nickname ‘Napoleon-Atilla Sykes’ among his contemporaries.[788] With their camp surrounded, Sykes ordered his local informant to communicate a message to the tribesmen, namely ‘that if a British Consul were murdered, the heads of a thousand Bashákirdis would have to be cut off by way of compensation, not counting the forty or fifty our party would surely kill!’[789] Whether it was this threat which prompted withdrawal or the realisation that, if they were contending with British forces then they also had to contend with their notorious firepower, the tribesmen withdrew and left Sykes and his party to continue their journey unmolested. This entire episode further underlines Sykes' proximity to violence, his willingness to use threats both to ensure compliance and repulse threats, and his justification of collective punishment; a tactic employed by Qajar officials and British imperial administrators alike.

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[786] Sykes, (1902), 349.
[787] Sykes, (1902), 304-5.
[788] Ure, (2009), 260.
[789] Sykes, (1902), 306.

Sykes' frequent proximity to violence demonstrates that anti-British violence was not confined to tribal areas, largely outside the direct control of the Qajar state, but was increasing across Iran's urban centres. This shift is illustrated by further examination of Edward Burgess' letters from earlier in the 19th Century wherein, even during rioting in Tabriz in 1838, he exhibited no concern for his personal safety: 'This town is growing very disorderly. Scarcely a night passes without someone getting wounded or killed fighting in the streets; this is no matter to us as they never think of touching an Englishman.'[790] Of Iran generally he concluded 'people run more risks of their lives from broken limbs in England than we do here,' while any threat he did perceive emanated from the Qajars: 'You at home do not appear to understand the risk I am running; one angry word from the Shah or his minister and I have the prospect of a prison before me.'[791] During the intervening decades, the impression of British invincibility was dispelled by defeat in Afghanistan and the Indian Uprising. Growing resistance to the granting of 'concessions' further contributed to this reversal, with the general populace now constituting the 'threat' while the Shah and his administration provided at least nominal protection of British interests. During his time in Yazd, one of Sykes' Indian retainers was pelted with stones and injured.[792] This was not an isolated incident: Indians had become inextricably associated with British power which made them objects of jealousy, due to the protected status they enjoyed as a result. Indian merchants, in particular, became targets for the frustrations of Iranians, as in Zabol in 1903 where they were threatened and attacked by angry crowds.[793] Sykes, determined to seek redress as he felt his own dignity had been affronted by the attack on his retainer, oversaw the apprehension of the culprits, 'young khans' from the surrounding countryside, and ensured they were given the bastinado.[794] While Layard and Wills were also in close proximity to the implementation of the bastinado, Sykes thus became an active participant in the administration of a particularly-Iranian mode of violent correction in an even more direct fashion. While navigating up the Karun, Sykes and his party also received abuse and threats of violence from locals. However, he concluded that this was due to their being mistaken for Sunni Muslims, prompting a discourse on the ignorance and lack of civilisation among the Arab communities adjacent to the river, again demonstrating Sykes' pro-Aryan bias.[795]

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[790] Edward Burgess to George Burgess. Tabriz. 8. December 1838: in Schwartz, (1942).

[791] Edward Burgess to George Burgess. Tabriz. 30. January 1838; Edward Burgess to George Burgess. Julfa, Isfahan. 12. August 1840: in Schwartz, (1942).

[792] Sykes, (1902), 346-7.

Finally, though he acknowledged Layard's high opinion of Shushtar and its people, Sykes' own perception of the city was heavily affected by the fact that, shortly before his arrival, a British official named Tanfield had been attacked by his own servant and almost killed. This coloured Sykes' time in Shushtar to the extent he conceded 'it was very hard to act with the moderation demanded by my official position, knowing, as I did, that these half-Persian, half-Arab creatures had stoned poor Tanfield as he was being carried down to the river.'[796] Dislike of the Shushtaris, already stoked by the assault on Tanfield, was heightened by the ethnically heterogeneous nature of the population, aggravating Sykes' racist fears of miscegenation. The threat posed to the British presence does, however, seem to have been palpable, with shots fired over Sykes' compound at night which prompted him to sleep with a revolver.[797] What *Ten Thousand Miles* fails to acknowledge is that this threat was not some manifestation of 'oriental fanaticism' but a direct reaction to British (and Indian) control of the Iranian grain trade, an aspect of the concessions system which garners little attention despite this period of Iranian history being characterised by frequent droughts and famines.[798] In 1895, prior to the destabilisation caused by Naser al-Din's assassination, Iranian soldiers had attacked a Lynch Brothers Company warehouse in Ahvaz, on the pretext of searching for grain.[799] British officials also conceded that rioting, which broke out in Bushehr and Shushtar in January 1897, stemmed from the local populace blaming British and Indian merchants for hoarding grain during a drought, implicating them directly in the suffering of the populace.[800] This context is entirely lacking in Sykes' travelogue, with outbursts of violence portrayed as fanatical and inherently irrational acts.

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[793] Dobbs, *Note on the Anti-British Agitation in Seistan,* enclosed in: Dobbs to Dane. 7. July 1903, F.O. 60/727.

[794] Sykes, (1902), 347.

[795] Sykes, (1902), 251.

[796] Sykes, (1902), 253.

Of Iran generally, Sykes concluded that 'murder is considered as a mere trifle, just like drinking a glass of water, as a Persian remarked to me,' a statement in which he attempts to distance himself from the mundane infliction of violence or the threat thereof.[801] This is impossible considering Sykes' proximity to violence throughout his time in Iran, including his willingness to embrace Iranian methods when they helped him accomplish his own goals or seek redress for slights against himself or British authority. Qajar Iran is certainly portrayed as an environment where violence and cruelty persisted, with particular attention paid to the increased targeting of various manifestations of British influence. Sykes' account highlights, more clearly than any of the other travelogues, that there was not considerable disparity between Qajar violence and the violence which agents of the British empire were willing to inflict, and that the two were capable of working in tandem when their interests aligned. Sykes' involvement with both the Perso-Baluch and Perso-Afghan boundary commissions leave an additional legacy of conflict for Iran; namely rising tensions with both Afghanistan and Pakistan regarding the borders imposed on them by British administrators.

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[797] Sykes, (1902), 254.

[798] Amanat, (2008), 378-80, 381-2.

[799] McDougall to Wilson. 14. November 1895, enclosed in: Wilson to Durand, 23. November 1895. F.O. 248/610.

[800] Wilson to Durand. 10. January 1897, F.O. 248/650; Butcher to Wilson. 29. January 1897, enclosed in: Wilson to Hardinge. 20. February 1897, F.O. 248/650.

[801] Sykes, (1902), 377.

3.4 - Greed and Corruption

The Qajar State: Extractive Authority

The most pervasive trope in Curzon's *Persia and the Persian Question* is the characterisation of the Iranians as greedy and corrupt, interlinked with the excesses of Oriental despotism and the prevalence of violence to extract or secure financial gain.[802] The legal system provided, in Curzon's view, a perfect example of this interplay as 'the proverbial venality of the Persian official renders litigation a farce unless backed by a well-filled purse and the adroit understanding how to use it.'[803] This led him to criticise Wills' assertion that justice was, nonetheless, relatively effectively administered, as universal bribery within the Iranian system roughly equated to paying court costs and barrister fees in Britain: '[this] genial opinion appears somewhat to ignore the quality of the justice that is dispensed… difficulty may be experienced in procuring judges of integrity and worth, and no abrupt change can be expected in the habits or moral standards of an Oriental country.'[804] Ironically, Curzon would later mimic Wills' argument, in his assessment of justice in Afghanistan under the rule of Abdur Rahman Khan (r.1880-1901), where murderers were met with harsh and often arbitrary punishments while crimes remained unsolved in England.[805] In Iran meanwhile, bribery also had the potential to ameliorate allotted punishments, with the bastinado inevitably highlighted as an example. Curzon describes how the *ferashes* (carpet spreaders) responsible for administering the punishment could be convinced to temper their blows if sufficiently bribed, and would abuse their position to extract greater sums from their victims, with the beating exceeding its mandated length if payment was refused or rendered impossible by the victim's poverty.[806] According to Curzon, Iranian justice thus combined the arbitrary nature of Oriental despotism and the infliction of violence, with extractive financial gain as the overwhelming motivator for action or inaction, in a framework which 'obeys no law and follows no system... publicity is the sole guarantee for fairness [and] there is not a sentence of an official in Persia, even of the higher ranks, that cannot be swayed by a pecuniary consideration.'[807] Reform, namely the introduction of a European-style gendarmerie in the form of the *darogas* in Tehran, is cast as farcical much as it was in Bird's travelogue. These officers appeared just as susceptible to the 'Persian vices' of greed and brutality as the *ferashes*, and other less-formalised agents of state power, who preceded them.

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[802] Curzon, (1892), I, 425.
[803] Curzon, (1892), I, 459.
[804] Curzon, (1892), I, 456, 462.

The main targets for Curzon's critique of Iranian greed however were the governors and other administrative officials, who he held primarily responsible for the impoverishment and stagnation of the country. Curzon describes Qajar officials as 'the most undesirable and flagitious of the human race;' who through greed and employing violence to obtain their ends 'have combined the rapacity of a Verres with the cruelty of an Alva;' references to the notoriously corrupt magistrate of Sicily prosecuted by Cicero in 69 BCE and the Duke of Alva, the Spanish military governor of the Netherlands who waged a violent campaign against the growing Protestant resistance in the 1550s.[808] Invoking these names in the context of gubernatorial conduct is akin to comparing the actions of a murderer with those of Jack the Ripper while providing occasion for Curzon to once again demonstrate his historical knowledge. The extractive schemes of governors are described at length, ranging from deliberately prolonging trials and litigations, to extract the greatest quantity of bribes, to deliberately instigating the conditions for blackmail. The latter was accomplished, for example, by introducing prostitutes into wealthy neighbourhoods before using them as pretext to descend upon the clandestine revels of the mercantile class and extract bribes in exchange for official discretion.[809] These schemes, Curzon stresses, were concocted to enable governors to meet their debts to the Ministry of Arrears, ‘which has a beautiful way of producing all sorts of arrears, and deficits, and objections to provincial budgets. No final acquittances can be obtained without considerable palm oil... as corrupt and wasteful a system as could well be devised.’[810]

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[805] Curzon, (1923), 83.

[806] Curzon, (1892), I, 455-57.

[807] Curzon, (1892), I, 455.

Such bribery underpinned the worst excesses of the system, with Curzon describing it as ‘the deteriorating contagion of Persian official life.’[811] Wills’ travelogue, which Curzon both criticised yet heavily relied upon, equally characterised greed and corruption as endemic among the ruling classes of Qajar Iran, claiming that 'bribes are to the Persian what beef is to the Englishman.’[812] At Tehran he perceived a largely unrestrained system of bribery, which enabled the upper-classes to enrich themselves further through the purchase of positions and favours for the 'feathering [of] their own nest.'[813] Excessive greed among the elite was however not confined to the capital, with Wills providing an equally unflattering portrayal of the ruling class in Shiraz: 'All is fish that comes to the net, and the local magnates would sell the big monolith of Yezd marble, which covers the grave of Hafez, for a price.'[814] Though generally dismissive of Iranian literature and poetry, Wills' reference to Hafez confirms he understood the importance of the poet to the cultural psyche, creating a hypothetical scenario akin to the desecration of Shakespeare's grave for the sake of profit. The governor of Shiraz faced particular criticism from Wills, who described him as 'a huge, fat man about thirty-eight, who was a general debauchee, opium eater, wine and spirit drinker and bhang smoker,' with his retinue comprising 'the fattest set of men I ever saw collected in one room... nearly all drank wine to excess.'[815] Wills goes on to describe bouts of hard drinking and the performance of 'dancing boys' for these men.[816] This characterisation brings together the greed for material wealth and the greed for food, narcotics, and sex into the same context; corelating with the Greco-Roman view of eastern sumptuousness and excess epitomised by the lavish feasts of the Achaemenid Great King.[817] Hunger for wealth and for varied and exotic foods were equated as essential facets of Iranian identity, in contrast with the comparative simplicity and even austerity of ancient Greek fare.[818] Echoes of this trope are observable in the comparison drawn between 'Oriental excess' and British 'moderation' by Wills.[819]

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[808] Curzon, (1892), II, 264, 366.
[809] Curzon, (1892), II, 474.
[810] Curzon, (1892), II, 474-75.
[811] Curzon, (1892), I, 428.
[812] Wills, (1883), 371.
[813] Wills, (1883), 270.

Bribery not only facilitated the self-indulgence of Iranian officials but dictated their relationship with the monarchy and state. Infractions against the central government, excessive embezzlement, or failure in military campaigns, could all be negated by paying what amounted to direct bribes to the Shah, by which 'the dignity of the Government is satisfied, and the anxiety of the offender relieved' upon their receipt in Tehran.[820] This provided governors, especially in the remote provinces, carte blanche to establish their own fiefdoms and extract as much money from their subjects as they were able, as long as they could simultaneously placate the Shah. Curzon satirically casts the Qajar administration as the most democratic in the world, since neither status of birth nor actual ability disqualified an individual from holding office, as it would in Britain. Instead, 'Interest or the capacity to pay is sufficient to procure a post for anyone, even of menial origins.' [821] This clearly amused the aristocratic Curzon, despite the largest demographic of office-holders remaining members of the extended Qajar clan. Curzon was similarly critical of the disbursement of presents as a political tactic, which 'though consecrated in the adamantine traditions of the East, is synonymous with the system elsewhere described by less agreeable names,' namely, bribery and corruption.[822] The various methods employed by subalterns, to extract wealth from their superiors, 'whose ingenuity is only equalled by their multiplicity... the crowning interest and delight of a Persian's existence,' are cast as further manifestations of greed as an essential characteristic, with Curzon referring to them as a 'swarm of bloodsuckers' and 'little short of a national calamity.'[823] Subsistence within an intensely hierarchical national economy is thus negated as a motivating factor. Curzon's assessment of the Qajar administration, from top to bottom, thus reaches its most dehumanising and hyperbolic: 'in no country that I have ever seen or heard of in the world, is the system so shameless, or so universal as in Persia… generosity or gratuitous service may be said to have been erased in Persia from the category of social virtues, and cupidity has been elevated into the guiding principle of human conduct'.[824]

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[814] Wills, (1883), 191-2.
[815] Wills, (1883), 244-7.
[816] Wills, (1883), 246.
[817] Bridges, (2015), 55; Hdt. 7.118-20.
[818] Llewellyn-Jones, (2013), 127-9.
[819] Wills, (1883), 247.

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[820] Curzon, (1892), I, 447.
[821] Curzon, (1892), I, 444.
[822] Curzon, (1892), I, 438.
[823] Curzon, (1892), I, 440, 450.
[824] Curzon, (1892), I, 441.

The violence which was often inextricably linked, in the British appraisal of Iranian vices, with the unscrupulous accumulation of wealth applied particularly to the Qajar governors. The chief perpetrator of this in Layard’s travelogue is Manuchehr Khan, described as 'chiefly engaged in screwing money out of the unfortunate inhabitants of Shuster (sic) and Dizful,' with Shushtar itself being reduced to a pitiable state of poverty as a result.[825] The impact of this rapacious revenue-collection was apparent throughout the countryside, where Layard observed numerous abandoned villages whose inhabitants had fled with their possessions and livestock to avoid surrendering them to the tax collectors.[826] This form of aggressive governorship emanated from the antiquated system of tax-farming, whereby positions were auctioned off by the ruler and the successful appointees were forced to extract wealth from their new fiefs; both to recover the funds expended on securing the position, and to guarantee the stream of tax revenue back to the capital to ensure they remained in post. Qajar Iran was comparatively decentralised and comprised a patchwork of urban centres and tribal confederations, inevitably leading to a heavy-handed approach as there was little incentive or notable recompense in terms of security or infrastructural investment offered in exchange for the payment of taxes, outside the favoured cities of Tehran, Tabriz, Isfahan, and Shiraz.[827] Layard largely glossed over the nuances and constrictions created by this system but emphasised its devastating impact: 'a region naturally of great richness and fertility had been almost reduced to a wilderness. It was thus that Persia was governed.'[828]

The corruption of the Qajar administration, and particularly this capacity for officials to enrich themselves arbitrarily, impacted particularly heavily upon nomadic and other minority groups. The collection of taxes from these communities frequently resulted in varying degrees of violence and had a generally destabilising effect although, as the state grew more powerful in the late-19th Century, it became harder to resist payment. Bird described this situation as follows: 'The task of the Persian tax-collector is a difficult one, for the tribes are in a state of chronic turbulence and fail even in obedience to their own general council… collection frequently ends in an incursion of Persian soldiers and a government raid on the flocks and herds. Many of these people are miserably poor, and they are annually growing poorer under Persian maladministration.'[829] Though she expressed a degree of sympathy for them, Bird claimed that the tribes themselves were, by nature, no less avaricious than those who oppressed them: 'Hard, cunning, unblushing greed is as painful a characteristic of the Bakhtiaris as of the Persians.'[830] This is in contrast to Bird's description of Ischaryar, a young Bakhtiari servant who suffered with fever and acute rheumatism, common afflictions among nomadic populations, for whom she provided basic medical care. His reaction surprised her as, by her reckoning, he was 'the one grateful creature that I have seen among these Orientals, and his gratitude is in return for a mere trifle,' underlining her perception of the ingratitude of his kinsfolk.[831]

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[825] Layard, (1887), 284-293.

[826] Layard, (1887), 326.

[827] Katouzian, (2000), 2-17; Amanat, (2017), 259, 292-4.

[828] Layard, (1887), 343.

Though Curzon dismissed any Iranian capacity for resistance against the mechanism of oppression, he did concede that the greed of officials had, in certain instances, sparked anger among their subjects. The Zil es-Sultan is singled out in this regard, presumably due to his Russian sympathies, with Curzon accusing him of displaying indifference to the plight of the people when confronted with the cruelty and greed of his officials. This 'inflamed the public mind against his government' and led to the Zil es-Sultan's recall, though this was actually prompted by power struggles within the Qajar hierarchy rather than his performance as governor.[832] Naser al-Din, meanwhile, largely escapes condemnation in *Persia and the Persian Question* for his extortive behaviour. Curzon claimed he did not provoke particular resentment among his subjects, who viewed him as taking only the portion rightfully owed to him as Shah, in the ancient manner of the Achaemenid Great King receiving tribute from across his realm as depicted on the *Apadana* staircase at Persepolis.[833] Curzon was, however, unable to resist a jibe at Naser al-Din's self-interest while simultaneously archaising the Qajar monarchy: 'the maxim 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's stands in no need of being pressed in a country where Caesar takes such very good care of himself.'[834] Though the Shah is not portrayed by Curzon as the most egregiously avaricious member of the administration, it is also emphasised that the entire hierarchical system was held in place by royal authority and thus he was inextricably linked to the worst excesses of his subordinates. Curzon expresses his pessimism that the situation might be reformed internally, as 'the rapacity of the entire official world being thus enlisted in the maintenance of the existing system, it will easily be understood how stubborn a barrier is opposed to any administrative reform, and how faint is the hope that Persia will ever, unaided, work out her own salvation.'[835] Iranian greed is cast not only as a personal or collective flaw, but a powerful and inherently destructive force. The impression he creates is of a ruling class leeching from the population and maintaining their status through a wholly corrupt system, which was resistant to any kind of meritocratic advancement. Curzon concluded that greater British influence in Iran was, therefore, the only realistic means of curbing the inherent greed and self-interest of the Qajars and their officials.

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[829] Bird, (1891), I, 298.
[830] Bird, (1891), II, 84.
[831] Bird, (1891), II, 84.

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[832] Curzon, (1892), I, 417.
[833] Llewellyn-Jones, (2013), 75-9.
[834] Curzon, (1892), I, 448.
[835] Curzon, (1892), I, 448.

Sykes commentary on greed and corruption in Iran is, by contrast, noticeably less expansive than Curzon's or other earlier travelogues, as refraining from significant criticism of the Qajar monarchy curtailed comment on their self-promotion and rapacious acquisition of land and wealth. The governors and officials of Iran, who so often acted as proxies for the sovereign in this regard also received comparatively little criticism from Sykes. He did however allude to the crucifixion of the corrupt governor of Fars, Orsines, on Alexander's orders, as setting the precedent for how transgressors should be punished.[836] The Qajar commissioner in the border negotiations between Iran and Afghanistan meanwhile provided a contemporary example of corruption. According to Sykes, he was 'only anxious to make money' from the proceedings and was subsequently punished by the Qajar government, though no further details are given and he was presumably not crucified.[837] Governors occasionally came into conflict with the central government over the collection of tax revenues, leading to outright rebellions; particularly in the remote provinces where a governor might prefer to hoard this income and take his chances against the often-underprepared Qajar army.[838] Sykes describes this occurring in Furk in Southern Khorasan, where the governor had repeatedly rebelled against the government. He was able to hold out against military retaliation in his citadel, 'until a bright idea penetrated the somewhat obtuse brain of a besieging general who dragged a gun onto the hills above and then proceeded to open fire. Needless to say, the money-bags were speedily produced!'[839] The extraction of taxes under threat of violence was not an isolated incident as, in Baluchistan, they were 'paid irregularly and at the rifle's muzzle,' according to Sykes.[840] In both of these instances, where the corrupt actions of officials are recounted, they prompted a forceful reaction from the

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[836] Sykes, (1902), 175.

[837] Sykes, (1902), 368.

[838] Amanat, (2017), 260-1.

[839] Sykes, (1902), 398.

[840] Sykes, (1902), 309.

Shah, leading to the perpetrator's punishment. This undermines the common trope that Iranian officialdom was able to act with complete impunity in consolidation of their wealth, while underlining that Qajar Iran had indeed become more centralised. Though this may reflect Sykes' moderation of his depictions due to his working relationship with various Qajar officials, it also raises a further question, namely whether these travelogues perpetuate the stereotype of the Iranian population being universally motivated by greed.

Greed, Class, and Society

Though overwhelmingly focused on the Qajar administration, *Persia and the Persian Question* does describe other instances of greed as motivation, illustrating Curzon's belief that it was a truly innate characteristic of the Iranians. While visiting the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, described as the 'most immoral city in Asia', he expressed amusement at the devotion of the pilgrims whilst claiming that the imams and *seyyeds* alone were unmotivated by piety, focussed instead on extracting money from the worshippers.[841] Whenever religious figures appear in his travelogue, from members of the *ulema* to itinerant Sufis, they are similarly described as greedy charlatans, highlighting Curzon's Islamophobic outlook. The bazaar is another sphere which attracted Curzon's condemnation as a hive of greed and corrupt practices, with merchants suffering 'no scruples of morality, no stings of remorse, not even any fear of the consequences... in the absence either of any code of commercial honour or of any tribunals for enforcing legal obligations.'[842] The brevity of Curzon's description, however, indicates little first-hand experience of the bazaar, and he appears primarily concerned with dissuading British travellers from attempting to engage in trade directly themselves.[843] The formulaic nature of this description is further demonstrated by his inclusion of the oft-repeated story about the Isfahani merchant seasoning his food with bottled cheese as 'key evidence' of the mercantile character. This appears in various other travelogues including those of Browne and Wills, indicating that these comical stories, which resemble jokes more than actual anecdotes, were widely circulated within Iran, enshrining local and regional stereotypes and rivalries which were then absorbed by British travellers.[844]

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[841] Curzon, (1892), I, 159, 165.

[842] Curzon, (1892), II, 582.

Another example of widespread greed relates to the establishment of the modern Iranian postal system, which was instituted in 1851 and adopted postage stamps in the mid-1860s.[845] Curzon claims this was abandoned when it was discovered that the printer had created an extra 100,000 stamps for personal use. While this event is presented anecdotally, Curzon believed its details were 'so profoundly Persian as to render the tale more than credible,' a clear example of how adherence to tropes, and belief in intrinsic racial characteristics, led to credulity on the part of British travelogue writers.[846] Curzon's account repeatedly emphasises the universal participation in avaricious and corrupt behaviour, yet also attempts to highlight the contradiction of maintaining 'scrupulous regard for specific precepts of the moral law' while inhabiting 'an atmosphere of corruption.'[847] Despite decrying the greed of the Iranians, Curzon utilised bribery for political ends when, in 1919, he secured the Anglo-Persian Agreement, which essentially rendered Iran a British protectorate and was sealed with a clandestine payment of £130,000. [848] Curzon had long concluded that the elites in Iran 'were unlikely for long to turn the cold shoulder upon a project by which money might stick to their own fingers,' and decided to use this to further

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[843] Curzon, (1892), II, 43.
[844] Wills, (1883), 172; Browne, (1893), 214.
[845] Shahnavaz, (2005), 25-6.
[846] Curzon, (1892), I, 466.
[847] Curzon, (1892), I, 15; II, 634.
[848] Amanat, (2017), 404-7.

British imperial interests, a clear example of adherence to tropes informing actual political policy.[849]

In stark contrast to Curzon’s superficial assertion that greed was an inherent characteristic of all Iranians, Browne’s rebuttal of ‘greed and corruption’ tropes is the most emphatic in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, where he lays the blame for its prevalence explicitly upon the writings of other European travellers. He criticises the perception of Iranian meanness, in response the expectation of a mutual exchange of presents or payment for hospitality in Iran, describing the inherent power-imbalance between British travellers and those they relied upon during their journeys: ‘To expect a poor villager to supply travellers gratis with the necessities of life, which he can often ill spare, and to blame him for desiring to receive the value of the same, is surely the height of absurdity.’[850] Browne blamed such travellers for making no attempt to comprehend the true significance of gift-giving etiquette in Iran, and condemns their perception that the desire for reciprocity was a manifestation of deep-rooted avarice among the people.[851] Tropes relating to the conduct of servants and subalterns, namely that they were ‘the most sordid and rapacious of mankind’, were also repudiated by Browne. With the aim of rectifying this injustice, he describes the ‘disinterested and generous conduct exhibited by those of the Nawwáb’s household’ in Tehran, believing honest curiosity to be the defining characteristic of Iranian servants.[852] There is also much praise of his own servant, Hajji Safar: ‘faithful and efficient... he had served me well, and to his intelligence and enterprise I owed much. He was not perfect- what man is? - but if ever it may be my lot to visit these lands again, I would wish no better than to secure the services of him, or one like him.’[853] While Browne’s fondness was likely heightened by Hajji Safar's status as a 'true Iranian' (Aryan) of the South, this invites comparison with Wills' writing on Iranian servants, as he had ample experience of them due to the length of his residence in Iran. He praised their integrity in relation to his possessions and protectiveness over his household, but also complained that many supplemented their income through 'pickings and stealing' for which he used the Farsi *modākel* (literally 'medals,' more accurately 'awards' in this context).[854] This largely consisted of servants expecting small tips or gifts upon the completion of certain tasks, such as the delivery of messages or goods. It is telling that Wills praised the cheapness of hiring domestic staff in Iran while simultaneously complaining about their expectation of supplementing their meagre income, which Browne would likely have judged a matter of subsistence rather than greed. Wills was not entirely unsympathetic to the plight of the lower classes, his encounter with a subsistence farmer presenting a stark and view of the impact of greed and administrative corruption on the poor. Admiring the farmer's pea plants, Wills asked about them and was greeted with reticence, before the farmer fearfully explained 'if the prince hears that I grow peas, I shall be obliged to present them to him, and he will never pay me anything, and when the crop is over, probably beat me because I have no more.'[855] *Land of Lion and Sun* thus portrays the lower-classes as both complicit in, and victims of, the all-consuming greed he perceived to exist in Iran.

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[849] Curzon, (1892), II, 384.
[850] Browne, (1893), 73-4.
[851] Browne, (1893), 75.
[852] Browne, (1893), 225.
[853] Browne, (1893), 173, 620.

Along with refuting many of the tropes tied to essentialised Iranian greed, Browne highlighted the greedy and reckless behaviour of his own British countrymen in Iran. Disappointed at the degraded condition of a once-ornate Safavid caravanserai at Yezdikhvast, Browne questioned local villagers why they had not better-maintained the historic structure of which they were presumably proud. They protested their helplessness in this regard, as over a decade before a *firangi* had bribed one of the local men to remove some of the tiles from the caravanserai as souvenirs: 'Of course he broke at least as many tiles as he removed, and a noble monument of the past was irreparably injured to gratify a traveller's passing whim.'[856] Where Curzon would almost certainly have blamed this destruction upon the inherent avarice of the peasantry, Browne was adamant that culpability lay with the unnamed British traveller for instigating such destruction, merely to appease his own selfish desire for souvenirs. This episode, in microcosm, underscores much of Browne's critique of material exploitation in the context of Qajar Iran. *A Year Amongst the Persians* also includes some brief allusions to Iranian perspectives on greed and corruption. Browne became aware of the reputation of the Isfahanis, describing how 'the character which they bear amongst other Persians is not altogether enviable, avarice and niggardliness being accounted their chief characteristics.' He then proceeds to recount the aforementioned story of the merchant flavouring his food with bottled cheese but, unlike Wills or Curzon, does not credit it as offering any particularly profound insight.[857] Browne's conversations with Babis, notably the elderly Sheikh Ibrahim, also demonstrate how the community felt encircled and overwhelmed by the greed and corruption of the Qajar state and its religious underpinnings. This further highlights Browne's bias against Islam, as he complimented the Sheikh on Babi practices which 'certainly seem to me very much better than those of the Musulmáns,' and received the response: 'their doctrines… are as untenable as their actions are corrupt.'[858] The interaction between greed and violence is underscored, in a later conversation with Sheikh Ibrahim, who recalled his imprisonment: 'in the hopes of extorting money from us or our friends, they subjected us by day to various torments, and by night put our necks in the collar (*tawk*), and our feet in the stocks (*khalil*).'[859] Though he certainly sympathised with the Babis, these sweeping assertions of wholesale corruption in Iran were not replicated in the rest of the travelogue, or indeed Browne's later writings on Iran. For Browne, it was specifically the greed of the Qajars, and those who directly served their interests, which drove corruption in Iran, rather than any inherent tendency of the common people. He saw the latter as trapped in deprivation; crushed between the demands of their despotic rulers and the steady economic encroachment of the imperial powers.

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[854] Wills, (1883), 66-7.
[855] Wills, (1883), 300.

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[856] Browne, (1893), 246.
[857] Browne, (1893), 214.
[858] Browne, (1893), 236.

Sykes, by contrast with Browne and Curzon, is both generalising and is relatively brief in his commentary on the profusion of greed across Iranian society. He claims the Iranians had 'absolutely no idea but that of hoarding in time of scarcity… they care nothing, as a class, for the sufferings of their own fellow-countrymen,' with the Shirazis particularly singled out in this regard.[860] As evidence, he describes the siege of Shiraz by an invading Afghan army in 1722, which brought the population to the brink of starvation.[861] Upon taking the city, the Afghans discovered huge stockpiles of grain which had been hoarded by wealthy citizens, and 'so disgusted were they at this treachery, that they hanged the various owners by hooks inside their granaries, and allowed them to die of slow starvation in sight of plenty, a barbarous but effectual lesson to their fellow citizens.' Sykes appears to endorse this as the 'only cure' for Shirazi greed and selfishness.[862] His judgement is particularly hypocritical considering the growing resentment among Iranians regarding the consolidation of British-Indian influence over the Iranian grain trade, and the accusations of hoarding which accompanied it. Beyond the urban context, Sykes describes encountering contemporary examples of 'exceptional meanness' on his travels through rural Iran. Although this is not further elaborated upon, the generalisation is qualified by admission that this was also the case among ‘agriculturalists of other lands.’[863] This places Sykes somewhere between the positions of Browne and Curzon: the former considered British expectations of hospitality without remuneration on the part of rural populations unreasonable, due to their constrained financial circumstances, while the latter believed these communities to be universally degraded and avaricious and sought to remain entirely aloof from them.

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[859] Browne, (1893), 566.
[860] Sykes, (1902), 348.
[861] Amanat, (2017), 134-6.
[862] Sykes, (1902), 348.

Soldiers also provide examples of avaricious behaviour among the lower classes in *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia*. Sykes complained that the road guards in Qaen, who received only irregular pay from the government, sometimes colluded with the Turkmen slavers they were tasked with fighting, in order to supplement their income.[864] He also encountered a group of Tabrizi gunners at Nosratabad who enjoyed a privileged status within the hierarchy of the Qajar army, ‘[a] position, of which they take the fullest advantage by carrying on a money-lending business [with interest of] 500 percent, as a minimum! To borrow from a gunner in Persia means more than to fall into the hands of the Jews in England.’[865] This somewhat confirms aspersions which Browne cast upon an ex-gunner he met at Tehran, who expressed a desire to accompany him. It, however, also highlights Sykes’ anti-Semitism, which is also clearly identifiable in the travelogues of Wills, Bird, and Curzon. Of the Jewish population of Kerman, Sykes wrote they existed ‘in a wretched condition… yet, as petty dealers, are absurdly grasping, their ideas of profit being extortion;’ tempering any sympathy for their plight under Qajar rule with typically anti-Semitic tropes with the presumption of greed mirroring the stereotype of the Iranians.[866] Yet in other comparisons, regarding greed, Sykes describes the Iranians in a more favourable light. In Kalat Nader, in Khorasan, Sykes describes the incredible meanness of its *bazāris* which corroborated his belief that the area was home to ‘a race which is far lower than the Persians in the arts of civilisation.’[867] The Baluchis, frequent targets of Sykes’ disdain, are also heavily criticised for their greed and conceit: ‘the shameless mendacity of this people, and the grumbling at whatever is given, checks the growth of any liking for them,’ which he contrasted with the often warm attachments which formed between Iranian servants and their British employers.[868] While Sykes described that corruption was widespread across Iran, his travelogue only alludes to this anecdotally, doing little to unpack its potential causes or wider effects.[869] Greed as an essential Iranian characteristic is less directly pronounced than in Curzon’s travelogue, but is particularly observable in Sykes’ description of minorities, who he considered less advanced in morals and the etiquette of civilisation, due in significant part to his adherence to the theory of Aryan superiority.

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[863] Sykes, (1902), 203.

[864] Sykes, (1902), 408.

[865] Sykes, (1902), 376.

[866] Sykes, (1902), 197.

3.5 Cowardice

The preceding tropes of despotism, cruelty, and greed are used directly to characterise the operation of the Qajar state itself, encompassing the Shah, officialdom, and army, as well as the various subalterns who facilitated their functioning. While these tropes are at times framed as essential characteristics of the Iranians, particularly by Curzon, they could also be envisioned as systemic rather than purely personal failings. This rendered them particularly relevant to British imperial administrators, as the characteristics of the Qajar state impacted directly on the ‘concession’ system and, potentially, the status of Iran as a buffer between the

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[867] Sykes, (1902), 236.
[868] Sykes, (1902), 120, 351.
[869] Sykes, (1902), 457.

Raj and Russian empire.[870] The tropes subsequently examined on the other hand; cowardice, dishonesty, and attitudes to gender and sexuality, noticeably feature less prominently in comparison to earlier travelogues, indicating that by the late 19th Century they were of diminishing interest to British travellers and could be invoked with little context or justification, if they were invoked at all. Nonetheless, where these tropes are addressed in the travelogues, it is important to examine how their invocation contributes to the traveller's assessment of Qajar Iran.

Typical of Curzon's multifaceted engagement with a 'decline narrative' in his travelogue, he claimed that the courage of the Iranians had declined, and they were now essentially passive subjects, incapable of reform or engagement with European concepts of nationalism or democracy, and thus ripe for British imperial tutelage. Characteristically of *Persia and the Persian Question,* the topic is introduced through reference to Greco-Roman texts, specifically Herodotus' description of the battle of Plataea, where the Achaemenid forces were 'not one whit inferior to the Greeks in courage and warlike spirit.'[871] Curzon also describes an incursion by Cossacks in 1668 which was successfully repulsed by Safavid forces, being 'bolder or more fortunate than their nineteenth-Century descendants.'[872] The decline in bravery and martial prowess had, however, apparently already been in progress under Safavid rule; an assertion supported with an anecdotal admission made by Shah Abbas I: 'We have a good army for reviews, but a bad one for war'.[873] This statement accorded with the long-held European belief that much of Persian power consisted of style over substance; a trope with demonstrable precedence back to the Greco-Roman sources, and knowingly invoked by Curzon in this context.[874] The continuing decline in the Qajar period is epitomised by the person of the Shah, with Curzon particularly focusing on Fath' Ali Shah, who he deemed 'as ambitious of military aggrandisement as he was personally timid and unwarlike,' mockingly recounting how he fell from his horse in fright during the only battle in which he personally participated.[875] Mohammad Shah is also described as having great ambitions and desire for conquest, posing as 'a second Nadir Shah', while being 'utterly deficient in military instincts or capacity.'[876] The pacification of Khorasan province from 1831-2, a rare example of Qajar triumph in a Century characterised by defeats and territorial losses, is undermined as compounding the effect of poor leadership, stoking the hubris of generals and officers who, as a result, believed themselves capable of vanquishing British or Russian armies.[877] With such ineffective leadership, it was unsurprising to Curzon, and earlier British travelogue writers, that the Qajar army endured a stretch of setbacks, retreats, and outright defeats. Curzon describes with satisfaction how, in the face of superior British arms, the Iranians abandoned their positions 'without firing a shot' during the brief invasion of 1857, abandoning stores, ammunition, and the best of their artillery. Curzon also mocks their conceited interpretation of the subsequent withdrawal of British troops to Bushire on the coast as demonstrating British apprehension of Qajar superiority: 'a movement which the Persians, who are learned in the casuistry of retreat, have always interpreted as a sign of discomfiture.'[878] Khanlar Mirza, the Qajar commander who oversaw the debacle, is described as 'the arch-coward' by Curzon, who argued he should have been shot for his conduct. Yet he escaped disgrace in the usual manner described in the greed and corruption tropes, namely sending the vizier a large sum of cash and, in return, receiving a sword, a robe of merit, and effectively a pardon for his failures.[879] The Iranian officers who faced the British also allegedly suffered ‘from an ineradicable disposition to run’ and Curzon quotes the saying, ‘if there were no dying… how gloriously the Persians would fight,’ though, in this case, it is attributed to an infantry officer, rather than the chief executioner or Qajar general as in other travelogues and Orientalist texts.[880] Lacking the status or funds to expiate their failure, unlike Khanlar Mirza, these officers were subsequently publicly disgraced by royal decree, ‘being dragged along the ranks by rings through their noses, beaten, and cast into prison.’[881]

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[870] Dabashi, (2015), 87.
[871] Hdt. 9.62.
[872] Curzon, (1892), I, 186, 571.
[873] Curzon, (1892), I, 575.
[874] Ansari, (2005), 12.

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[875] Curzon, (1892), I, 100, 576.

[876] Curzon, (1892), II, 255.

[877] Curzon, (1892), I, 582.

[878] Curzon, (1892), II, 226-9.

[879] Curzon, (1892), II, 340.

Not only the behaviour of the Iranians, but their manner of warfare was defined as cowardly by Curzon, echoing Greco-Roman disdain for the use of mounted and dismounted archers and cavalry feints, as favoured by pre-Islamic Iranian armies.[882] He refers to Lady Sheil’s travelogue, where she describes how her husband, Justin Sheil, British envoy to Iran from 1844 to 1854, viewed the tactics of Qajar cavalry as those ‘of Persian dogs, alternately advancing and retiring, snarling, growling and yelling, but rarely coming to close quarters.’[883] Characterised as both bestial and cowardly, such reports exacerbated Curzon’s fear of Russian advances in Northern Iran, believing all it would take to panic loosely organised cavalry formations, would be the appearance of Russian troops firing volleys of blank cartridges.[884] Descriptions from earlier travelogues further contributed to this assessment: on departing for Hamadan, Bird was assigned a *savār* (cavalryman) as escort by the local governor, but expressed disgust at what she considered his cowardly behaviour, declaring that 'the poor fellow showed the white feather on the first march, and I was obliged to assert the ascendency of race and ride in front of him.'[885] Whether her guide was aware of dangers on the road, to which Bird was oblivious, or she simply disliked his attitude, her invocation of race here chimes with Curzon's belief in the inherent cowardice of Asiatic peoples. The one instance where Curzon found some justification for the, apparently, cowardly behaviour of Iranian troops appears in his description of the 'Rebellion of the Yomuts' (February 1888 - March 1889). He describes the mutiny of a regiment sent to quell a Turkmen insurrection (which had allegedly received Russian support, including Berdan rifles) and the subsequent harsh punishment meted out to the soldiers on Naser al-Din's orders.[886] Curzon concedes that '[the] Persian soldiers were perhaps as much actuated by discontent as by cowardice in these discreditable proceedings,' though he does not include the primary cause of the mutiny, namely that the soldiers had not been paid and were chronically undersupplied.[887]

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[880] Curzon, (1892), I, 580, 605.

[881] Curzon, (1892), II, 340.

[882] K.A. Raaflaub, ‘Persian Army and Warfare in the Mirror of Herodotus’ Interpretation’ in *Herodot und das Persische Weltreich,* R. Rollinger, B. Truschnegg and R. Bichler (eds.), (Wiesbaden, 2011), 5-39.

[883] M.L.W. Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and manners in Persia,* (London, 1856), 325; Curzon, (1892), I, 576.

[884] Curzon, (1892), I, 198.

[885] Bird, (1891), II, 134.

Curzon's fear of Russian expansion, and his dismissal of any form of patriotism or solidarity among Iranians, led him to a pessimistic conclusion about the continued independence of Iran, assuming Britain would either be forced to administer the country, or the Russians would invade and finally spark the cataclysmic imperial conflict in central and south Asia he had long feared. He claimed that, though the people might exhibit pride in the beauty of their country and culture, 'there is not one in a hundred who would pull his sword from the scabbard to vindicate its independence. In every manifestation of national spirit or activity they appear to have succumbed to a creeping paralysis…', again failing to identify the rising spread of nationalism.[888] Curzon suggested that Britain should take a more active role in Iran generally, believing that the Qajar army had been most effective under the command of British officers, such as Henry Rawlinson in the early 19th Century, before this accommodation was dissolved in the first diplomatic fall out over Herat.[889] Much of the critique of Iranian soldiery seems to stem from their failure to meet European standards of dress and drill. As with many other assertions, the underlying reasons for this disparity are not interrogated further, including that many Qajar soldiers were unwilling levies who often went long periods without pay or allowances for uniforms.[890] Typical of his imperial mentality, Curzon believed that only exact imitation would improve the situation, with the discipline of British-style drill overcoming the inherent cowardice of the average Iranian soldier. Without this, ‘disgrace [will] attend the Persian arms, and the Lion and the Sun be no more than a boastful symbol of disaster;’ another damning pronouncement and, in the context of the ‘Great Game’, admission of anxiety by Curzon on the future of Iran.[891]

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[886] Curzon, (1892), I, 191

[887] Curzon, (1892), I, 190; Amanat, (2008), 383.

[888] Curzon, (1892), II, 628.

[889] Johnson, (2012), 35.

In *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia*, Sykes echoes Curzon in adhering to the trope of Iranian cowardice. He contemplated the decline in the nation’s martial prowess as he passed Gulnabad, ‘the scene of Persia’s shame,’ where the ‘degenerate Sefavi monarch’ was defeated by the Afghans; ushering in the destructive power-struggles of the 18th Century and the deadly cataclysm of Nader Shah’s rule.[892] Little sympathy is shown for the population of Isfahan, who were slaughtered by the Afghan army, with Sykes deriding the ‘cowardly inhabitants’ for their unwillingness to fight in defence of their city.[893] In this context Sykes also repeats some common slanders regarding the cowardice of the residents of Kashan, including the well-known slanderous proverb: ‘A dog of Káshán is the superior of the noblemen of Qom, though a dog is the superior of a Kásháni,’ as well as the story of the Kashani contingent being excused military service due to their cowardice, and requesting an escort home from Nader Shah.[894] Browne recounts some of the same stories in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, describing how Kashan was supposedly notorious for ‘the extreme timorousness of its inhabitants,’ and that the Kashani military regiment had been disbanded due to the cowardice of the soldiers, and their resulting inefficiency and liability to the army.[895] Browne, however, emphasises that these were purely anecdotal accounts, recognising that they reflected the rivalry between urban centres and regions rather than any particular flaw of the Kashanis: 'Of the alleged cowardice of the inhabitants I had, of course, no means of judging.'[896] Browne's own experiences of Kashan appear to have been universally positive, coloured particularly by his friendship with Sheikh Muhammad Hossein, 'one of the best types of unobtrusive, kindly, disinterested, enthusiastic scholar and bibliophile of the East that it has been my lot to meet,' further demonstrating how Browne's interpersonal relationships with Iranians countered uncritical absorption of stereotypes.[897]

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[890] Amanat, (2008), 382-3.
[891] Curzon, (1892), I, 612.
[892] Sykes, (1902), 345.
[893] Sykes, (1902), 67.
[894] Sykes, (1902), 158.

The Iranians were often judged cowardly not only by their own actions but by comparison with the other ethnic groups who inhabited the Iranian plateau, a trend repeated across the breadth of travel writing on Iran and observable in the earlier travelogues of Wills, Layard, and Bird. Curzon, presenting himself as among the foremost British experts on the 'peoples of the East,' dedicated significant attention to categorising and defining their characteristics and thereby determining their position in the racial hierarchy. While some might be judged 'favoured minorities', they were nonetheless considered inferior to the British and other white Europeans. He did not, however, engage as significantly with the 'Aryanism' theories gaining popularity in the 1880s and 90s, which were prominent in the travelogues of Browne and Sykes. The general fixation with race and categorisation continued during Curzon's tenure as Viceroy of India, where he directly promoted the heightening of sectarian and ethnic tensions as a means of ensuring British control; which in *Persia and the Persian Question* he refers to as '*divide et impera'*.[898] His typically classicising style betrays an admission which previous generations of British imperialists in India would have feared to make publicly: that intensified conflicts between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs suited British interests perfectly, and were deliberately stoked.[899]

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[895] Browne, (1893), 189.

[896] Browne, (1893), 189-90.

[897] Browne, (1893), 602.

[898] Curzon, (1892), II, 272.

As in the travelogues of Bird and Layard, who spent time among the Bakhtiari, the clearest divide in terms of cowardice, as perceived by Curzon, was the contrast between urban and rural, sedentary and nomadic. This is illustrated by his observation on pilgrims: ‘a Persian is a coward at the best of times: but a Persian pilgrim is a degree worse than his fellows; and a Persian pilgrim in the vicinity of a Turkoman almost ceases to be a human being.’[900] The Turkmen, styled a ‘martial race’ in British literature, were often contrasted positively with the Iranians for their wild fearlessness and prowess, and the Oghuz Turkic origins of the Qajar tribe were credited, by Curzon, for what assertive traits he considered Naser al-Din to possess. Yet the fact that Turkmen were often employed as mercenaries, due to these qualities, was also a source of anxiety for Curzon, who believed that they posed a potential threat to integrity of Northern Iran. He considered this comparable to the destabilising impact of large-scale recruitment of Gauls and Goths as auxiliaries upon the Roman Empire, as emphasised by Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*, especially if the Russians were able to offer them greater financial incentives than the Qajars.[901] Sykes similarly appears to have regarded the Turkmen as superior to Iranians in bravery and martial skill, recounting a group of Turkmen tribesmen boasting of how, during an uprising, whole regiments of Qajar troops would flee merely at the sight of a few of their horsemen. When pushed to explain how the Qajar general involved had subsequently managed to return the severed heads of Turkmen to Tehran, Sykes was met with a ready answer: ‘Oh, he attacked and massacred a section that had joined him, and it was their heads which gained the Persian his promotion!'[902] Though this prompted Sykes to exclaim that '[the] Turkoman is a greater braggart than an Afghán!' it also bolstered his belief that cowardice was an essential characteristic of the Iranians.

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[899] Gopal, (2020), 80-2.

[900] Curzon, (1892), I, 277.

[901] Curzon, (1892), I, 199; Gibbon, (1875), Vol.II, Cap. xxx.

The Kurds are, similarly, lauded as a courageous and warlike people, despite 'their position amid hostile and craven communities,' with Curzon describing how faced by the rebellion of the Kurdish Sheikh Abdullah, the Iranian forces 'fled with characteristic precipitation.'[903] The Arab tribes living around the Persian Gulf were also able to hold their own against Qajar encroachment due to allegedly being 'as venturesome as the Persians were timid;' an advantage which was compounded by the Iranians supposedly 'possessing an hereditary terror of the sea.'[904] Regardless, the Gulf was by this point under tight British control through the creation of the 'Trucial States', to the degree that Curzon asserted a *Pax Britannica* had been established and it was now a *mare clausum*, further equating British and Roman imperial power.[905] Iran had no means of challenging this state of affairs, as in their current state they were 'not a power that can afford to infringe any treaty; nor are the modern Persians so untrue to the traditions of their nation as to be willing to run any risk for sake of the sea.'[906] The situation was different among the coastal communities of Iran itself, particularly in Khuzestan, was different however with the heterogeneous towns of Arabs and Iranians unable to withstand the consolidation of Qajar authority. This was not only because they were impoverished and lacked the means of organised resistance but, according to Curzon, because they were inherently 'sad cowards… having a mortal fear of a soldier, even of a Persian soldier, at the butt-end of a muzzle-loading gun.'[907] To Curzon's eyes, experiencing fear, when confronted with such an unimpressive institution as the Qajar army, was perhaps the perfect demonstration of cowardice among the timid peoples of Iran.

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[902] Sykes, (1902), 15-16.

[903] Curzon, (1892), I, 552-3.

[904] Curzon, (1892), II, 226, 390.

[905] S. Kelly, 'The Gamekeeper versus the Mercenary Spirit: The Pax Britannica in the Gulf' in *Imperial Crossroads,* J.R. Macris and S. Kelly (eds.), (Annapolis MD, 2012), 52.

[906] Curzon, (1892), II, 393.

[907] Curzon, (1892), II, 410.

The sedentary-nomadic dichotomy also informs the only other notable reference to cowardice in *A Year Amongst the Persians*, stemming from a conversation which Browne had with Darcham Bey about the threat posed to travellers by the raiding of nomadic tribes, specifically the Lurs and the Qashqai. The demeanour of these two is contrasted: ‘though the former will usually rob you if they can, and would not hesitate to murder you if you refused to give up your possessions to them, the latter, not content with this, will murder you even if you make no resistance, alleging that the world is well quit of one who is such a coward that he will not fight for his own.’[908] Though this would have fitted neatly into the travelogues of Layard, Bird, Sykes, or indeed Curzon as an illustration of the contrast between the martial nomadic aggressor and the passive urban victim, Browne makes no such comparison. With his focus firmly upon the urban literati and religious minority communities, the nomadic-urban divide is otherwise largely ignored and the relative bravery or cowardice of either category irrelevant to Browne’s interests or travel aims in Iran. The cowardice trope, specifically, led to a later clash with David Fraser, the *Times* correspondent. His assertion that ‘some evil genius has looked into the Persian soul and withered some of its courage,’ leaving them ‘soft... effeminate, and cowardly,’ irritated Browne immensely as, for him, such stereotyping represented the epitome of imperial arrogance and was responsible for the lack of anticipation of the Constitutional Revolution.[909] Browne thus makes no assertions of his own, in relation to the cowardice of the Iranians. On the contrary, it was the self-sacrifice and quixotic bravery of the Babi movement which initially made such a strong impression on the young scholar and sparked his initial interest in Iran.[910] This would further intensify in

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[908] Browne, (1893), 210.

[909] Fraser, (1910), 101, 290-1.

[910] Nash, (2005), 37.

Browne's writing on the Constitutional Revolution where, as Amanat describes, 'Persian paradigms of martyrdom, particularly when they occur in the cause of a national movement, [were] a sign of strength at odds with the stereotypes of timidity, irresolution and deception prevalent in European popular orientalism'.[911]

While Browne's lived experience of Iran led him to dismiss generalisations on the cowardice of the Iranians, Sykes' time on campaign in Baluchistan seems only to have reinforced his more nebulous assumptions about the Iranians and the nomadic peoples. He lamented that Mr Graves, the murdered British telegraph officer, had 'only a few cowardly servants to protect him,' despite also describing the Karwani Baluchis, who had presumably perpetrated the attack, as timid.[912] The image of the inhabitants of Baluchistan presented in *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia* is overwhelmingly negative, with Sykes describing them as 'a feckless, lazy, and almost hopelessly backward race, [who] made promises which I knew they would not keep, as they rarely carry out an agreement except from fear.'[913] Following a fight with Karwani tribesmen, which left over a hundred of them dead, Sykes pondered on the differing perceptions of warfare: 'a Baluchi battle is considered severe if two or three warriors bite the dust, so that the fact of the list of the slain running into three figures produced a stupendous effect throughout Baluchistán, and, without doubt, indirectly aided the work on the Persian side of the frontier.'[914] This is again evocative of the Greco-Roman disdain for Eastern modes of warfare and confirms that Sykes' acted upon his earlier assertion that the 'timid' Baluchis would only accede out of fear, which was duly delivered courtesy of his expedition's Martini rifles and Maxim gun.[915] This also emphasises the stark contrast between the aims of differing modes of warfare: tribal conflicts were largely tied to personal and group honour, coupled with the seizure of livestock which did not necessitate large-scale bloodshed, where the imperial mode of warfare sought to achieve permanent control of a territory, and often annihilated whole populations who resisted its consolidation.[916] Sykes also complained of the lack of courage among his servants during the campaign, describing how his young Armenian servant was failing in his duties due to his 'cowardice and home-sickness,' while his Iranian servant, Abdul Aziz, is described as being 'green with fear' as the punitive expedition approached the Karwani villages.[917] Abdul Aziz's subsequent disappearance caused anxiety he had been captured and upon his return he alleged kidnap and torture by the Karwanis but, lacking any visible injuries, he was deemed a coward by Sykes and dismissed by the telegraph company.[918] It appeared to Sykes that across Iran, whether friend or foe and regardless of ethnic identity, there was no group which satisfied his definition of courage.

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[911] A. Amanat, 'Introduction' to E.G. Browne, *History of the Persian Revolution,* (New York NY, 1995), xix.

[912] Sykes, (1902), 274-6.

[913] Sykes, (1902), 307.

[914] Sykes, (1902), 295.

[915] Sykes, (1902), 276.

3.6 Dishonesty

The Iranian relationship with truth and lies is another aspect of their stereotyping with precedents in the Greco-Roman sources, which Curzon, Browne, and Sykes engaged with in markedly different ways as a result. Curzon tied the question of honesty directly to his broader decline narrative, complaining that Herodotus and Xenophon's description of the Achaemenid elites teaching of their sons, to 'ride, shoot and tell the truth,' was no longer upheld: 'the last-named precept has long ago been expunged from the ethical code of their descendants.'[919] According to Curzon, this paradigm had been completely reversed, to the extent that ‘a true son of Iran would sooner lie than tell the truth; and that he feels twinges of desperate remorse when, upon occasions, he has thoughtlessly strayed into veracity,’ thus completely essentialising dishonesty as an inherent trait of the Iranians.[920] Ministers, governors, and other bureaucrats are particularly singled out in this regard, with Curzon quoting Malcolm’s *History of Persia,* which asserted that ‘[their] occupation is in intrigues which have always the same objects: to preserve themselves or ruin others; who cannot, without danger, speak any language but that of flattery and deceit; and who are, in short, condemned by their condition to be venal, artful and false.’[921] While this was an particularly negative judgement, in the context of Malcolm’s *History,* and emphasised the systemic factors dictating the Qajar administration’s relationship with the truth, Curzon considered this assessment ‘marked by insight and justice characteristic of their distinguished author.’[922] He asserts that this held true for his own experience of Iran, reinforced by his interactions with various functionaries and inherent distrust of Iranian motives. The clearest example of Curzon’s attempt to inspect the fortified gate of Arghun Khan, in Razavi Khorasan province, which he was prevented from doing by soldiers before a representative of the local Khan arrived to remonstrate with him for attempting to enter a military installation. He describes the emissary as being ‘voluble with explanations and afforded me an interesting insight into Persian character… it was useless bandying words with so accomplished a liar… I had heard a good deal of Persian artfulness before entering the country; … I did not know whether I was more incensed at the treatment I had received or tickled at the illustration of Oriental tactics.’[923] Such interactions merely confirmed Curzon’s pre-existing prejudice, and belief in the inherent dishonesty of Qajar officials.

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[916] Johnson, (2012), 42-3.
[917] Sykes, (1902), 281, 346.
[918] Sykes, (1902), 282-3.
[919] Curzon, (1892), I, 593; Hdt. 1.136-7; Xen. *Cyrop.* 1.6-9, 1.31.

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[920] Curzon, (1892), II, 633.
[921] Malcolm, (1829), Vol. II, Cap. xxiv.
[922] Curzon, (1892), I, 425.
[923] Curzon, (1892), I, 131-32.

Such 'Oriental tactics' extended beyond mere evasiveness, in Curzon's mind, and permeated every aspect of Iranian activity. He highlights the 'familiar Persian methods of treachery and intrigue' in warfare, the 'diplomatic fencing, with feint and counter-feint... [the] diversified tricks of the Oriental school' in the political sphere, including the 'shifty diplomacy' around Herat, and 'the proverbial craftiness of the Oriental[s]' in the bazaars.[924] Dishonesty is thus portrayed as universal in Iran, an assertion which runs throughout *Persia and the Persian Question*, with Curzon quoting lines such as 'Better the lie that keeps the peace than the truth that disrupts' from the *Gulistan* of Sa'di to emphasise how deeply rooted he believed lying to be in Iranian culture.[925] This is also reiterated through flippant remarks, such as his description of a civil law officer: 'presuming him to be honest (perhaps a rash assumption in Persia).'[926] Such comments are ubiquitous and somewhat mask Curzon's scant personal interaction with Iranians, constrained both by his breakneck race through the country and his deficient language skills, resulting in his reliance on earlier accounts of Iran which are replete with descriptions of the dishonesty of its inhabitants.[927] His lack of Persian language also led Curzon to deride the 'accomplished manners and a more than Parisian polish' of the Iranian intelligentsia, as little more than 'cover [for] a truly superb faculty for lying and almost scientific imposture.'[928] Such observations led Curzon to conclude that, in Iran, and indeed across the East more generally, there was no such thing as objective truth due to there being 'no sources of knowledge accessible to the public… figures and facts are, in their very essence, an insult to the Oriental imagination,' while hyperbole obscured what information was available, exemplified by the 'vainglorious boast' that 'Isfahan is half the world.'[929] He considered this atmosphere of falsehood to be so all-encompassing that it extended to self-delusion. While inspecting the arsenal of guns at Shushtar, Curzon verified that the newest had been a gift from Tsar Nicholas I to Abbas Mirza following the cessation of hostilities in 1828, whereas the common belief among the troops was that it had been triumphantly seized in battle, despite the Russians having been the victors.[930] The one instance in *Persia and the Persian Question* where the Iranians are somewhat excused accusations of dishonesty relates to the 'Shaking Minarets' outside Isfahan. Here Curzon belittles Wills' credulity by contradicting his description of them as a means of fraudulently extracting money from visitors: 'there is no fraud, and still less is there any miracle. The only folly is that of the visitor who is in the smallest degree excited by so commonplace, even if uncommon, a manifestation'.[931] As with his extensive description of Naser al-Din, Curzon's discourse on dishonesty leaves the reader with a contradictory impression of the country as an entity where 'life is both magnificent and squalid; the people at once despicable and noble; the panorama at the same time an enchantment and a fraud.'[932] Though Curzon might excuse the Shaking Minarets, he overwhelmingly believing it to be the latter.

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[924] Curzon, (1892), I, 190, 267; II, 333, 405.
[925] Sa'di Shirazi, (2008), 13.
[926] Curzon, (1892), I, 454.
[927] Ansari, (2005), 11; Ross, (2009), 392.
[928] Curzon, (1892), I, 15.

Browne's discussion of the supposed dishonesty of Iranians mirrors that of their cowardice, both in its brevity and through relaying the opinions of others, while withholding his own judgement and avoiding unquestioning adherence to tropes. He heard from non-Iranians, during the early stages of his journey, that 'the Persians were the wickedest, most faithless, and most dishonest people in the world.' This view, reiterated by a Belgian mining engineer he encountered in Trabzon, who claimed to have 'discovered some good qualities in every people, with the exception of the Persians, in whom I have failed to find a single admirable characteristic,' appears to have had little impact on Browne.[933] On only one occasion in the travelogue, is an Iranian explicitly characterised as untrustworthy, though perhaps not without justification. Upon leaving Tehran by the Shimran gate, Browne was accosted by a gunner who had just been dismissed from service and bastinadoed. He 'expressed a desire to accompany me to 'Landan', declaring that Persia was no fit place for an honest man.'[934] The gunner's profession of honesty did not reassure Browne, who expressed relief when he lost sight of him at Amul. Considering the poor reputation of gunners in Iran as moneylenders, as described by Sykes, and *lutis* (thugs) in uniform, it was perhaps reasonable for Browne to be sceptical of his suitability as a travelling companion.[935]

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[929] Curzon, (1892), I, x; II, 23.

[930] Curzon, (1892), II, 381.

[931] Curzon, (1892), II, 58.

[932] Curzon, (1892), I, 15.

On the other hand, it was an unnamed English doctor who faced Browne's most vehement derision for his dishonesty during his time in Shiraz. The doctor had allegedly converted to Shi'a Islam, so Browne and his friend, Mirza Ali, went to visit him to ascertain what had prompted the conversion. However, upon meeting the 'convert', both men were surprised by his poor grasp of Farsi, and questioned if he understood enough Arabic to have read the Qur'an. When the doctor reluctantly conceded he had read some sections in English translation, Mirza Ali was outraged and demanded 'pray what particular passage or doctrine so commended itself to you that you became convinced of the divine origin of Islám? For of course you had some strong reason for casting aside the faith in which you were born.'[936] Upon leaving, both men concluded the doctor to be a charlatan and his professed adherence to Islam nothing more than an attempt to win customers among the pious Shirazis. This illustrated, only too well for Browne, that the Iranians were no more inherently dishonest than his own countrymen, who were fully capable of using deception to exploit others while enriching themselves. Browne, unlike Curzon, also fundamentally sympathised with the need to use deception as a means of self-preservation, which was particularly relevant in the case of the Babis and other persecuted minorities. Ramita Navai focuses on this dynamic in *City of Lies*, emphasising the need for deception as a tool of survival in the capital of the Islamic Republic: ‘in order to live in Tehran you have to lie. Morals don’t come into it: lying is about survival…lying for survival in Iranian culture goes back a long way; in the early years of the Islamic conquest, Shias were encouraged to lie about their faith to avoid persecution, a practice known as *taqiya*. The lies are, above all, a consequence of surviving in an oppressive regime, of being ruled by a government that believes it should be able to interfere in even the most intimate affairs of its citizens.’[937] Invoking *taqiya* in this context emphasises the historical precedence of this survival tactic and, though the internet and mass surveillance provide the contemporary Iranian state with an ability to oppress its population far in excess of late-Qajar Iran, Browne’s discourse indicates he recognised the rationale of deceiving an oppressor to ensure survival.

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[933] Browne, (1893), 25, 38.
[934] Browne, (1893), 610.
[935] Sykes, (1902), 376.
[936] Browne, (1893), 295.

Sykes’ view of dishonesty in Iran seem to tread a middle ground between that of Curzon and Browne. Though he otherwise demonstrated a very low opinion of the inhabitants of Baluchistan, Sykes did concede they were ‘extremely honest,’ and also characterised the Zoroastrians as having greater integrity than other groups in Iran, a further illustration of his belief that the ‘unadulterated Aryan’ population was inherently superior to the Shi’a Muslim majority.[938] Yet Sykes, equally, did not characterise the rest of the population as inherently dishonest, as many earlier travelogue writers had. In this aspect his views are closer to those of Browne than Curzon, whose *Persia and the Persian Question* influenced so many other aspects of *Ten Thousand Miles*. Sykes’ ability to converse fluently in Persian dispelled some of the tropes of universal dishonesty and deception, as he concluded that 'Persians, with their polite manners and vivacity closely resemble the Latin races,' with the caveat that 'there is an absolute want of system [of debate] and no idea of thrashing out a question in the way so dear to the heart of an Englishman.'[939] He also understood that exaggeration was often an aspect of *ta'aruf,* and did not constitute malicious intent to deceive. The closest that *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia* comes to making generalisations about Iranians' loose relationship with the truth is in the discussion of 'Oriental hyperbole', though this is only explicitly referred to in relation to the 12th Century chronicler Afzal Kermani's comparison of the fortifications of Kerman with 'Alexander's Barrier' (the Great Wall of China).[940] A similar incident while on route to Afzalabad in Baluchistan is also recounted, with Sykes describing how a post-carrier overtook his party proclaiming 'the heroic deeds he and his fellow sowárs [*savārs*, cavalrymen] had performed in beating off a band of Baluch raiders, taking great spoils in the shape of two donkeys.'[941] However, the boastful exaggerations of these soldiers are framed in a comic tone, and not presented within the context of wider arguments on the nature of Iranian veracity. Equally, Sykes' observation that widespread instances of fraudulent bankruptcy constituted the primary challenge to the profitability of the British-backed Imperial Bank of Persia is not portrayed as a uniquely Iranian issue.[942] Thus, though it makes brief references to the trope of 'Oriental hyperbole', *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia* generally deviates from the stereotype of dishonesty, as constituting an essential aspect of the Iranian character; principally informed by Sykes' ability to directly converse, coupled with his desire to imitate Browne in appearing as a sympathetic 'friend' to Iran, as well as an 'expert'.

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[937] R. Navai, *City of Lies,* (London, 2014), xiii-xiv.

[938] Sykes, (1902), 120, 190.

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[939] Sykes, (1902), 76.
[940] Sykes, (1902), 191.
[941] Sykes, (1902), 394-5.
[942] Sykes, (1902), 450.

3.7 - Gender and Sexuality: The De-exoticised 'Other'

Upon analysing discourse on gender and sexuality among the Iranians contained in these travelogues it becomes apparent that, over time, less attention was paid to this subject and the tropes associated with it. Browne's *A Year Among the Persians* contains very few descriptions of women, none of which characterise them as scheming or power-hungry, does not characterise Iranian men as effeminate or sexually debased, and makes no mention of eunuchs at all, thereby avoiding the three core themes of stereotyping derived from the Greco-Roman sources.[943] Curzon's writing on gender is also particularly limited, lacking any insight into the lives of Iranian women and demonstrating that it was not only Browne's disengagement from the classics which prompted ambivalence on the topic. When women are referred to by Curzon in *Persia and the Persian Question*, it occurs primarily in order to disparage their physical appearance: 'female beauty in early youth is followed by a premature decay and ugliness beyond words.'[944] This denigration is particularly directed at the women of the Bakhtiari Lur tribes, who 'at an age when a western woman is at her prime… become shrivelled and decayed,' and Turkmen women who 'were prematurely old and ugly, the melancholy law of the East.'[945] This characterisation is even applied to the topography of Iran, specifically the so-called 'Pass of the Old Woman' which Curzon traversed: 'if one aspired, by the aid of a local metaphor, to express anything that was peculiarly uninviting, timeworn, and repulsive, a Persian old woman would be the first and most forcible simile to suggest itself.'[946] Beyond the obvious misogyny, the 'decline narrative', so pervasive throughout Curzon's travelogue, appears here to have been extended to its women. The virtue of Iranian women is also questioned by Curzon, who repeated Layard's assertion that the women of Shushtar were ‘beautiful but not virtuous,’ and also describing the abandonment of the traditional punishment for unfaithful women in Tabriz.[947] Typically hurled from the summit of the citadel, this ended ‘when one of these ladies, sustained by her inflated petticoats as by a parachute, descended unharmed on to *terra firma,’* transforming a potentially grisly execution into a laughable farce.[948] These few examples constitute the extent of Curzon’s writing on Iranian women. They relied on his own superficial assertions, and the anecdotes of others, as he had no means of communicating with them directly nor accessing their social spaces.[949] This was coupled with the fact that the objective of *Persia and the Persian Question* was explicitly political, a sphere within which Curzon credited women with little influence or relevance, thus decisively diverging from the Greco-Roman trope of the politically powerful Iranian woman.[950]

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[943] Brosius, (1996), 1, 109.

[944] Curzon, (1892), I, 15.

[945] Curzon, (1892), I, 114; II, 282.

[946] Curzon, (1892), II, 202.

Bird’s views on gender in Iran provide an important counterpoint to the male travelogue writers as, apart from Wills in his medical capacity, she was at least theoretically able to mix more freely with women she encountered during her travels. Wills considered the clothing of elite women to be 'highly indecent' because 'the breasts and chest are very visible, and the abdomen is quite bare,' concluding that 'ladies of rank…have no shame of any kind, and display very redundant charms.'[951] The *hijab*, *niqab,* and *chador* were, however, not considered as modest, but rather characterised as ‘mysterious’ and providing a useful means of disguise, tying them to the Orientalist trope of intrigue occurring within women’s quarters.[952] That women consumed tobacco in the same manner as men, coupled with the popularity of opium smoking among older women, also elicited disapproval.[953] On one occasion, Wills makes positive comments about an unnamed woman's appearance, praising her 'soft brown eyes of a lustrousness only seen in the East.'[954] However, the travelogue more often tends to dispense crass jokes at women's expense, such as: 'Persian horses, like Persian women, age early; possibly they are ridden too young.'[955] Wills' writing on women therefore exhibits a disparaging tone while simultaneously reflecting the female 'Other' as a site of British heterosexual imagination.[956]

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[947] Layard, (1887); Curzon, (1892), I, 522.
[948] Curzon, (1892), II, 370.
[949] Ross, (2009), 392.
[950] Brosius, (1996), 2-3, 109-12.
[951] Wills, (1883), 322-4.
[952] Wills, (1883), 325.
[953] Wills, (1883), 334.

Wills focuses not only on female clothing itself, describing the ancient precedents for female trousers he had observed at the South Kensington Museum, but also on the etiquette surrounding female modesty, which he compares unfavourably with the standards of British women.[957] Bird, by contrast, offers a more measured view as to the relativity of the concept: 'The modesty of the women of one country must not be judged of by the rules of another… [an Iranian woman] would avert her eyes in horror by no means feigned from an English lady in a Court or evening dress of to-day.'[958] Yet beyond such general statements or descriptions of female missionaries and their charges, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* discourse on women was dominated by Bird's fascination with Semiramis; a semi-mythical Assyrian queen who, according to both Greco-Roman and Iranian mythology, waged a war of conquest across Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and Iran.[959] Though clearly inspired by the historical Shammuramat, the wife of Shamshi-Adad V and mother of Adad-Nirari III, for whom she served as regent during his minority from 811-806 BCE, the Semiramis described by Diodorus functioned as a more generic archetype for the powerful, and thus dangerous, royal woman of the East.[960] The literary presentation of prominent Achaemenid women such as

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[954] Wills, (1883), 103.
[955] Wills, (1883), 103, 219.
[956] Tavakoli-Targhi, (2001), 61.
[957] Wills, (1883), 325.
[958] Bird, (1891), I, 216.
[959] Bird, (1891), I, 85, 122, 131; II, 338.
[960] Stronk, (2017), 14.

Atossa, Parysatis, Artemisia; as well as Tomyris, the Scythian queen who resisted Cyrus, all embody some of the traits found in the figure of Semiramis.[961] As Sykes was apt to do with Alexander, Bird tied numerous historical sites she visited to Semiramis, drawing not only from her reading of Diodorus but also, occasionally, from local folklore. This was the case at Van in Armenia, which the residents regarded as the foundation of the mythical queen, who had dubbed it 'Shemiramagerd'.[962] This pairing of Greco-Roman sources with Iranian folklore also occurs at Kangavar in Kermanshah province, where Bird wrote that 'some traditions regarding Semiramis are localised there, and it is supposed to be on the site of Pancobar, where she erected a temple to Anaitis or Artemis,' in fact the goddess Anahita first attested to in the epigraphy of the later-Achaemenid period.[963] Bird's tendency to fold Semiramis into her general historical narrative, such as when she juxtaposed the 'relics of Semiramis and the fire-temples of the Magi,' becomes more problematic when it obscured her perspective on important sites. Bird describes Bisitun, for example, as the erstwhile 'pleasure grounds of Semiramis', while ignoring its important ideological function for the Achaemenid and Sassanian dynasties.[964] This reflects both Bird's adherence to the Greco-Roman sources, as authoritative guides to the ancient world, and the potential for a traveller's personal fascinations to undermine the relevance and accuracy of their observations.

Sykes' writing on gender relations in late-Qajar Iran is as scant as Curzon's, and largely relates to the time his sister, Ella C. Sykes, spent with him. Her own journey also led to the publication of a travelogue, *Through Persia on a Side Saddle*, in 1898.[965] Though it clearly drew inspiration from Bird's earlier account, and attempted to ape its style, it was produced under drastically different circumstances. Ella typically travelled with a large team of porters and as many as fifty camels, laden with food, clothing, and luxury items including a porcelain tea service and English silverware.[966] She also had access to her brother's wide array of contacts and benefited from his protection, which further ensured the ease of her travel through Iran. If anything, it was Percy himself who seems to have constrained Ella's freedom within Iran, according to Ella even barricading her in her bedroom 'for her own protection'.[967] Percy Sykes contradicts this in his own travelogue, claiming that, when they were both in the company of Iranians, he did not attempt to maintain the cultural norms of gender segregation: 'I thought that its observance would only widen the gap between East and West, a gulf that I was anxious, even if in a very small way, to bridge over.'[968] This accords with Sykes' general view, namely that 'social intercourse between East and West was no longer a thing to be reprobated,' but rather actively encouraged, primarily so that Iranians might acquaint themselves with, and be civilised by, European habits and ideas.[969] When not actively travelling, Ella seems to have been principally occupied with organising her brother's household, an illuminating example, particularly in the context of Qajar Iran, of what Henes describes as 'imperial femininity'; namely the integral role played by women in the everyday maintenance of empire and the disparaging views they often formed as a result of close interaction with native servants.[970] Sykes' desire to overcome gender segregation, with regards to his sister, unwittingly reflected increasing debate, among Iranian intellectuals, about the potential benefits of greater emancipation and education for women, who could then play an active role in the 'restoration of the nation.'[971]

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[961] Llewellyn-Jones, (2013), 64, 148.

[962] Bird, (1891), II, 338.

[963] Bird, (1891), I, 131; I.C. Méndez, 'Anahita and Mithra in the Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions' in *Anahita: Ancient Persian Goddess and Zoroastrian Yazata,* P. Nabarz (ed.), (London, 2012), 41-2.

[964] Bird, (1891). I, 85, 122.

[965] Sykes, (1902), 176.

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[966] E.C.C. Sykes, *Through Persia on a Side Saddle,* (London, 1898).

[967] Henes, (2012), 74-5; Sykes (1898).

[968] Sykes, (1902), 202.

[969] Sykes, (1902), 424.

[970] Henes, (2012), 81-2, 142.

[971] A. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity,* (Berkeley CA, 2005), 124-7.

Just as it was fading from the interest of British writers, the topics of sexuality and gender rights were becoming increasingly prominent in the writings of Iranians, including in their own travelogues. For example, I'timad al-Saltanah recounts how members of Naser al-Din's harem appeared unveiled in public for the first time, on a horseback excursion from Tehran in October 1895.[972] As a conservative advocate for gender segregation and veiling, he was horrified by additional breaches of etiquette: 'no servant preceded them and no eunuch followed in their wake.'[973] He subsequently interpreted the event as proof of the moral decline of the Qajar household. I'timad al-Saltanah also regarded the comparatively free behaviour and dress of European women visiting the court to be evidence of the weak morals and uncivilised nature of their home countries, recalling disparaging commentary on English women in Iranian travelogue literature, such as Gamrudi's *Shabnamah.*[974] Taj al-Saltanah, a Qajar princess whose memoir of life in the harem is one of the more widely-known Iranian sources from the late-Qajar period, took a diametrically opposite view. In her conception, both veiling and gender-segregation hindered reform, ensured the continuation of rural poverty (through the exclusion of half the workforce), encouraged corruption (as officials apparently stole to provide their wives with luxuries) and generally weakened the morals of the nation.[975] Haideh Moghissi has stressed that the tactic of unveiling as a form of female-initiated protest thus has clear precedents in late-19th Century Iran; the approach of 'shocking' the 'guardians of morality' remaining a core component of contemporary protests against the Islamic Republic.[976] Ibrahim Sahhafbashi's *Safarnamah* further underlines this growing trend of reconsidering gender, as his travels through Europe and North America prompted examination of his own biases. Referring to Iranians as ‘we stupid people’, he criticised the misogyny of both his countrymen and himself: ‘we think that men are preferable over women, and we look down at all the women of the world with disdain.’[977] This self-reflection was prompted by his inept attempt to ride a bicycle while in Yokohama, Japan: having observed women using them in America he assumed it required little skill, but was quickly disabused of this upon swiftly hitting the ground.

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[972] P. Sprachman, 'The Poetics of Hijāb in the Satire of Īraj Mīrzā' in *Iran and Iranian Studies,* K. Eslami (ed.), (Princeton NJ, 1998), 343.

[973] I'timad al-Saltanah: quoted from Sprachman, (1998), 343.

[974] Sohrabi, (2012), 65-7.

[975] Taj al-Saltanah, *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess,* A. Amanat (ed.), trans. A. Vanzan and A. Neshati, (Washington DC, 1993), 95, 285, 290.

[976] H. Moghissi, 'Rethinking Women's Rights in Iran's Modern and anti-Modern Social Engineering Projects', Mapping the Role of Intellectuals in Modern and Contemporary Iranian History: conference, SOAS, University of London, (1. Dec 2018).

I’timad al-Saltanah’s reference to absent eunuchs reflected their declining presence in within the Qajar harem, principally due to the loss of Georgia and other peripheral Caucasian territories, through the Treaty of Turkmenchay.[978] While laden with formulaic assertions that Manuchehr Khan was ‘cruel and unscrupulous’, ‘crafty’ and ‘cunning’ due to his very nature, Layard is also somewhat unique among British travelogue writers of Qajar Iran for his description of repeated encounters with a eunuch in a position of meaningful power.[979] This reflects how gender relations, and the practices of the court, also shifted in response to the influence of European norms.[980] There was a trend to greater heterosocialisation while sexual relationships between men became increasingly taboo, regarded as symptomatic of Iran’s inability to achieve parity with the demonstrably heterosexual West, where men and women mixed comparatively freely and homosexuality, supposedly, did not exist. Iraj Mirza, poet and Qajar official, went so far as to explicitly draw a connection between homosociality and pederasty in Iran.[981] As demonstrated in early Qajar painting, feminine characteristics were considered beautiful in male adolescents, or *amrads*. These youths were not considered effeminate but, rather, occupied a transitional state before manhood. This was heralded by the growing of a full beard, whereafter the youth ceased to be considered a socially acceptable object of male desire.[982] That Mozaffar ad-Din's homosexual relationships were utilised, by the Constitutionalists, as a major justification to oust him as Shah, demonstrates how pervasive the change in attitudes had been within just a few decades.[983] However, Iranians who adopted European manners and clothing wholesale also faced accusations of effeminacy from traditionalists, derided as foppish *fukuli* (derived from *faux col*, French collar) and accused of being *gharbzādeh* ('struck by the West', a Europhile).[984] The drive towards hetero-normalisation, in line with European standards, and the gradual disappearance of eunuchs from positions of influence, may partially account for the waning interest in the subject of gender and sexuality within British travelogues. As Iran increasingly approximated European norms, or at least aspired and attempted to, there was less notable divergence to be observed.

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[977] Sahhafbashi Tehrani, (1978), 89: quoted from Sohrabi, (2012), 121.

[978] Amanat, (2017), 211-5.

[979] Layard, (1887), 217, 220, 252.

[980] Najmabadi, (2005), 22-3.

[981] Sprachman, (1998), 342.

Waning British interest in gender is further illustrated by the fact that, despite adhering closely to the other tropes, there is surprisingly little on the supposed effeminacy of Iranian men contained in Curzon's travelogue. Certain ethnic minorities, particularly the Kurds and Turkmen, are described as 'masculine' and 'uncomplicated', in contrast to the urban Iranian populations, but there is little elaboration on this point and the assertion appears so frequently in earlier travelogues, that Curzon's allusions appear formulaic, particularly as he had virtually no contact with these communities.[985] The description which most closely aligns with the Greco-Roman effeminacy trope is the characterisation of the average Iranian soldier as 'docile and supple', particularly when compared with the 'stubborn and self-reliant' Azeris, who he considered more masculine due to their Turkic ethnicity. The Azeris constituted the elite core of the Qajar army, which Curzon regarded as better equipped to withstand Russian encroachment than the ‘lethargic peoples of Khorasan’, his constant concern throughout *Persia and the Persian Question.*[986] Iranian soldiery similarly provided examples of ‘unmanly’ behaviour for Layard, however, in the case of *Early Adventures*, this related explicitly to their personal behaviour rather than intrinsic racial attributes: ‘[they were] a dissolute and debauched set of fellows [who] feasted, drank arak, and spent most of their time, half-drunk, in listening to music and watching dancing boys and girls…[they] disgusted me so greatly.'[987] Curzon even applied a racial rationale to explain the rule of the Qajars themselves, who supposedly owed ‘a manliness, amounting almost to a brusqueness of bearing that is uncommon in the smooth and polished Persian’ to their Turkic heritage, which also manifested itself in a love of hunting and stubborn resistance to European reforms.[988] Curzon stresses that the docility of the Iranian troops was mitigated by serving under British officers, but this was later undermined due to the aforementioned cowardice and general laxity of the Qajar officers who replaced them.[989] Without adequate leadership, this rendered the troops, in Curzon’s unflattering summation, ‘poor wretches, who were about as like what one ordinarily associates with the idea of a soldier as a costermonger’s donkey is like the winner of the Derby.’[990] This influenced Curzon’s general view of Iran, which he considered ‘feeble as an ally and impotent as a foe,’ with the ‘national manhood’ decayed if not utterly extinct.[991] His figurative characterisation of Iran is employed for specific rhetorical effect, while inadvertently paralleling a growing ideological trend among the emergent Iranian nationalist movement. They, however, conceived of a feminine *mādar vatan* (motherhomeland), to whom they pledged their love and fidelity, and who was described as crying out for the aid of a ‘strong man’.[992] While the last point chimed with Sykes’ regard for the stabilising effect of Naser al-Din Shah’s rule, and his belief in the need for a ‘strongman ruler’ to ameliorate the later upheaval of the Constitutional Revolution, Curzon doubted that such men were to be found in Iran. Though he, notably, devoted less attention to the subject than previous travelogue writers, Curzon thus remained broadly under the influence of the long-standing tropes of effeminacy and decadence.

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[982] Najmabadi, (2005), 15-17.

[983] Najmabadi, (2005), 24.

[984] Najmabadi, (2005), 8, 140-1.

[985] Curzon, (1892), II, 99, 143, 207, 271.

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[986] Curzon, (1892), I, 524-8.
[987] Layard, (1887), 284
[988] Curzon, (1892), I, 395.
[989] Curzon, (1892), I, 579.
[990] Curzon, (1892), I, 130.
[991] Curzon, (1892), II, 393, 630.

Sykes’ travelogue, similarly, presents few reflections on the effeminacy of men in late-Qajar Iran, demonstrating he was less influenced by this trope than other travelogue writers, except for Browne who ignored it altogether. There are passing references to the effeteness of the Sassanian and Achaemenid dynasties, though it is not clarified whether this is intended to denote their effeminacy or, rather, their inability to adapt themselves to counter new challenges and avoid decline.[993] The Iranians, generally, are not characterised by Sykes as being any less masculine than their European counterparts. Assertions about the manliness of nomads or ethnic minorities, in contrast to the urban populations, are also generally absent, with a description of the Lashari tribe in Baluchistan as ‘wild specimens of humanity… manly and cheerful’ representing the solitary exception.[994] However, rather than prompting comparison with the urban Iranians, as occurred in many earlier travelogues, this description is employed to contrast the Lashari favourably with the other Baluchi tribes, who Sykes considered particularly primitive and dangerous. Whether relating to the status and behaviour of Iranian women or the perceived effeminacy and homosexual tendencies of Iranian men, the travelogues of Curzon, Browne, and Sykes demonstrate the declining trend in explicit adherence to these tropes. By the beginning of the 20th Century the ‘Orient’, as epitomised by

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[992] Najmabadi, (2005), 117.
[993] Sykes, (1902), 50.
[994] Sykes, (1902), 120.

Iran, had lost much of the mystique which had once rendered the harem, its inhabitants, and indeed the entire nation, a fantastical sphere of sexual licence and decadence for earlier generations of British travel writers.

Summary: Diverging Visions

The travelogues of Curzon, Browne, and Sykes deal more directly and explicitly with the political issues surrounding late-Qajar Iran, and its relationship with Britain, than previous examples. All three are also, in differing ways, indicative of ‘imperial anxiety’ as the British empire entered its final Century. *Persia and the Persian Question*, as both the longest and most encyclopaedic of these travelogues, exhibits most clearly the effects of overreliance on Greco-Roman sources as the fundamental bedrock for understanding Iran. Curzon not only absorbed the classical tropes associated with the Iranians, believing in an unchanging national character, but further reinforced them by binding them to contemporary conceptions of essential racial characteristics. His predilection for categorising the supposedly intractable differences between ethnic groups in Asia, the hallmark of an aspiring imperial administrator, endured throughout Curzon’s career, leading to his most controversial and, ultimately, disastrous action as Viceroy of India: the 1905 partition of Bengal along sectarian lines.[995] As for Iran, Curzon did not deem material progress impossible, but was convinced it could only succeed under the close oversight and tutelage of the British empire, who he believed needed to aggressively secure its Indian frontier through the ‘forward position’ against Russian threats, both real and imagined. This led him to condemn the Tobacco Protests and subsequently the Constitutional movement for their destabilisation of the Qajar monarchy; while lamenting the supposed political apathy and intellectual torpor of the Iranians.[996] Not only did reliance on stereotyping distort the actual conditions in Qajar Iran, but it equally obscured the accelerating pace of change. In the conclusion of the text, following an extensive list of contradictory characteristics he had supposedly observed in the Iranians, Curzon stresses to the reader: 'above all we must remember that the ways of Orientals are not our ways, nor their thoughts our thoughts.'[997] The gulf between East and West, Oriental and Occidental, was thus supposedly as unbridgeable, and fundamentally Manichean, as it had been when Xerxes waged war upon the Greeks or Shapur humiliated Valerian and his legions at Edessa. As a self-appointed heir to the classical legacy and representative of the British imperial project, which consciously associated itself with the imperium of Rome in the context of India and the Gulf, Curzon purposefully denigrated and remained aloof from a culture which he regarded as its antithesis.

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[995] A.F. Madden and J. Darwin, *Select Documents on the Constitutional History of the British Empire and Commonwealth: The Dominions and India,* (London, 1993), VI, 660.

Browne took the opposite approach to Curzon, immersing himself in the language and culture of Iran and building relationships with various groups and individuals. Due to his continued readership in Iran, and the efforts of British and other Western scholars to find in him an example of a 'good' Orientalist, Browne's intellectual legacy has also endured beyond any of the other travelogue writers of the late-Qajar period.[998] He was unusual both in his linguistic abilities and his concerted deviation from pervasive stereotyping; failing to see anything uniquely cowardly, corrupt, or dishonest in the Iranian character, and making no comment at all on Iranian gender roles or sexuality. There is, however, a degree of alignment in Browne's fascination with the Babi movement and his sympathy for the violent repression they suffered, resulting in disdain for Naser al-Din and the despotic rule of the Qajars. Yet there are also clearly problematic elements in Browne's portrayal of Iran. The influence of de

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[996] Curzon, (1892), I, 435.
[997] Curzon, (1892), II, 630.
[998] Ross, (2009), 396.

Gobineau's racial 'science' led to his idolisation of any aspects of the country's history he considered Aryan, whilst casting the Turkic dynasties as a deviation from the rightful order; ignoring the reality that the Iranian plateau has been a complex multi-ethnic patchwork for millennia. Browne also demonstrates a clear bias towards religious eccentrics, and the minority faith communities of Iran, which led to a dismissive attitude towards the mainstream practices of Shi'ism. In the context of the British empire this led to a tendency to identify favoured minorities for roles within imperial administration. Though these biases undermined Browne's understanding of the broader trends of Iranian history, and diminished his recognition of its heterogeneous nature, they did not dilute his open and sympathetic attitude to the people he encountered, who he unselfconsciously considered his 'friends'.[999] Browne's support for the Tobacco Protests set him squarely at odds with the British imperial establishment represented by Curzon and the Iran correspondents for *The Times*. Unable to impugn the scholar's academic credentials, they sought instead to stymie his influence and cast him as overly idealistic and naïve. By approaching Iran with a comparatively open mind and sympathetic attitude towards its people, Browne managed to present a truly alternative view to mainstream British imperial discourse. While much scholarship identifies Browne as initiating an anti-imperialist discourse in Iran, it is crucial to stress that, as with so much of the intellectual innovation in the late-Qajar period, it evolved from the engagement with, translation, and adaptation of his ideas by Iranians themselves.

Sykes' *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia* presents useful insight into both the continuity and diminution of certain tropes regarding the Iranians, with more contemporary developments such as 'scientific racism', and the defence of British imperial interests, playing an increasing role. Sykes' idolisation of Browne influenced his self-portrayal in the travelogue, casting himself as an expert in everything pertaining to Iran, from history and archaeology to contemporary politics, architecture, and geography. His ability to converse fluently in Persian certainly facilitated a greater degree of engagement and nuance in his travelogue than Curzon's. However other biases, such as belief in the superiority of the Aryan ethnicity, coupled with his experience of expeditions against the tribes in Baluchistan or among the heterogeneous populations of Shushtar and the Karun Valley, hardened his disdain for those he did not consider 'pure Iranians.'[1000] Sykes was also primarily a careerist and, much as Curzon's travelogues were considered his unofficial application for Viceroy of India, *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia* emphasises its author's credentials as an 'expert' and, thus, suitable for higher diplomatic office in Iran.[1001] Unlike Curzon however, whose distaste for his time in Iran is evident in his writing, Sykes consistently portrayed himself as a 'friend' of the country with its best interests at heart. This is indicative of an insidious shift in imperial propaganda which took place during the second half of the 19th Century. Military incursions or outright colonialism were no longer undertaken, officially at least, for economic or strategic gain, but for the 'benefit' of native populations, their 'deliverance from slavery' and their 'instruction in civilisation.'[1002] Echoes of this can still be observed in British foreign policy through to the 21st Century. When Sykes began his imperial career, Iran along with much of the rest of the world was no longer shrouded in mystery or romance, as the deluge of increasingly formulaic and often unflattering British travel writing attests. The shift to a paternalistic imperial perspective, coupled with supreme self-confidence, led Sykes to believe he could comprehend both the nature of the Iranians and all the challenges facing them. His judgement regarding their best chance of progress belied any spurious profession of friendship, namely the consolidation of British influence and de-facto colonisation of the economy, thus rendering Iran a protectorate in all but name.

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[999] Browne, (1893), 475.

[1000] Sykes, (1902), 198.
[1001] Harrison, (2011), 107.
[1002] Gopal, (2020), 80-2.

These three highly influential travelogues display evidence of stereotyped conceptualisations of Iran, which to varying degrees hindered their ability to fully appreciate and engage with the actual and nuanced conditions of the ‘contact zone.’ It is thus vital to assess how their cross-cultural encounters with the Iranian ‘Other’ took place, the British dissection of the ‘Persian character’ through fact and fiction, and ultimately the dialogic nature of change in late-Qajar Iran.

4. Facing the 'Other': Fact, Fiction, and Stereotype

'And strange to tell, among the Earthen Lot
Some could articulate, while others not;
And suddenly one more impatient cried –
"Who is the Potter, pray, and who the Pot?"'[1003]

The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, 'translated' by Edward Fitzgerald

Travelogues, to employ Radhika Seshan's phrase, create a 'landscape of imagination' which incorporates fictitious elements, fragments of historical memory, and pre-existing stories, mutually reinforcing each other.[1004] For example, Herodotus' description of gold-digging ants in the East and the widespread Greco-Roman assertions of the overwhelming wealth of the Achaemenids seemed to be confirmed by what the first English travellers in Safavid Iran encountered; and later stoked adherence to a 'decline narrative' when Victorian travellers observed widespread poverty or famine in the Qajar period.[1005] The Greco-Roman sources constituted an influential feature of this 'landscape', but were not alone in creating expectations of what Iran would hold for travellers. As travel writers traversed the 'contact zone', they occupied multiple roles as they passed from the familiar to the unfamiliar: traveller, eyewitness, and storyteller.[1006] This rendered their travelogues simultaneously a 'tale' as well as an 'account', representing the fundamental tension of treating them as historical sources.[1007] The symbiotic relationship between travel writing and fiction makes gauging objective facts difficult, while travel writers themselves feared being dismissed as a ’travel liar’.[1008] Seshan’s conceptualisation of the ‘travel lie’ is closely connected to the intertextuality observable in travelogues, as ‘travel carries with it much baggage, and not just of the material variety. One part of this baggage is truth.’[1009] The influence of previous travelogues, and the reactions to them, comprise a core element of this baggage.

[1003] E. Fitzgerald, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, (Oxford, 2010), LX, 46.

[1004] R. Seshan, *The Construction of the East in Western Travel Narratives,* (Abingdon, 2020), 92.

[1005] Hdt. 3.102-5.

[1006] Pratt, (1992), 8.

[1007] Seshan, (2020), 3-5, 80.

These travelogues strive to appear candid and record honest reactions, yet self-censorship and retrospective editing easily obscures events and realigns their details to adhere to the author’s own biases and self-image. There is often a failure to rigorously record names and places which, coupled with the wide variation in transliterations from Persian and the variable language skills of the writers, makes it difficult to definitively attribute quotations and determine the exact detail or chronology of events. Practical factors such as illness, fatigue, and discomfort, all inevitable aspects of travel in this period, were also liable to accentuate or obscure the reporting of events. Travelogues themselves also vary widely in tone and style; from Layard’s novelistic adventure or the meticulous travel diary of Bird, to Curzon’s encyclopaedic work, where the travel sections are secondary to the author’s discourse on Iranian politics, history, and culture. These factors render travelogues inherently unreliable for historical research of the Qajar period which is in part why this study confines its inquiry to dissecting and analysing the mentalities they contain.[1010] This chapter explores British engagement with the Iranian ‘Other’ through the alignment of travel writing and fiction, recognising the significant influence of literature on the perpetuation and consolidation of stereotypes. *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* by J.J. Morier epitomises this trend and has thus been selected as a case study to examine its key role in transmitting stereotypes to future travelogue writers. Determining who has ‘voice’ in these texts is crucial as, in both travel writing and fiction, the ‘voice’ of the ‘Other’ is often adapted, abridged, discarded entirely, or rendered unintelligible due to linguistic barriers. This chapter thus concludes with an assessment of the growth in Iranian travel and travelogue writing, and the intellectual engagement with modernity which resulted. This challenges British assertions regarding the stagnant, quiescent nature of late-Qajar Iran; instead emphasising the dialogic nature of encountering the ‘Other.’

[1008] B. Colber and G. Hambrook, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, *Comparative Critical Studies* 4 no.2, (2007), 165-75.
[1009] Seshan, (2020), 5.
[1010] Sancisi-Weerdenburg, (1991), 31.

4.1 – Intertextuality, Veracity, and ‘Voice’: Tales and Travelogues

Travel in Asia in the late-19th Century was increasingly formalised, evolving into a travel itinerary not dissimilar to the European 'Grand Tour’.[1011] Though more pronounced with regards to India and Burma, it is also observable in travelogues of Iran, where certain cities, routes, and historical sites start to appear repeatedly as destinations, a trend further reinforced by the growing volume of travel writing.[1012] This led to the growth of the travel guide as a genre, such as the widely used *The Art of Travel* by Francis Galton, who had built a reputation upon his own travels in West Africa.[1013] This guide contained not only practical advice on travelling equipment and supplies but also interspersed commentary on the manners of the ‘Others’ that might be encountered. The popularity of the travelogue genre itself in Britain was particularly encouraged by two men: Richard Francis Burton and Henry Morton Stanley. Burton’s journeys, in search of the source of the Nile and to Mecca, drew interest immediate interest due to the novelty of his intended destinations. Travelling to Mecca disguised as an Arab was particularly perceived as a ‘victory’ over the superstitious and xenophobic Muslim ‘Other’ through impersonation, penetrating to the heart of what had once been mysterious and taboo.[1014] Stanley's highly publicised journey up the Congo river meanwhile, depicted as pushing the boundaries of knowledge, was in fact calculated to distract from the rapid covert construction of rubber harvesting infrastructure and the manipulative extraction of treaties from the Congolese tribes at the behest of Leopold II of Belgium.[1015] While Burton was primarily motivated by his own desire to push physical and intellectual boundaries, and Stanley was directly employed in the service of a (then clandestine) colonial project, both men's travels, and subsequent publications, were directly facilitated by the circumstances of empire.[1016] Regardless of their attitudes and respective biases, the travelogues of Curzon, Browne, and Sykes were equally inextricably linked to the experience of empire, with the entire genre requiring further analysis in this regard.

[1011] Seshan, (2020), 69.

[1012] Henes, (2012), 87, 158.

[1013] F. Galton, *The Art of Travel,* (London, 1872), vii.

Travelogues thrived in the climate of imperial anxiety from the 1880s onward because they were inherently connected with the contemporary experience of empire; with travel acting as a soft conquest which quantified and contextualised the previously unknown and unobserved. Assessing this phenomenon prior to 1800, Seshan describes how travelogues had 'mapped this journey from the exotic to the pedestrian, from the wonderful to the disgusting, to be subsumed into colonial formations and colonial writings,' aligning with Dabashi's identification of a trajectory from 'Persophilia' to 'Persophobia' in 19th Century British discourse.[1017] As the century waned, travel writing became increasingly commodified and the purpose of travel itself shifted. Expansion of knowledge became less central with more travelling purely for pleasure, work within the imperial structure, or in the hopes of concocting their own adventure-laden travelogue for sale upon their return. According to Sancisi-Weerdenburg, this had a marked impact on the travelogues produced: 'the tone becomes on the whole less learned, personal experiences get more emphasis, and in general the visitors are less well prepared and have read less of the earlier literature on the subject.'[1018] This trend aligned with the growing prevalence of 'aesthetic orientalism' in travelogues, where impressionistic and metaphysically-tinged descriptions gradually replaced more meticulously descriptive accounts. Intertextuality was thus increasingly a potentially limiting factor: relying upon what others had previously seen or experienced reduced the need to see it oneself or form original opinions.

[1014] Gopal, (2020), 137; Harrison, (2011), 107.
[1015] Pratt, (1992), 206.
[1016] Mackenzie, (1984), 32-3.
[1017] Seshan, (2020), 83; Dabashi, (2015), 8, 173, 205.

Bird's *Travels in Persia and Kurdistan* is emblematic of this evolution. Her journey, though certainly arduous, was undertaken for her own pleasure. It foreshadowed the proliferation of travelogues which recounted formulaic itineraries, rendering mundane what had once been considered marvellous and contextualising it through reference to histories and travelogues. Bird conceded of her travel writing process that 'I have no books of reference with me and can seldom write except of such things as I see and hear,' indicating she was well-versed enough with Greco-Roman sources to provide spontaneous discourse on the ancient history of the areas of Iran she visited, or alternatively that they were edited in or extended following her return to Britain.[1019] The former may well be the case, as Bird was classically educated and also keenly aware of more recent developments in the British comprehension of ancient Iranian history.[1020] *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* recounts several occasions, particularly around Hamadan, when Bird observed ruins and stone tablets which had been recorded by Henry Rawlinson and Layard, praising both for their instrumental efforts in the decipherment of cuneiform.[1021] Bird also referenced following the same route that Rawlinson had taken in 1836, underlining her admiration for the 'pioneer of

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[1018] Sancisi-Weerdenburg, (1991), 31.

[1019] Bird, (1891), I, 60.

[1020] J.M. Scarce, 'Isabella Bird Bishop and her Travels in Persia and Kurdistan in 1890', *Iranian Studies* 44 no.2, (Mar. 2011), 244.

[1021] Bird, (1891), I, 85, 154.

Assyriology.'[1022] Engagement with earlier travelogues thus provided Bird with 'expert' validation for her pronouncements on archaeology and history, while simultaneously continuing to burnish the reputations of those earlier travellers who had traversed Iran as 'imperial agents'. Her journey in turn was lauded for its scope and courage and, as Henes has demonstrated, proved particularly inspirational for subsequent female British travellers in Iran, from Ella Sykes to Mary Hume-Griffith and Freya Stark.[1023]

Accounts by earlier travellers were highly influential on Curzon and he relied particularly heavily on Albert Houtum-Schindler, who had worked for the Indo-European Telegraph, Imperial Bank, and various mining operations, as a key informant to supplement his own impressions of Iran.[1024] Curzon was scathing of what he deemed 'lightweight texts', considering publications on Iran to include 'some of the most worthless rubbish that ever blundered into print.'[1025] He was, however, an unabashed admirer of Layard's writings, describing *Early Adventures* specifically as 'one of the most romantic narratives of adventure ever penned, and so rich in incident that one is at a loss to understand why the author should have delayed its publication for forty years.' [1026] The fact that Curzon described Layard's presence among the Bakhtiari Lurs as 'accidental' indicates he was either unaware of Layard's covert objectives or, more likely, that he was happy to maintain the deception that his proximity to the uprising of Mehmet Taqi Khan and the Bakhtiari had been 'mere coincidence'. Though Curzon complimented Layard's 'gifts of insight and style' and praised *Early Adventures* for being 'absorbing', these comments highlight another facet of Layard's travelogue which faced criticism.[1027] As well as distorting the political dimension of his travels in Iran, *Early Adventures* received criticism from Layard's British contemporaries for its tendency to 'novelise' events; the author casting himself in the role of heroic adventurer, perpetually escaping danger and confounding the intrigues of hostile forces. One lengthy anonymous review cited the tendency towards 'book-making' as a major flaw in Layard's writing generally, claiming that 'gossip of the most trivial character is mixed up with the accounts of his discoveries,' diluting the veracity of the whole.[1028] This criticism is not only applicable to Layard. As travel writing became more popular, there was greater pressure from editors to sensationalise or entirely reshape travelogues, often to approximate the structure of a novel.[1029] Layard's *Early Adventures* clearly demonstrates the intersection of fiction, specifically the novel format, with travel writing and the resulting tensions between veracity and telling a good story. Bizarrely, Curzon also praises Wills' travelogue for providing 'vivid and entertaining representations of life and customs in modern Iran' and utilises his travelogue as a key source, despite repeatedly criticising him for inaccuracy.[1030] Thus, one of the key methodological flaws in the construction of *Persia and the Persian Question* was the extensive use of potentially unreliable second-hand information, similar to Curzon's reliance on Greco-Roman sources such as Curtius or Diodorus, which he himself conceded were highly unreliable.[1031] Curzon credited Bird's travelogue, published soon after her return to Britain, with containing 'much novel and interesting information', particularly regarding the Bakhtiari and Kurds with whom he had little interaction.[1032] A direct chain of transmission of ideas can be observed between these three preceding travelogues and *Persia and the Persian Question;* which compressed, homogenised and decontextualised their experiences, and those of many others, under the auspices of creating the 'definitive' work on Iran. The subsummation of these earlier texts did not go unnoticed by his critics; a review in the *Sunday Sun* mocked Curzon for being 'under the impression that he has discovered Persia [and] he now in some way mysteriously owns it,' while characterising *Persia and the Persian Question* itself as 'a dull book on one of the most interesting subjects in the world.'[1033] Dull or not, its two encyclopaedic volumes saturated the market for British works on Persia in the 1890s, leaving Browne's travelogue to more slowly gain a domestic readership in the decade preceding the Constitutional Revolution, in the context of which it then gained wider attention.[1034] As late as 1918, as Curzon was preparing the 'Anglo-Persian Agreement' which would consolidate Iran's status as a British protectorate, Browne was still endorsing *Persia and the Persian Question* as 'by far the best general work on the subject and a monument of careful research and wide erudition.'[1035] This again underlines that though Browne was willing to critique specific aspects of Persia policy and make his own counter-proposals, he was ultimately unwilling to confront the biggest proponent of British imperial control over Iran.

[1022] Bird, (1891), I, 84.

[1023] Sykes, (1898); Henes, (2012), 69, 115, 242.

[1024] Wright, (1987), 346.

[1025] Curzon, (1892), I, 15.

[1026] Curzon, (1892), II, 290, 339.

[1027] Curzon, (1892), I, 409, 413.

[1028] *Dublin University Magazine,* (1849), 427-8.

[1029] Pratt, (1992), 86-7.

[1030] Curzon, (1892), I, 418.

[1031] Curzon, (1892), I, 564; II, 79, 81, 188.

[1032] Curzon, (1892), I, 22-24; II, 283, 300.

Sykes similarly criticised the flimsy travelogues characteristic of the earlier 19th Century, stating they had often judged Iran too harshly as they 'rushed hastily through the country, have not learned Persian, have engaged some scoundrel as servant, and have encountered many difficulties at the post-houses. It would be equally fair to judge of Paris or London by the surliness of its cabbies!'[1036] Despite Sykes' publicly fawning attitude towards Curzon, such accusations could be levelled directly at *Persia and the Persian Question*, and echo Browne's assertions regarding the superficiality of impressions formed by other British travellers.[1037] Curzon's reaction to Sykes' travelogue vacillated between satisfaction at the esteem and deference he was shown in the text and annoyance at Sykes clear borrowing from *Persia and the Persian Question,* particularly in terms of quotations.[1038] The conclusion of Sykes' travelogue, signed off with 'all good wishes to my many Persian friends' draws further contrast between himself and Curzon, though both were equally committed imperialists.[1039] Sykes however represents an evolution of imperial mentalities; pragmatically oriented while intent on being seen as a 'friend' of Persia in direct imitation of Browne, which was also somewhat prefigured in Wills' travelogue.

[1033] 'A Dull Book about Persia', *Sunday Sun,* (5. June 1892), 7.
[1034] Bosworth, (1995), 115.
[1035] E.G. Browne, 'Hope for Persia: The New British Policy', *Manchester Guardian,* (26. Jan 1918)
[1036] Wills, (1883), 391, 457.
[1037] Browne, (1893), 91.

Though certainly influenced by stereotypes and holding the Iranians to be resolutely 'Other', Wills' lengthy residence in Iran allowed him to form some bonds of friendship and appreciate more positive aspects of his time there. For example, he described an unnamed *farash bashi* as his 'best friend among the Persians' and warmly commended the 'true hospitality' he received at a prestigious garden party in Tehran; thus, providing a more balanced, if fleeting, view of the Persians.[1040] Wills also explicitly distanced himself from the more extreme and reductive views of some of his countrymen. This is observable in his description of a young 'Mr P---', presumably a junior diplomat he encountered at Tehran: 'This youth had a very high idea of the dignity of the Englishman, and looked on the Persians as 'niggers.''[1041] Wills mocked this figure by describing how, having failed to rise courteously upon the arrival of the Zil es-Sultan, the arrogant youth jumped to his feet in fear upon the arrival of the Mirza's pet bear, prompting laughter from both Wills and the *Mirza*.[1042] Despite holding his own dismissive, derivative, and stereotyped views of the Persians, Wills evidently wished to distinguish himself from the likes of 'Mr P---' and appear insightful and tolerant by comparison. Though refusing to meaningfully engage with either the language or literature of Iran, which he considered inferior to the European canon, it appears that Wills became more accustomed to, and tolerant of, certain aspects of life in Iran.[1043] Layard, Bird, and Curzon, by contrast, refused to explicitly acknowledge any Iranians as friends, offering only vaguely benevolent 'wishes' for the future development of the country, which they presumed would entail greater British influence and modernisation along European lines.[1044] There is an inherent irony in the fact that Sykes' tenure in Iran was at a time of such encroachment that, though his expressions of fondness may have been heartfelt at times, his actions served solely British imperial interests. In the introduction to *Ten Thousand Miles in Persia,* Browne is foremost among the acknowledgements, while the text is dedicated to Curzon. [1045] This highlights the dichotomy of Sykes' relationship with Iran: historical and cultural curiosity coupled with an ingrained sense of imperial mission and personal career ambition, the epitome of an 'imperial agent' who 'made a career of the East'. Unlike Browne however, Sykes' writings did not resonate in Iran, rooted as they were in the British imperial milieu and its inherent prejudices, and are now largely forgotten both there and in Britain.

[1038] D. Wright, 'CURZON, George Nathaniel', *Encyclopedia Iranica,* Vol. VI, Fasc. 5, 465-470.
[1039] Sykes, (1902), 458.
[1040] WIlls, (1883), 111, 312-13.
[1041] Wills, (1883), 227.
[1042] Wills, (1883), 227.

Browne's openly inquisitive attitude to the Iranians made him, by his own assessment, the antithesis of British writers who had 'seen much of the outside of Asia without having learned in the least degree to understand or sympathise with its people.'[1046] *A Year Amongst the Persians* is both explicitly sympathetic and overwhelmingly positive, with Browne describing his travels as 'the pleasant year I spent in Persia.' He also reflects poignantly on his departure: 'It was with genuine regret that I turned for a moment before stepping into the boat to bid farewell to Persia (which, notwithstanding all her faults, I had come to love very dearly) ... Thus ended a journey to which, though fraught with fatigues and discomforts, and not wholly free from occasional vexations, I look back with almost unmixed satisfaction. For such fatigues and discomforts (and they were far fewer than might reasonably have been expected) I was amply compensated by an enlarged knowledge and experience, and a rich store of pleasant memories...'[1047] This paragraph alone, in its clear appreciation and affection for Iran, distinguishes Browne from much preceding British discourse. H. Nicolson, Curzon's assistant at the foreign office, wrote that his superior was also heavily impacted by his brief exposure to Iran and was 'forever haunted by those plains of amber, those peaks of amethyst, the dignity of that crumbled magnificence, that silence of two thousand years.'[1048] If Curzon did indeed yearn for this 'romantic Iran' in the decades after his journey, it was clearly neither the people nor their culture which held his attention or regard.

[1043] Amanat, (2004), x.

[1044] Layard, (1887); Bird, (1891), II, 396; Curzon, (1892), II, 634.

[1045] Sykes, (1902), x.

[1046] E.G. Browne, 'The Persian Crisis: a reply', *Fortnightly Review* 502, (1. Oct. 1908), 687.

Though clearly influenced by earlier writings on Iran, principally those of de Gobineau, Browne's travelogue is less tangibly intertextual with preceding British travelogues than those of Curzon or Sykes, again underlining his status as an outlier. Curzon and Sykes meanwhile contributed to the further intertextuality of British writing on Iran, not only through their own travelogues but also through patronage of the British Legation library in Tehran. It received donations from a range of British figures in Iran, including Morier, Henry Rawlinson, Percy Sykes, and particularly Curzon, who was prolific in his donations.[1049] Alongside numerous travelogues and histories were copies of Greco-Roman texts, specifically Herodotus' *Histories* and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and *Anabasis,* which remained integral to the British conception of the Achaemenid empire and the 'East' more widely. Even these sources, lauded through the public school system and venerated as the genesis of European culture, had a notably diminished impact on the British view of Iran in the 20th Century, when compared with the intertextual impact of the travelogues of the late-19th Century. The impact of this intense intertextuality is observable through the continued publication of British Iran travelogues which variously invoked the texts of Curzon, Browne, and Sykes as 'experts'. Robert Byron, whose travelogue *The Road to Oxiana* (1937) became highly regarded as the epitome of 'aesthetic orientalism' in the context of Iran, read both Curzon and Sykes' travelogues in Tehran as preparation for his own journey.[1050] He had little prior knowledge of Iran, and no relevant linguistic skills, thus initially experiencing both the land and its people through their eyes.

[1047] Browne, (1893), 184, 620, 635.
[1048] Nicolson, (1934, 120-1.
[1049] Henes, (2012), 205.

Veracity and 'Voice': Seeking Equality in the 'Contact Zone'

As illustrated in the second chapter, the production of travelogues was inextricably intertwined with the mentalities of empire, which embodied ideas of intellectual as well as military supremacy. This was, however, coupled with growing anxiety that such elevated status could be reversed through a mass-uprising of the native population, which heightened fears of inevitable imperial decline. Pratt designates this viewpoint the 'Imperial eye', interconnected with the 'monarch of all I survey' mentality, '[which] contains within it both racial pride of origin, and the empowerment provided by the sense of ultimate placement at the fountainhead of the human civilisation project.'[1051] The appearance of this paternalistic mentality, in the context of British travelogues of late-Qajar Iran, is borne out by the frequency of claims to be 'speaking on behalf of the Persians', suggesting requirements for their development and 'civilisation' (typically in line with British norms), while criticising their, supposedly, inherent flaws and failings. The offering of personal opinions distinguishes travelogues from historical monographs and makes them compelling, in terms of gauging the author's views and, thus, gaining insight into popular opinion. In contrast, histories often attempt to disguise bias through the selective presentation of facts. Assessing the reliability of travelogues, as sources of information, requires understanding of the issue of 'voice', namely who gets to speak and, crucially, have that speech recorded accurately.[1052] This applies to both the lived encounter in the physical 'contact zone' as well as the literary encounter experienced through the travelogue itself. The alignment of linguistic incomprehension with the dishonesty trope underlines how integral a lack of 'voice' is to the perception of the Iranian 'Other'.

[1050] R. Byron, *The Road to Oxiana,* (London, 1937), 202, 205, 207.
[1051] Pratt, (1992), 12.

While making sweeping statements about the rapacity of Qajar governorship in relation to Manuchehr Khan, and the plundering of the countryside under his authority, Layard's encounter with a *ghulām* (slave-soldier), who served as his official escort, elucidated his feelings about the Iranians on a more individual basis and out with the elite context. Layard's dislike of the *ghulām* formed immediately upon their meeting. It stemmed from his chafing under the companionship of a man with whom he largely could not communicate, coupled with the impact this had on the clandestine aspects of his journey.[1053] While such concerns remain vague in the text, a concrete reason given for the negative portrayal of the *ghulām* stems from the difficulties he created for Layard by repeatedly mistreating the villagers they encountered. He extorted money, goods, and animals from them, under the pretext that he was on official business and thus entitled to provision himself at the expense of the local populace.[1054] This made Layard increasingly unpopular among the rural populations, hindering his progress and likely further souring his view of the Iranians. It is ironic that to unburden himself of this troublesome travelling-companion, Layard reported the *ghulām* directly to Manuchehr Khan, who had him bastinadoed and dismissed from his service, confiscating the horses and donkeys which had been plundered from the local villages. Though he consistently characterised Manuchehr Khan as ‘monstrous’, in this instance Layard utilised the Qajar governor’s vindictiveness to his own advantage. When the dispossessed *ghulām* later reappears to confront Layard, his lament suggests much of this exchange may have been fictionalised upon revision, especially considering the author’s weak Persian comprehension. Nonetheless it summarises Layard’s view of a system where the powerful oppress their subordinates who, in turn, extract anything they can from those below them to recompense themselves: 'He [Manuchehr Khan] is a rich man and does not want them [the horses and donkeys]; I am a poor man and do. He is the greater robber of the two. He goes unpunished and I have scarcely a nail left in my toes.'[1055] Rather than eliciting sympathy, this confrontation is calculated to provide a satisfying comeuppance for the misdeeds of the *ghulām*. Though granted a moment to exercise his ‘voice’ in the narrative, this incident ultimately only serves to dehumanise the Iranian subaltern.

[1052] Pratt, (2022), 133-4.

[1053] Layard, (1887), 104.

[1054] Layard, (1887), 111.

Wills wrote at even greater length regarding his belief in the Iranians’ dubious relationship with the truth, though his travelogue is notably more nuanced than Layard’s, stating that the people were 'as honest as the general run of mankind,' which perhaps reflects his general cynicism.[1056] He did, however, make more straightforwardly positive comments, namely in praise of his servants 'for their honesty as to the property of their master.'[1057] Wills needed to interact with a variety of tradespeople and merchants and regarded the bazaar, in particular, as a hotbed of dishonesty and a sphere of 'much trickery… [and] various ingenious manoeuvres' which contradicted his Victorian sensibility of ‘fair play.’[1058] For example, he describes a tobacco merchant in Shiraz who regularly defrauded his credit customers, on the weight of their purchases, ensuring they received only his most inferior stock.[1059] Due to such deceptions, Wills often used his servants as mediators with merchants, lamenting that his status as a European, perceived as fabulously wealthy by the local population, made taking part in direct negotiations incredibly difficult as he was inevitably gouged on the price.[1060] As these negotiations were typically conducted in urban spaces, Wills perceived this deceptive attitude among merchants as inherent to specific cities. He complains that 'honesty cannot be expected in the Ispahani or Teherani [merchant]' while generally stressing that 'in an Eastern town it is difficult to get at facts.'[1061] It was in response to such challenges that Wills advocates a smart and unscrupulous approach in all dealings with Iranians.[1062] However beyond describing the subterfuge of the bazaars, he also attempted to delve more deeply into the Iranian relationship with the truth. To this end Wills presented what he styled a ‘Persian mantra’, in fact yet another adaptation from Sa’di’s *Gulistan*, namely that 'it is better to tell a lie that produces good, than to tell the truth which produces evil,' though the travelogue does not elaborate on any potentially positive outcomes.[1063] This also constitutes the closest that Wills’ travelogue comes to offering a direct Iranian perspective on truth. Wills does, however, claim to comprehend the differing cultural perception of truthfulness, asserting that among the Iranians lying was not considered an insult. He certainly considered it so, and recounts multiple occasions of becoming infuriated by the evasive behaviour he perceived.[1064] He also describes the Iranian admiration for those accomplished in deception, such as while playing cards, where 'they will cheat, and he who does so undetected is looked on as a good player,' anathema to a Victorian man drilled in the virtues of sportsmanship.[1065]

[1055] Layard, (1887), 118.
[1056] Wills, (1883), 314.
[1057] Wills, (1883), 296.
[1058] Wills, (1883), 221.

[1059] Wills, (1883), 189.
[1060] Wills, (1883), 187.
[1061] Wills, (1883), 188, 225.
[1062] Wills, (1883), 398.
[1063] Wills, (1883), 277; Sa’di Shirazi, (2008), 13.
[1064] Wills, (1883), 315.
[1065] Wills, (1883), 97.

While Wills' reaction to dishonesty is typically one of humour or exasperation, rather than moral condemnation, *Land of Lion and Sun* nonetheless portrays Iran and the Iranians as inherently inured to deception, implicitly devaluing their 'voice' as inherently untrustworthy.

Bird's *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan,* similarly, ruminates on the perceived relationship between the Iranians and deception. Bird clearly felt personally betrayed when she ascertained that her elderly servant 'Hadji' had been feigning a range of ailments, from deafness to palsied tremors, to obtain funds for his return journey as recompense for his meagre wages. Nonetheless she concluded with a degree of magnanimity: 'it is better to be deceived twenty times than to be hard on these poor fellows once, but he has been exasperating, and I feel somewhat aggrieved at having worked so hard to help a man who was 'malingering.''[1066] It is hard to imagine either Layard or Wills, both of whom were prepared to employ violence against Iranian subalterns, maintaining such an even-handed attitude. Bird would later praise Hassan, another servant who left her employment at Hamadan, for being 'not unreasonably dishonest' and a decent travelling servant. She complained that 'in the attempt to replace him a maze of lies, fraud, and underhand dealings has been passed through,' causing her significantly more distress than the loss of her former companion.[1067] Her frustration seemed to find validation in a conversation with an unnamed Qajar noble, who explained that 'lying is rotting this country. Persians tell lies before they can speak.' This prompted her own diatribe on the subject: 'almost every day when one is wishing to be trustful, kind, and considerate, one encounters unmitigated lying, cowardly bluster, or dexterously-planned fraud, and the necessity of being always on guard is wearing and repulsive.'[1068] Contact with other Europeans in Iran, particularly missionaries, reinforced her views in this regard by describing how 'from the Shah downwards no one trusts father, brother, wife, superior, or inferior.'[1069] Bird associates this directly with the ancient past in a footnote at the bottom of the paragraph which describes the inscription of Darius I at Bisitun; an invocation of Ahuramazda's protection against what she understood as 'lying'.[1070] This was the metaphysical *drauga* ('the lie'), a perversion of the natural order which disrupts the ability of the monarch to create harmony and ensure just rule, signified by *arta* ('truth').[1071] Bird, however, used this as confirmation that dishonesty was a deeply rooted cultural trait, presenting it as essential to the Iranian character since the Achaemenid period. Her lack of linguistic skill hampered her ability to communicate directly and record 'voice' equally. Instead, it prompted greater reliance upon ancient sources, histories, the experiences of others, and the accumulation of further intellectual 'baggage.'[1072]

[1066] Bird, (1891), I, 165.
[1067] Bird, (1891), II, 166.
[1068] Bird, (1891), II, 174.

Curzon similarly lacked Persian language skills which limited his ability to communicate with the people he encountered; his rapid three month journey leaving little time to acquire any degree of competence, even had he been inclined to do so.[1073] Curzon's mode of transport, *chāpār* riding, which involved quick transit between post-houses where horses were exchanged, was described by him as an 'exhilaration, a tedium, or a torture,' which likely further contributed to his negative experience of Iran, particularly in light of his youthful spinal injury.[1074] He also made no concessions to Persian dress or manners, expecting to be treated with the deference commensurate with his position as a British MP, and intent on impressing the natives with his deportment.[1075] His lack of Persian however limited his ability to access candid information from Iranians, unless they were able to converse in English or French, thereby restricting conversation to a few individuals within the

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[1069] Bird, (1891), II, 174.
[1070] DB §63-4: Kuhrt, (2010), 148-9.
[1071] Lincoln, (2012), 424.
[1072] Seshan, (2020), 5.
[1073] Ross, (2009), 392.
[1074] Curzon, (1892), I, 248.
[1075] Nash, (2005), 1.

Qajar court, or those who were otherwise multilingual.[1076] While extracts from these conversations, such as with the Zil es-Sultan, are included in *Persia and the Persian Question*, they appear sparsely and are included to corroborate Curzon's preconceptions, rather than any insight into the inner workings of the state or Iranian opinion. The rarity of Iranians with whom he could converse, on his own terms, confirmed Curzon's presumption that most of the population was uneducated and thus mute. He described Iranian peasants, in an article in *Pearson's Weekly,* as having 'no articulate opinions'; an underestimation which would contribute to his failure to anticipate the looming seismic changes in Iran's political landscape.[1077] While echoing Malcolm's discourse on the lack of political economy in Persian writing, Curzon goes much further by characterising whole classes as voiceless and apathetic.[1078] Practical issues frequently arose when trying to communicate with ordinary Iranians, resulting in confusion and accidents which further reinforced his biases. For example, Curzon found himself helpless when attempting to explain himself to Qajar customs officers at the border, as 'neither of us spoke any tongue that was intelligible to the other, and an intermediary was equally difficult to find.' This impasse led to his luggage becoming lost and only a single horse being available for his further transit, which Curzon used to cross the frontier while his servant was left to cover the remaining fifteen miles on foot.[1079] The information Curzon was able to glean in Iran emanated primarily from consular and other diplomatic sources, facilitated both through his status as an MP and his friendship with Lord Salisbury, who also enabled preferential assistance from orientalists and other specialists upon his return to Britain.

[1076] Ross, (2009), 392.

[1077] G.N. Curzon, 'Workers and their Work', *Pearson's Weekly,* (13. May. 1893).

[1078] Malcolm, (1815), I, 276.

[1079] Curzon, (1892), I, 86-7.

The degree of linguistic comprehension is thus crucial for gauging the veracity of the cross-cultural encounter in the ‘contact zone’, as recorded in these travelogues. Rhetoric, in the original Greco-Roman context with which the Victorian public school boy was acquainted, was generally regarded as the embellishment of speech, specifically occurring at a public or semi-public occasion. By contrast, in the Persian context, rhetoric was, and still is, ‘one of the most developed literary and oral storytelling traditions, deeply rooted in Persian philosophy with various aesthetic and social functions far more varied than in the Greco-Roman context,’ and suffused various aspects of Persian speech. [1080] ‘Obsequiousness’, for example, appears as a frequent complaint regarding various ethnic groups that the British encountered in Asia, to the extent that it became broadly synonymous with the behaviour of ‘Orientals’. In the case of Iran, this stemmed from a failure to comprehend the elaborate etiquette of *ta'aruf*, whereby a guest is praised while the host deprecates themselves, before the roles are reversed and the interplay continues.[1081] Layard, Wills, Bird, and Curzon all lacked the language skills, and indeed the cultural insight, to comprehend, what to them, appeared as disingenuous cringing. Claims made in the spirit of *ta’aruf* are, however, not intended literally by either party.[1082] A similar argument could be made regarding accusations of ‘Oriental exaggeration’ or ‘hyperbole,’ which appear frequently in British travelogues. In Layard’s travelogue this arises from his disappointment after an underwhelming visit to the ‘Tomb of Daniel’ near Mala Amir in Khuzestan: ‘this was a fresh instance of Oriental exaggeration, proving how little trust can be placed in descriptions given by Easterns of things and places, not only of which they have heard, but which they may have seen.’[1083] He evidently considered this an attempt at deliberate and malicious deception, though it likely represented the nuances of Iranian etiquette which remained incomprehensible to him. *Gholov* is the practice of exaggeration for rhetorical effect or to underline a specific point, as frequently employed in *roseh* orations for the martyred Hossein and in other Iranian religious contexts.[1084] Like *ta'aruf, it* is not intended to be taken as literal fact and, whoever described the site to Layard, may have employed such rhetoric to pay homage to the prophet supposedly entombed there, rather than with any intention of misleading the Englishman. Whether an example of *gholov* or otherwise, this episode underlines the virtual impossibility of establishing someone's veracity while possessing only the vaguest grasp of their language and remaining ignorant of their cultural idiom. Wills' broadest assessment of the Iranians as dishonest, brands them 'liar[s], but Oriental exaggeration and a tendency to 'run into poetry'…perhaps accounts for much of this. One learns to mentally discount the statements made by the natives.'[1085] His statement attempts to acknowledge the distortion of reality associated with the social etiquettes of *ta'aruf* and *gholov,* though Wills lacked the linguistic skills to truly understand these ritualised forms of exaggeration, or appreciate their long cultural pedigree. Bird also attempted to rationalise some of the causes of widespread dishonesty. In the case of the Iranian upper classes, she formed a generally favourable impression because they supposedly 'differed widely from Orientals, as they are supposed to be, and often really are.' Bird attributes their tendency towards dishonesty to 'hereditary suspiciousness and excess of courtesy,' providing at least slight acknowledgement of social etiquette.[1086] Bird further acknowledges this when she refers to the 'obsequiousness in stereotyped phraseology,' which she describes as less pronounced in the general manner of the people of Iran when compared to India, where she was treated with 'grovelling deference.'[1087] Though she framed this as an essential difference in the socio-biological makeup of Oriental peoples, it speaks more to the differing attitudes and survival mechanisms of the colonised and un-colonised, in the face of British imperial hegemony.

[1080] Malayeri, (2016), 139.

[1081] Majd, (2008), 141.

[1082] S.A. Koutlaki, *Among the Iranians,* (London, 2010), 44.

[1083] Layard, (1887), 175.

[1084] Majd, (2008), 141; Koutlaki, (2010), 59.
[1085] Wills, (1883), 315.
[1086] Bird, (1891), II, 252.

Perception of the Iranians and engagement with their ‘voice’, both directly in the ‘contact zone’, and subsequently textually, was fundamentally different for those with the language skills to fluently converse with them. Edward Burgess, for example, openly displayed his appreciation for their company: ‘the Persians are frequently most agreeable companions, full of fun and wit. The Hadji (Prime Minister) is celebrated for abusing people and sometimes his abuse although very gross is witty.’[1088] Having experienced the minister’s ire on more than one occasion, Burgess nonetheless conceded that ‘I have experienced kindness from other Persians where I little expected it.’[1089] Generally impeccable manners with a liberal distribution of compliments, the hallmarks of *ta’aruf,* led Sykes to draw comparisons between the French and the Iranians, whilst also describing them as ‘decidedly British in considering food and clothes the best investment for their money.’[1090] It is impossible to envision Curzon admitting any comparison between the Iranians and the heights of European civilisation, of which he considered himself an unassailable bastion. Sykes generally credits his ability to converse in Persian for the warm reception he received from Iranians across differing classes, reiterating that an inability to do so would hamper appreciation of their wit and manners.[1091] Unlike Curzon, Sykes was clear and unqualified in complimenting his hosts and praising their generous hospitality and courtesy; stressing that only in one instance was he treated impolitely, though he did not elaborate on the circumstances.[1092]

[1087] Bird, (1891), II, 251.

[1088] Edward Burgess to George Burgess. Tabriz. 10. June 1842: in Schwartz, (1942).

[1089] Edward Burgess to George Burgess. Tabriz. 30. June 1846: in Schwartz, (1942).

[1090] Sykes, (1902), 204.

[1091] Sykes, (1902), 203, 458.

The ability to converse fluently with Iranians, in their own language, was the main factor which affected British perceptions of direct interactions with Iranians in the 'contact zone'. For Browne and Sykes, it facilitated a demonstrably clearer understanding of social dynamics and provided the ability to hold extended conversations with Iranians out with the Qajar administration. However, in terms of allowing Iranians to truly exercise their 'voice', this is only really evident in Browne's travelogue, as Sykes tended to mingle Iranian perspectives with his own, to appear more like the 'expert' he aspired to be. Browne's *Year Among the Persians* contains a range of dialogues with Iranians, ranging from Zoroastrians, Sufis, Babis, and the ex-governor Ferhad Mirza, to Browne's servant Hajji Safar and other subalterns and travellers. Such variety, the straightforward presentation of the conversations, and the respect with which these individuals are treated distinguishes Browne's text, not only from his contemporaries, but from any preceding British travelogue of Iran. Creating a space for Iranian voices and discourses drew praise from some Iranian nationalist intellectuals, who viewed Browne's travelogue as the first instance of a British text granting them parity with the author.[1093] Browne's personal biases, however, favouring manifestations of 'Aryanism' while disparaging Turkic and Semitic influences, inevitably influenced which Iranians he chose to engage with in this manner; but, of the travelogue writers assessed here, he most closely approximates Pratt's criteria for 'equality in the contact zone', namely the 'equality of voice.'[1094] Curzon, by contrast, remained largely reliant on the writings, perspectives, and biases of others. This is apparent in his often-superficial reception of cultural and social phenomena, coupled with the incorporation of misconceptions and tropes from earlier travelogues. *Persia and the Persian Question* represents both the height of intertextuality, in the context of the British travelogue of late-Qajar Iran and, simultaneously, the most complete denial of 'voice' for Iranians. This is a key issue with the depiction of Iranians in British travelogues of the late-Qajar period as, beyond the small number of royal family members and Qajar officials whose conversations are recorded in any degree of detail, most Iranians remain both nameless and voiceless. Acknowledging this fundamental limitation raises the question of how British writers conceptualised the 'inner life' of the Persians or their intrinsic characteristics, and how a lack of understanding inevitably led to the production of literature which incorporated stereotyped Iranian characters and decontextualised and distorted Persianate literary elements. British travellers to Qajar Iran believed they already 'knew' the Persians, not only through engagement with travelogues or ancient histories, but through their fictionalised depiction in British literary culture, which by the late-19th Century already possessed centuries of provenance.

[1092] Sykes, (1902), 204, 457.
[1093] Bonakdarian, (1993), 16.
[1094] Pratt, (2022), 126, 133-4.

4.2 The Reflection of Persianate Elements and Characters in British Literary Culture

Further to unpacking the 'baggage' of intertextuality, and the tension between 'tales' and 'accounts', Radhika Seshan emphasises how stories inevitably prefigure travelogues in the conceptualisation of the 'Other', underlining the importance of assessing literature alongside travel writing as a source of stereotyping.[1095] *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville,* published in 1499 by Wrykyn de Worde, was the first travelogue of Asia to be published in English, with the titular traveller's stated aim reaching the court of Prester John, a powerful and fabulously wealthy Christian monarch who supposedly resided somewhere to the east of Persia.[1096] Its colourful descriptions found lasting popularity, with adapted excerpts reproduced for school children in the 19th and early 20th centuries, replete with fantastical illustrations.[1097] The supposed travelogue was, however, a fabrication, as was the land of Prester John, the text plagiarising the tales of merchants and other travellers in the Levant for credibility, while inventing much of what lay beyond. That this did not diminish its popularity demonstrates the complex attitudes toward fact and fiction in the context of travel writing: easily readable and entertaining travelogues were typically more attractive to readers than fact-heavy and more consciously scholarly examples. Veracity did not inherently guarantee the success of a travel narrative, nor did fabrication hinder its ability to influence perceptions of the 'Other'.

[1095] Seshan, (2020), 2, 79.

'Oriental' characters and settings became popular in England from the 16th Century onwards, when 'stories of violent, tyrannical, and lustful Ottoman, Moroccan, and Persian sultans' provided new and exotic material for playwrights.[1098] Setting plays in these distant and decontextualised surroundings allowed greater critical exploration of potentially controversial themes, which risked censorship, than was possible through the more rigidly defined Greek and Roman histories and mythologies which, along with biblical stories, dominated the earlier 'mystery plays' common in late-medieval England.[1099] Cyrus Ghani, in his inquiry into the incorporation of Persianate elements in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, emphasises this period as crucial for understanding the development of orientalism, as it constituted 'not only a view of the 'Other', but also a presumption to speak on their behalf.'[1100] Drama facilitated a literal opportunity to do so, yet was often capable of producing both more nuanced portrayals, and reactions from audiences. Contemporary Islamic rulers loomed increasingly large on the English stage, particularly the 'Great Turk' and 'Great Sophy', the Ottoman and Safavid rulers respectively.[1101] Commonly known as the 'Great Sophy' or 'Saphy' (stemming from conflation with the Greek *sophia*, 'wisdom'), the Safavids first came to English attention due to their wars with the Ottomans, which the Catholic powers of Europe were particularly eager to exploit for their own advantage.[1102] Taken together, these rulers provided examples of 'Asiatic despotism' which facilitated critique of domestic institutions through comparison with these largely-fictionalised tyrants; the Oriental settings functioning as 'loci of self-reflection and self-fashioning.'[1103] The most iconic and subsequently influential of these tyrannical figures was Timur, rendered in Christopher Marlowe's two-instalment play as *Tamburlaine the Great.* Depicted as a Scythian shepherd who rose from poverty to power, rather than the Barlas Turk he was in reality, Tamburlaine was deliberately constructed as an amoral antihero, with Marlowe encouraging his audience to 'applaud his fortunes as you please.'[1104] By setting the plays firmly within the Islamic world, Marlowe was able to utilise Timur as a vehicle for his own Islamophobia, having the warlord burn the *Qur'an* and curse the name of the Prophet, while also delivering a scene of 'humbling of the Turk', with the defeated Ottoman sultan Bayezid used as the conqueror's footstool.[1105] Both vilified and glamourised, this ambiguous portrayal represented both the growing fascination with the figure of the larger-than-life tyrant, and the literary potential of the 'Oriental' character as an amoral vessel for their creator.

[1096] Seshan, (2020), 16-19.

[1097] Mancall, (2007), 93.

[1098] Brotton, (2017), 15.

[1099] G. Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre,* (Cambridge, 1995), 46-7.

[1100] C. Ghani, *Shakespeare, Persia and the East,* (Washington D.C., 2008), 340.

Marlowe's success on the Elizabethan stage with *Tamburlaine* inspired a slew of plays, either with quasi-historical Orientalist settings or where 'Others' are confronted within a more familiar setting. In the former category are plays such as Thomas Kyd's *Soliman and Perseda* (1592/3), which superimposes a love triangle between a villainous caricature of Sultan Suleiman, a Byzantine concubine, and a Christian knight, onto the Ottoman conquest of Rhodes in 1522.[1106] Similarly, George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* (1594) fictionalised the events surrounding the 1578 battle of Alcácer Quibir, blaming the cataclysmic defeat of the Portuguese on 'Moorish machinations;' a theme which would reappear in Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West* (1631).[1107] The latter format, namely the confrontation of the 'Other' in a more familiar setting, is observable in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1590) and, most influentially, in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1600) and *Othello* (1603/4).[1108] These 'Others' became stock figures, stereotyped in their behaviours and attributes and reinforced by their appearance: turbans, facial hair, oversized scimitars, and robes, all became emblematic of the archetypal 'stage Turk' figure, providing 'a vantage for cultural mimicry and mockery.'[1109] Brotton describes the result as 'an outlandish style of histrionic orientalism, [an] affected, stagey performance by melodramatic actors,' placing these performances in the same theatrical tradition as Aeschylus' *Persians*.[1110] The Achaemenid rulers were vaguely known through the growing engagement with ancient Greek in England, further disseminated through their adaptation to the stage. Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, and Cambyses were ultimately interchangeable with other examples of 'oriental kingship', their depiction typically focused on extreme luxury and the despotism which was believed to accompany it. This is observable in Shakespeare's *Henry VI,* when the Dauphin promises to furnish Jean d'Arc with a beautiful urn even more luxurious than the 'rich jewell'd coffer' of Darius, demonstrating the association of the Achaemenids with riches and especially gemstones.[1111] Thomas Preston's *Cambyses* juxtaposed this luxury with cruelty and hubris; adhering to the key points of Herodotus' historical narrative while constructing 'Cambises, King of Percia' as an archetypal mad tyrant.[1112] By contrast, the extent to which Aeschylus' *Persians* humanises its subjects and their interpersonal drama is striking; while undoubtedly also revelling in their defeat and transforming their suffering, especially that of Xerxes in the wake of Salamis, into melodramatic spectacle for the gratification of the Athenian audience.[1113] Its reception, in early-modern Europe, also cemented the perceived centrality of certain cultural tropes in relation to the Achaemenids, such as powerful women and eunuchs within the court and harem.[1114] Hall argues that the depiction of Xerxes and his courtiers in the throes of lamentation was 'profoundly germinative ideologically', and contributed to the later entrenchment of orientalist tropes through 'the histrionic impersonation of Asiatic barbarians for exotic or comic effect,' evident in the early modern English theatre.[1115] This builds upon Grosrichard's identification of the adaptation of *The Persians* in Europe and North America as a conflation of 'the ancient victory of the Greeks over Persia at the Battle of Salamis with the more recent confrontation between the West and its subject peoples, in particular the Islamic world.'[1116]

[1101] Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night,* II.5; III.4.

[1102] Brotton, (2017), 42-6.

[1103] Tavakoli-Targhi, (2001), 37.

[1104] C. Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great,* 1st Edition, (London, 1590), Title page.

[1105] Brotton, (2017), 158-66.

[1106] Brotton, (2017), 166.
[1107] Brotton, (2017), 167-9.
[1108] Ghani, (2008), 33.
[1109] Tavakoli-Targhi, (2001), 37.
[1110] Brotton, (2017), 27, 169, 178.

These plays reflect both a growing familiarity with, and domestication of the 'Other', coupled with anxiety relating to the influence that these 'Others' might exert. This included the anxiety surrounding English sailors and travellers, as well as those taken as slaves 'turning Turk,' abandoning their customs and converting to Islam; not an uncommon occurrence in North Africa or the Ottoman Empire.[1117] This represents the genesis of the apprehension around 'going native' in English writing; a concern which would become particularly acute in the British colonial enclaves of the later 19th Century, but which clearly had its roots in the earliest period of overseas commerce and expansion.[1118] Domestically however, the popularity of oriental themes, characters, and settings continued to grow, accelerating as more concrete trading links were established with India, Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and North Africa. Trends in literature were increasingly reinforced through art and the import of luxury objects by the late 16th Century, when Persian carpet designs were being reproduced in England.[1119]

[1111] Shakespeare, *Henry VI,* I.6.25; Ghani, (2008), 120-22.

[1112] Ghani, (2008), 125-7.

[1113] Hall, (1989), 10; E. Hall, 'Aeschylus' Persians via the Ottoman Empire to Saddam Hussein' in *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars,* E. Bridges, E. Hall and P.J. Rhodes (eds.), (Oxford, 2007), 184-224; Bridges, (2015), 12.

[1114] Sancisi-Weerdenburg, (1987a), 33.

[1115] Hall, (2007), 169-70.

[1116] A. Grosrichard, *The Sultan's Court: European Fantasies of the East,* (London, 1998), 169.

The earliest English efforts to establish relations with Persia, such as Jenkinson's incomprehensible overtures to Shah Tahmasp on behalf of Elizabeth I, were eventually eclipsed in the popular imagination by the exploits of one man: Anthony Sherley. Arriving in Persia alongside his brother Robert, during the reign of Shah Abbas I (r. 1571-1629), the Sherleys were welcomed graciously, receiving gifts of clothing, animals, jewels, and weapons. Anthony was even, reportedly, elevated to the rank of *mirza*, accompanying Abbas on hunting expeditions and dining with him at banquets. His depiction of the Shah is, unsurprisingly, a flattering one: physically he was 'excellently well shaped' while 'his mind [was] infinitely royal, wise, valiant, liberal, temperate, merciful, and [he was] an exceeding lover of justice,' with Sherley even comparing Persia under his rule to the utopia of Plato's *Republic,* though he also conceded that 'those nobly disposed Persians' of antiquity were nowhere to be found.[1120] Sherley's companions on the expedition, meanwhile, presented a less positive picture of their host, with Abel Pinçon characterising Abbas as an archetypal oriental despot who treated his subjects ‘inhumanely and cruelly, cutting off their heads for the slightest offence, having them stoned, quartered, flayed alive and given alive to the dogs, or to the forty *anthropophagi* and man-eaters that he always had by him.’[1121] He additionally describes the 20,000 severed heads Abbas brought to Qazvin after his successful campaign against the Uzbeks. Anthony Sherley’s flattery of the Shah seems to have been effective, with Abbas despatching him on a diplomatic mission to the rulers of Europe on his behalf. This endeavour soon descended into chaos, however, with Anthony Sherley accused, by the Persian members of the delegation, of plundering the Shah’s gifts and selling them for his own profit when the party reached Moscow.[1122] The delegation subsequently visited Pope Clement VIII in Rome where Ali Beg, leader of the Persian contingent of the mission, reiterated the accusations that Anthony Sherley had plundered the presents intended for the Pope.[1123] In an ironic inversion of the dishonesty trope, the Pope concluded that the Persian spoke the truth ‘because he has always spoken consistently,’ whereas Sherley was ‘doubtless a liar and unreliable.’[1124] Regarded as a traitor in England for subsequently taking service with the Hapsburgs, Anthony Sherley ended his days impoverished in Spain, where he was visited by his younger brother, who had eventually been sent by Abbas to fulfil the older brother’s mission in Europe. Robert then bore the travelogue, *Sir Anthony Sherley, his Relation of his Travels into Persia*, back to London where it was published in 1613, though it failed to attract a significant readership.[1125]

[1117] Brotton, (2017), 142-3.

[1118] Dabashi, (2015), 34.

[1119] S.M. Levey, *The Embroideries at Hardwicke Hall,* (London, 2007), 380-5.

[1120] A. Sherley, 'Sir Anthony Sherley, his Relation of his Travels into Persia' in *Early Modern Tales of Orient,* K. Parker (ed.), (London, 1999), 64-5.

Rather, Anthony Sherley’s fame spread through works of fiction, such as the play *The Travailes of the Three English Brothers* (1607), through which Anthony and Robert’s exploits at the court of Abbas I were both popularised and rapidly mythologised.[1126] They were lauded by the biographer Samuel Purchas as ‘brave adventurers’, surpassing even the classical heroes: ‘if the Argonauts of old, and the Graecian worthies, were worthily reputed heroical for European exploits in Asia, what may we think of the Sherley brethren…[who] pierced the very bowels of the Asian seas and lands, unto the Persian centre.’[1127] The tendency to elevate their achievements ahead of classical precedents, observable in the Victorian discourse on empire and its comparisons with Rome, demonstrably has its origins in this early period of commercial expansion.[1128] Purchas also erroneously credited the Sherleys with introducing gunpowder to the Safavid armies, a typical assumption of eastern ignorance and European ingenuity. His praise of Anthony Sherley particularly influenced the Victorians as it accorded with their search for heroic, empire-building figures. For example, *Gentleman's Magazine*, praised ‘Those three brave Sherleys! Each separate history a romance!’, describing how they had found ‘honour and renown in distant lands!’[1129] The endurance of this romanticising trend is also observable in *Persia and the Persian Question*, where Anthony Sherley is characterised by Curzon as a quasi-Arthurian ‘knight errant’, retreading Alexander's conquests by expanding the bounds of English influence in Asia.[1130] Later biographers, however, conceded that Sherley had been ‘a born intriguer, a complete opportunist, a man whose word could never be relied on and whose personal dishonesty leaves us gasping… [he was] a completely sinister person, to be avoided by all who valued their reputations or fortunes.’[1131] One of the earliest, and certainly most influential, English forays into Persia was, thus, made by an archetypal ‘travel liar’.[1132] Iconic back in England for his ‘adventures’, his reputation was justifiably poor among his direct contemporaries, and it was particularly his rehabilitation by the Victorians which cemented a romanticised, largely fictitious Anthony Sherley as an archetype for later travellers in Persia.

[1121] E. Denison Ross, *Sir Anthony Sherley and his Persian Adventure,* (London, 1933), 154-9, 162-3.
[1122] Brotton, (2017), 256-7.
[1123] Brotton, (2017), 259-60.
[1124] B. Penrose, *The Sherleian Odyssey,* (London, 1938), 107-8.
[1125] K. Parker (ed.), *Early Modern Tales of Orient,* (London, 1999), 63.

[1126] Brotton, (2017), 264-5.

[1127] S. Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes,* J. MacLehose (ed.), (Glasgow, 1905), vol. 1, 374.

[1128] Mancall, (2007), 294-5.

[1129] *Gentleman's Magazine,* new series, vol. 22 (1844), 474.

[1130] Curzon, (1892), I, 363, 573.

[1131] Penrose, (1938), 245.

[1132] Colber and Hambrook, (2007), 166.

Outright works of fiction played a significant role in the process of illuminating Asia for the domestic audience. The popularity of orientalist prose, poetry, and drama was continually renewed by academic orientalist publications and travelogues, which created a symbiotic and inherently circular relationship of influence. The appearance of distinctly Persianate influences are also increasingly observable, which accelerated in the 18th Century through contact with India. This was further spurred by Antoine Galland’s French translation of the *Arabian Nights*, translated into English between 1706 and 1721 as *Arabian Nights Entertainments*.[1133] These stories were drawn primarily from Persian and Arabic folklore, although some of the most iconic episodes such as *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* may have been Galland’s own invention, as it does not appear in any of the extant manuscripts.[1134] Regardless of their exact provenance, these stories entered the popular consciousness and further reinforced the perception of Persia, and the Islamic East more widely, as dominated by despotic and lascivious rulers, duplicitous eunuchs, and scheming concubines, while also introducing British readers to the creatures of Iranian folklore: genies, ifrits, ghouls, the roc, and the simurgh.[1135] Layard, for example, expressed great regard for the stories of the *Arabian Nights,* which he credited with influencing his ‘love of travel and adventure,’ as they presented a romanticised Orient, largely divorced from historical context and, therefore, immune to the decline of empires.[1136] The 18th Century produced a further slew of fantastical Orientalist tales in English, with anthologies such as James Ridley’s *Tales of the Genii* (1764) and the *Tales of Inatulla of Delhi* (1768), translated from Persian by Alexander Dow, proving particularly popular. Distinctly Persian influences were also increasingly observable in poetry, in terms of subject matter as well as meter. This is well illustrated by William Jones' *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatic Languages* (1772) and *Select Odes from the Persian Poet Hafez, Translated into English Verse* (1787) by John Nott.[1137] The trend for Persianate poetry would further expand in the early 19th Century, spurred particularly by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *West-Östlicher Divan* (1819), a manifestation of the 'ghazal craze' which drew inspiration from German orientalism and philological research.[1138] The prose addendum to the *Divan,* entitled *Noten und Abhandelungen,* contains sections focusing on pre-Islamic Iranian history and demonstrates interest in the Zoroastrian communities of Iran and India.[1139] Goethe's regard for them, as a manifestation of the ancient culture of Iran, helped to stoke greater European curiosity in Iran, prefiguring the admiration for the Babis and theories of 'Aryanism' which would emerge later in the century and be particularly influential on the travelogues of Browne and Sykes.[1140]

[1133] Said, (1978), 63-5.

[1134] Said, (1978), 64.

[1135] Dabashi, (2015), 2-4.

[1136] Layard, (1903), I, 26-7.

It was, however, the increasingly popular medium of the novel which came to have the greatest impact on the proliferation of Orientalist tropes in the 19th Century, exerting a significant impact on the framing of the 'Orient' in subsequent travel writing. Orientalist novels began to attain popularity in the later 1700s, including Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) and John Hawkesworth's *Almoran and Hamet* (1761).[1141] However, it was *Vathek by* William Beckford, first published as *An Arabian Tale, from an unpublished Manuscript* (1786), which most influentially demonstrated the convergence of orientalism, both aesthetic and academic, with fiction.[1142] The text combines many of the themes and stylistic elements running through preceding Orientalist literature; incorporating well-established tropes into the emergent format of the Gothic novel while, simultaneously, fusing together quasi-historical and supernatural elements. Along with Beckford's studies of Iranian and Arabic folklore, the novel was particularly inspired by his extravagant twenty-first birthday celebrations at Fonthill Abbey, a consciously decadent and sensual orientalist spectacle staged in the 'Egyptian hall' of his ostentatious home.[1143] The novel is equally emblematic of Regency Period engagement with oriental themes, which were invigorated by conflict with the French in Egypt and the accompanying intensification of British imperial involvement in Asia.[1144]

[1137] R. Taher-Kermani, *The Persian Presence in Victorian Poetry,* (Edinburgh, 2020), 2.

[1138] H. Tafazoli, *Der deutsche Persien-Diskurs,* (2007), 477-95.

[1139] J.W. v Goethe, 'Noten und Abhandlungen zum besseren Verständnis des *West-Östlicher Divans'* in *Berliner Ausgabe: Poetische Werke,* (Berlin, 1960), 166, 175-7, 180, 187.

[1140] Dabashi, (2015), 88.

[1141] Taher-Kermani, (2020), 41.

Purporting to be a history of the ninth Abbasid caliph al-Wathiq ibn Mu'tasim (r. 842-7 CE), Beckford's Vathek is an archetypal 'Oriental despot' figure in the tradition of Tamburlaine; amorally inclined to pleasure and self-indulgence in the various wings of his palace, each dedicated to one of the five senses. The 'Eternal or unsatiating Banquet' in particular evokes the trope of oriental excess and greed traced back to descriptions of the lavish Achaemenid royal banquets.[1145] In a touch that would have amused Greek audiences, Beckford describes the disgruntled Vathek as losing his appetite: 'of the three hundred dishes that were daily placed before him, he could taste of no more than thirty-two.'[1146] The historical Al-Wathiq's mother, a Byzantine concubine named Qaratis, appears in the novel anglicised as Carathis, a sorceress, who unscrupulously attempts to gain unassailable power for herself and her son. As with the assumption of oriental despotism and greed, this reflects the trope of the corrupting influence of women, none more so than the queen mother in an

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[1142] T. Keymer, 'Introduction' to W. Beckford, *Vathek,* (London, 2013), ix, xi.
[1143] Keymer, (2013), xv-xvii.
[1144] N. Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East,* (Cambridge, 1992), 13.
[1145] Beckford, (2013), 3; Llewellyn-Jones, (2013), 127-9.
[1146] Beckford, (2013), 3, 8.

‘oriental court’.[1147] Having encouraged her son to follow the alluring promises of power, knowledge, and wealth offered by the Giaour, a shadowy Zoroastrian magus, the novel concludes in the fiery subterranean palace of Eblis, a creation of Beckford’s which melded the mischaracterisation of the Zoroastrians as fire-worshippers with Christian and Islamic conceptions of hell. References to Zoroastrianism, and the setting of the palace of Eblis as supposedly located beneath the ruins of Istakhar, demonstrate the Persianate influences informing Beckford’s fantastical East. Even the Achaemenids’ influence is tangible, the description of ‘Istakhar’ clearly informed by descriptions of the ruins of Persepolis: ‘the steps of a vast staircase reached the terrace, which was flagged with squares of marble, and resembled a smooth expanse of water, upon whose surface not a blade of grass ever dared to vegetate. On the right rose the watch-towers, ranged before the ruins of an immense palace, whose walls were embossed with various figures. In front stood forth the colossal forms of four creatures, composed of the leopard and the griffin, and though of stone, inspired emotions of terror.’[1148] Similarly, the Achaemenid cruciform tombs at Naqš-i Rustam similarly provided an eerie backdrop for Vathek’s approach to ‘Istakhar’: ‘aloft, on the mountain, glimmered the fronts of various royal mausoleums, the horror of which was deepened by the shadows of the night.’[1149] These passages demonstrate the unmistakable influence of travelogues on the creation of Orientalist fiction, owing much to the account of Jean Chardin and the largely-fanciful etchings of Cornelius de Bruijn while, more generally, confirming the Persianate aesthetic influence on Beckford.[1150] Persia and the Persians were becoming known in Britain not only through travelogues and histories, but crucially through the lens of fiction. The East was steadily being ‘contained’ through literature as well as scholarship and travel, and earlier writings where greater nuance existed were gradually discarded in favour of a ‘recreated Orient’, luxurious, decadent, corrupt, and despotic, with growing assertions that this could only be remedied through exposure to British civilisation.[1151] The growing intersection of orientalism with Imperialism, at the beginning of the 19th Century, is thus clearly observable.

[1147] Brosius, (1996), 2-5.

[1148] Beckford, (2013), 84-5.

[1149] Beckford, (2013), 84.

[1150] Sancisi-Weerdenburg, (1991), 28-31.

Vathek played a significant role in further disseminating Persianate themes and characters in early-19th Century British literature. Lord Byron cited it as a source for his poem *The Giaour* (1813), while Robert Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), along with Thomas Moore's *Lalla-Rookh* (1817), all incorporated Persian elements and claimed direct inspiration from Beckford.[1152] Reza Taher-Kermani’s recent *The Persian Presence in Victorian Poetry* extensively details how these Persianate literary elements increasingly permeated British poetry and literature more widely in the later 19th Century by focusing on three key examples, the first of which is Mathew Arnold’s *Sohrab and Rustum* (1853).[1153] This blank-verse retelling of one of the most popular episodes from Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh,* relies on Malcolm’s *History of Persia* and Sainte-Beauve’s *Livre des Rois* for its narrative details, as Arnold possessed no Persian language skills, demonstrating engagement with Persian literature even by those who lacked the ability to read or translate the original.[1154] Arnold’s distance from Ferdowsi’s text is however quickly apparent. An eclectic range of geographic terms are deployed, primarily ancient Greek (e.g. Chorasmia, Hyphasis) highlighting the influence of classical literature, while the Turanians/Turks are anachronistically rendered as ‘Tartars’, and contrasted with the ’pale Persians’.[1155] Characters’ names are also eccentrically transliterated, especially ‘Kai

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[1151] Brotton, (2017), 304-5.

[1152] Keymer, (2013), ix, xii.

[1153] Taher-Kermani, (2020), 2.

[1154] Taher-Kermani, (2020), 114.

[1155] M. Arnold, *Selected Poems,* N. Shrimpton (ed.), (London, 1998), 47, 166, 327-30, 409.

Khosroo', while the mythical *simurgh* is anglicised as a 'griffin'.[1156] Particularly notable for this enquiry however is a brief description of Persepolis: 'As those black granite pillars, once high-rear'd by Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear his house, now, mid their broken flights of steps, lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side.'[1157] Attributing the construction of Persepolis to 'Jemshid' (Jamshid) demonstrates engagement with Iranian mythistory regarding the site, however the rest of the passage is clearly fanciful. From the 'black granite pillars' (Persepolis is primarily constructed of limestone) to the site's imaginary relocation to a mountain side, as with *Vathek*, the description likely owes its inaccuracies to reliance on earlier travelogues and de Bruijn's etchings.[1158] Decontextualised and littered with incongruous terms as it was, Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* brought an iconic scene from Iranian mythology to an English-speaking audience for the first time, a process which Taher-Kermani characterises as the transformation of a Persian epic into a Homeric one, rendering it more palatable to a Victorian audience.[1159]

By contrast, Edward Fitzgerald's *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859) by contrast purported to be a direct translation of poetry by the medieval Iranian mathematician and astronomer, though its authenticity remains questionable as Khayyam's poems lack contemporary provenance.[1160] The Persian influence on Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát* is, however, unmistakable in the structuring, themes, and idioms employed; though these elements were consistently modified or distorted, indicating that the text was an adaptation rather than a direct translation.[1161] Historical engagement in Fitzgerald's interpretation is worth consideration: figures from the *Shahnameh* (Jamshid, Kay Kawad, Kay Khosrow) and, by extension, from the Sassanian period (Shapur, Bahram Gur) are referenced, along with

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[1156] Arnold, (1998), 220, 676.
[1157] Arnold, (1998), 857-60.
[1158] Sancisi-Weerdenburg, (1991), 28-31.
[1159] Taher-Kermani, (2020), 124.
[1160] Taher-Kermani, (2020), 10.
[1161] Taher-Kermani, (2020), 90-1.

Mahmud of Ghazna, as a shorthand for erstwhile greatness and power, now long decayed.[1162] Initially experiencing poor sales, the *Rubáiyát* became widely popular by the 1880s, influencing the Pre-Raphaelite movement and celebrated by the London-based ’Omar Khayyám Club’ founded in 1892, enshrining itself as a cultural touchstone well into the 20th Century.[1163] This was, partly, because it facilitated discussion of topics, such as hedonism and atheism in this case, which remained taboo in mainstream Victorian discourse, and underlines the similar roles played by Greco-Roman and Orientalist literature in facilitating British engagement with otherwise unbroachable subjects through discussion and critique of the ‘Other’. Robert Browning’s *Ferishtah’s Fancies* (1884) diverges from both Arnold and Fitzgerald’s engagement with Persianate elements.[1164] The eponymous sufi Ferishtah, seemingly unrelated to the Iranian historian Firishta, dispenses wisdom to his followers over the course of twelve individual poems, together forming a didactic parable. Clearly inspired by the structure of Goethe’s *West-Östlicher Divan,* the *Fancies* were an entirely original creation, with no pretence to be an adaptation or translation of a Persian original. There are some relatively inconsequential references to the characters of the *Shahnameh*, including ‘Kawah’ (Kaveh) and ‘Rustem’, and Shah Tahmasp and Shah Abbas of the Safavid dynasty are also mentioned, with the latter named in a section title.[1165] There is, however, little below the surface that ties the substance of the poems to Persia; the setting merely serving as a ‘safe’ venue for Browning’s moralising. Taher-Kermani describes this work as possessing only a ‘thin disguise’ of Persian elements, underlining their widespread and decontextualised permeation into British literary culture by the 1880s.[1166] It is noticeable that across these poems, the Achaemenids are largely absent, apart from references to Persepolis. The focus rests instead on the characters of the *Shahnameh,* both mythical figures and historical members of the Sassanian dynasty or, in the case of *Ferishtah's Fancies,* the Safavid shahs.[1167] This demonstrates the extent to which engagement with sources out with the Greco-Roman canon were increasingly influencing perceptions of Iran in the 19th Century, though with extremely heterogenous and often superficial results, a trend mirrored in contemporaneous travelogues.

[1162] E. Fitzgerald, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám,* D. Karlin (ed.), (London, 2010), 20, 21, 24, 38.

[1163] Taher-Kermani, (2020), 87.

[1164] R. Browning, *The Works of Robert Browning,* (Ware, 1994).

[1165] Browning (1994), 644-6, 664.

[1166] Taher-Kermani, (2020), 175.

Additionally relevant to this thesis is Richard Burton's translation of Persian and Arabic folktales, privately published as *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night* (1885-8). They contributed to reinvigorating the popularity of Oriental themes and aesthetics in late-19th Century Britain, and the additional erotic content both scandalised and enthralled a Victorian audience, which had grown up on Galland's earlier sanitised translation.[1168] Archetypal characters – despotic rulers, scheming eunuchs, the seductive yet untrustworthy residents of the royal harem, and all manner of tricksters and thieves – remained emblematic of the 'imagined Persia' and, through the tales' adaptation for children, proceeded to influence subsequent generations.[1169] The 'East', for Burton personally, fulfilled the role of a fantastical, liminal space where he indulged his imagination and discarded the social constraints of his class. He typified the promising imperial agent 'gone native', cohabiting with a Hindu woman while residing in Bombay as an ensign and, on official orders, conducting an enthusiastic survey of the city's brothels, including those which catered for homosexual clients.[1170] Failing to thrive within the rigid constraints of the imperial military or administrative hierarchies, Burton's fame rested instead on his travelogues and the reputation, as an eccentric explorer and adventurer, which they established for him in Britain.[1171]

[1167] Browning, (1994), 644-6.
[1168] Taher-Kermani, (2020), 40.
[1169] Ansari, (2005), 8.
[1170] Said, (1978), 190.
[1171] Pratt, (1992), 200.

Together with Foster Arbuthnot, a fellow member of the Kama Shastra Society which sought to explore the erotic art and literature of Asia, Burton translated the Sanskrit *Kama Sutra* and *Ananga-Ranga,* and the Arabic *The Perfumed Garden*.[1172] While not directly connected to Iran, these translations appeared to confirm the general Victorian suspicion that the 'East' was a sphere of debauchery and transgressive sex although, as with engagement with the more illicit aspects of Greco-Roman culture, this elicited fascination as well as revulsion. Burton's own conception of Iran's historical significance, elaborated on in the terminal essay to further demonstrates his divergence from the orthodox views of his contemporaries: 'the gifted Iranian race…has exercised upon the world history an amount of influence which has not yet been fully recognised. It repeated for Babylonian art what Greece had done for Egyptian…Hellas and Iran chose as their characteristics the idea of beauty; rejecting all that was exaggerated and grotesque, and they made the sphere of art and fancy as real as the world of nature and fact.'[1173] While comparisons between ancient Greece and the Achaemenid empire were common, largely to the detriment of the latter, Burton's ascribing the same motivation to Hellas and Iran, namely the pursuit of beauty, acknowledges their cultural proximity and potentially dialogic relationship.

The recreation of the 'Orient', and specifically Iran, emanating from these texts was clearly highly personal to the author, capable of transforming from a perfumed rose garden to a site of supernatural horrors or cynical hedonism. A circular process of inspiration and influence is also observable: orally transmitted tales inspired travel and travelogues, which inspired drama, prose, and poetry, which in turn influenced the preconceptions of subsequent travelogue writers.[1174] Burton and Fitzgerald's interpretations of *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* and *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám,* respectively, could be considered the products of personal passion for Persianate literature and, potentially, as attempts to foster appreciation and comprehension thereof among the British public.[1175] However, in both of these instances the British reactions were mixed, vacillating between fascination and revulsion at the perceived excesses of what they considered 'authentic' Iranian literary culture, inadvertently furthering a narrative of decadence and degeneracy.[1176] These more inquisitive forays into Iranian history and culture cannot be viewed as inherently benevolent as, regardless of the intentions of their authors, they ultimately contributed to the belief among British travellers, scholars, and politicians, that they understood the nature of the country better than the Iranians themselves. This assertion was supported by what was perceived as the relative obscurity of the Achaemenid legacy among the peoples of Qajar Iran, which clashed with the British perception that the reigns of Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes constituted the apogee of Persian civilisation.[1177] Orientalism and the fantastical, decontextualised, and often superficial depictions it spawned, contrasted with the actual conditions of Qajar Iran, prompting disappointment or outright condemnation by travellers, corroborating Dabashi's description of a 19th Century trajectory from 'Persophilia to Persophobia' in British discourse.[1178]

[1172] C. Fowkes, 'Introduction' to *The Illustrated Kama Sutra, Ananga-Ranga, and Perfumed Garden,* trans. R. Burton and F. Arbuthnot, (London, 2002), 12-13.

[1173] R. Burton, *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night,* (London, 1885), Vol. X, 127.

[1174] Seshan, (2020), 5.

4.3 - Morier and *Hajji Baba*: An Orientalist Template for Qajar Iran

Originally inspired by tales and travelogues, Persianate themes permeated literature and influenced subsequent travellers, with the texts previously discussed directly impacting on the travelogues examined in Chapter 3, as demonstrated by their direct quotation, or use as chapter headings by Sykes.[1179] It was however ultimately a novel which played the most significant role in shaping stereotypical expectations of Qajar Iran, and the Iranian 'Others' who inhabited it. Some consideration of *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (1824) by James Justinian Morier (c.1780-1849) is central to assessing the stereotyping of Iranians in British travelogues of the Qajar period, and their convergence with orientalist literature. It served as a template for later accounts of Iran and was treated as an invaluable manual for understanding the Iranian character, referenced by the travelogue writers analysed here as a key influence on their perceptions and writing. While popular awareness of *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* has not endured into the 21st Century, its impact on shaping British attitudes to Iran and perpetuating cultural stereotypes cannot be overstated. Morier's belief in an Iranian tendency towards tyranny, cruelty, greed, dishonesty, cowardice, and transgressive attitudes to gender and sexuality (by British standards) chimed with already-extant tropes, repackaging them with details of the early Qajar period to lend them renewed credence.[1180] Though initially a commercial failure, selling only 2,655 copies in its first decade with 95 left unsold, the novel grew in popularity through the 19th Century as Britain became more involved in Iran, both strategically and economically.[1181]

[1175] Taher-Kermani, (2020), 88.

[1176] Gail, (1951), 156; D. Karlin, 'Introduction' to E. Fitzgerald, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám,* (London, 2010), xxviii-xxix.

[1177] Ansari, (2005), 11.

[1178] Dabashi, (2015), 205.

Born in Smyrna to a Swiss-Jewish merchant father, the first forty years of Morier's life were divided between England and Asia, though he liked to portray himself first and foremost as an 'English gentleman' in a drive for respectability.[1182] Following an education at Harrow boys' school (possibly a later fabrication, as his name does not appear on any relevant student registers), Morier held a variety of diplomatic roles in Iran.[1183] These included serving as secretary to Harford Jones-Brydges, the special envoy to the Shah (1808) and Gore Ouseley, the first ambassador to Iran (1810-1814), before a term as Chargé d'Affaires (1814-1816).[1184] These assignments provided the material for two travelogues, through which he presented his credentials as an 'expert' on Iran.[1185] He also accompanied Mirza Abul Hasan, the Shah's ambassador, to Britain in 1809 which inspired *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan in England* (1828), the sequel to the work principally examined here. Morier's relationship with his Iranian counterparts ultimately deteriorated to the point that they requested his diplomatic tenure not be renewed.[1186] Morier's time in Iran certainly exposed him to the intricacies of the culture, though he endeavoured to remain aloof from Iranian society to avoid 'going native', particularly as his own background was hardly the epitome of the Anglo-Protestant adventurer idolised in Britain.[1187] Curzon levelled exactly this criticism at Browne in his review of *A Year Amongst the Persians.* He praised it 'as a guide to the mysteries of the native character…[Browne's] book sheds a more penetrating light upon the Persian people than any that has appeared since *Hajji Baba*,' while Browne 'becomes almost a Persian himself.'[1188] Comparison with Morier was high praise considering the influence which *Hajji Baba* exerted, though the comment about Browne's 'Persianness' indicates Curzon's belief that the scholar veered dangerously close to this imperial cardinal sin of 'going native'.

[1179] Sykes, (1902), 72, 361.

[1180] Harrison, (2011), 98.

[1181] H.M. Johnston, *Ottoman and Persian Odysseys: James Morier, the Creation of Hajji Baba and his Brothers,* (London, 1998), 213-14.

[1182] Gail, (1951), 64.

[1183] Johnston, (1998), 5-6.

Morier's ambivalence towards Iranians created a dichotomy in his work: he believed himself to 'understand' Iran, littering his travelogues and novels with minute cultural details intended to lend them credibility with a largely uninformed British audience and display his credentials as an 'expert', while possessing no degree of empathy for the Iranians themselves. He consequently reduces his characters to clownish stereotypes intended to entertain and scandalise his readers in equal measure. Morier's assertions regarding his expertise Iran extended to its antiquities; claiming in his first travelogue to have identified Persepolis, which he judged unimpressive by comparison with Greek and Roman ruins, as the location of the tomb of Cyrus, before rejecting his own theory based on further reading of Arrian's *Anabasis*.[1189] Curzon criticised Morier for his attempts at identification of historical sites which were characterised as 'very wide afield', while also deriding his efforts to illustrate rock sculptures as 'twist[ing the details] out of all verisimilitude.'[1190] Morier's second travelogue describes him undertaking 'excavations' at Persepolis which, in practice, consisted of hunting for fragments of reliefs to sell, breaking larger specimens apart in order to more easily transport them to Britain.[1191] Curzon did however concede, in his summary of British literature on Iran, that 'Morier… by his story of Hajji Baba, even more than by his travels, has gained the firmest hold of the public ear.'[1192] This point is reinforced by the fact that Browne, who diverged significantly in his perceptions of Iran from Curzon, and whose travelogue C.E. Bosworth described as a 'corrective' to the stereotypes of *Hajji Baba*, was nonetheless a devotee, if not of Morier's opinions, then certainly of his ability to caricature.[1193] For example, when recounting the stories of a peasant he conversed with in Yazd, who had previously been captured by Turkmen raiders, Browne describes how he 'had finally effected his escape during a raid into Persian territory, in which he had accompanied his marauders as a guide, exactly after the manner of the immortal Hajji Baba.'[1194]

[1184] A. Amanat, 'Hajji Baba of Ispahan', *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* Vol. XI, Fasc 6, (2003), 561, accessed 07.11.23.
[1185] Dabashi, (2015), 165.
[1186] Ansari, (2005), 16.
[1187] Amanat, (2003), 561-2.
[1188] G.N. Curzon, 'Review: A New Book on Persia', *Pall Mall Gazette,* (10. Feb. 1894).

In *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan,* key statements in the introductory epistle, which acts as a rudimentary framing device, set the tone for the rest of the novel and highlight Morier's archaising tendency with regards to Iran and his belief in its decline. He describes a continuity of culture from the ancient period, with Iranian customs as 'copies of ancient originals' while also emphasising that 'to the generality of Europeans they appear so ridiculous and disgusting.'[1195] The Qajar court itself was archaised, as when Morier compared the role of *mehmandar*, a courier or escort, to the Achaemenid Satrap Tissaphernes' efforts to escort Xenophon and the Greek mercenaries through Asia Minor.[1196] Morier emphasises both the grandeur of the Achaemenid period and Iran's subsequent decline: 'the Persians exhibit ancient origins and the sculptures at Persepolis could have been carved yesterday…yet no country less comes up to one's expectations than Persia,' a statement equally intended to convey the author's historical acumen.[1197] This view is reflected in Wills' travelogue: 'As Persia was in Morier's time so it is now; and, though one sees plenty of decay, there is very little change.'[1198] Ansari characterises this as further intellectual 'baggage' which Western travellers brought with them, causing them to search (in vain) for what they perceived as the 'glory of ancient Persia', and consequently leading to disappointment and pejorative descriptions when they encountered Iran and its people first-hand.[1199] This also contributed to the suspicion that the 'noble Persians', who Herodotus and Xenophon claimed lived only to 'ride, shoot, and tell the truth,' were a race apart from the Iranians of the Qajar period, and perhaps completely extinct.[1200]

[1189] J.J. Morier, *A Journey through Iran, Armenia and Asia Minor,* (London, 1812), 135, 145; Arr. *Anab.* 6.29.

[1190] Curzon, (1892), II, 216, 123.

[1191] J.J. Morier, *A Second Journey through Iran to Constantinople,* (London, 1818), 75; Sancisi-Weerdenburg, (1991), 27.

[1192] Curzon, (1892), I, 24.

[1193] Bosworth, (2011), 150.

[1194] Browne, (1893), 400.

Morier believed in an antithetical relationship between an enlightened and 'civilised' Europe and a monolithic, barbaric 'East': 'what is moral and virtuous with one is wickedness with the other- that which the Christian reviles as abominable is by the Mohammedan held sacred…moral and intellectual darkness… overhangs so large a portion of the Asiatic World.'[1201] Morier even suggested that all successful Iranians must, by merit of their achievements, be Europeans in disguise. This allegation is made in reference to the Irish adventurer, Thomas O'Kelly or O'Callaghan, who supposedly travelled as 'Tahmas Kouli Khan' before adopting the identity of 'Nader Shah' and conquering Iran; the 'secret Irishman' itself constituting an English literary trope.[1202] The narrative of the 'incompetent and degenerate native' was increasingly widespread in British popular thought, and at its most insidious was deployed to justify the expansion of imperial control in Asia and Africa, for the supposed 'betterment' of the indigenous populations.[1203] Morier's presumption of an inherent cultural clash between Iran and the West, coupled with his belief in an 'unchanging Orient' which preserved ancient modes of behaviour and custom, invites assessment of how these perceptions were layered onto Hajji Baba himself.

[1195] J.J. Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan,* (London, 1985), xxiii.
[1196] Morier, (1818), 46.
[1197] Morier, (1985), xxiv.
[1198] Wills, (1883), 3.
[1199] Ansari, (2005), 10-11.
[1200] Hdt. 1.136-7; Xen. *Cyrop.,* 1.6-9, 1.31; Ansari, (2005), 16.

Hajji Baba – Iranian Everyman

Morier's novel reflected and heightened already-extant tropes applied to the Iranians, condensing them into the single figure of Hajji Baba, a blank canvas or 'everyman' figure. This portrayal was so damaging precisely because Hajji Baba is fundamentally irredeemable, serving as an amoral vessel for the author in the tradition of both Tamburlaine and Vathek. Unlike them, however, Hajji Baba is firmly rooted in the historical context of Qajar Iran, lending his portrayal by Morier an unparallelled degree of credibility compared with these more-fantastical 'Oriental characters'. Not simply shaped by the system he inhabits; Hajji Baba actively exploits it at every turn to his own advantage and the detriment of others. The desire of rulers to exercise tyrannical authority over their subjects appears throughout Greco-Roman descriptions of the Achaemenid Persians and was frequently set in opposition to Greek *libertas*.[1204] This reflected the reframing of the Greco-Persian Wars as a monumental clash of cultures and values in the Greek historiography of the 4th Century BCE, a literary trend with parallels in post-Napoleonic British self-representation.[1205] As shown, depictions of despotic sultans, caliphs, and shahs, present in English writing since the 16th Century, were similarly used to draw a distinction between Europe and Asia, Christendom and Islam, with 'Asiatic' becoming a byword for the inherent corruption and violence of absolute and arbitrary rule.[1206] The character of Hajji Baba reflects this anxiety regarding the arbitrary nature of such power when, upon first seeing the Shah in person he reacts fearfully, describing the ruler as having 'all the terrors of despotism concentrated in his person… a single nod might have ordered my head to take leave of my shoulders.' He also emphasises the Shah's changeable whims: 'when events depend upon the will of one man he may with as much consistency order you back from exile as bid the plucking of your beard and thrusting you from the city.'[1207] While the Shah is shown as having the power to dispense immediate violence, the Grand Vizier's speech in the final chapter, highlights the arbitrary and inherently unstable nature of such despotic power: 'when the Shah is no more, all that we may have done for the welfare of Persia will most likely be destroyed;… his successor shall have well ruined the people in securing himself… for certain privileges and enjoyments are the lawful inheritance of the Shahs of Persia.'[1208] The implications for the inhabitants of Qajar Iran are clear: their sole duty is to sustain a succession of Shahs and, if necessary, to suffer and die for their rulers' ambitions and whims.

[1201] Morier, (1985), xxx.

[1202] Morier, (1985), 193; Gail, (1951), 69.

[1203] Ansari, (2005), 9.

[1204] Bridges, (2015), 2-4.
[1205] Ball, (2011), 47; Rood, (2007), 269.
[1206] Tavakoli-Targhi, (2001), 37.
[1207] Morier, (1985), 148-9, 322.
[1208] Morier, (1985), 399.

The character development of Hajji Baba himself parallels the discussions of royal power: fearing powerful individuals, he simultaneously covets their power for his own. Near the beginning of the novel, he is subjected to the bastinado for selling adulterated tobacco, with Morier highlighting the entertainment derived by the perpetrators who laugh at the suffering of their victim.[1209] This acts as a watershed moment for Hajji Baba. Rather than sparking empathy for the downtrodden and abused, it encourages him to seek his own position of power with the authority to inflict violence on others, his trajectory from victim to perpetrator.[1210] He yearns for authority as seen when, upon his inclusion among the retainers of the Shah tasked with controlling the crowds along the royal route, he declares: 'I was one of the beaten, now I am one of the beaters!'[1211] Rather than just relief from avoiding the threat of violence, he is unashamedly proud of his rise in status and meagre degree of authority, which is now his prerogative to use or misuse. His position is further secured upon becoming assistant to the chief executioner, the lurid description of his new surroundings calculated to shock the reader: 'I now lived in such an atmosphere of violence and cruelty, I heard of nothing but slitting noses, cutting off ears, putting out eyes, blowing up in mortars, chopping men in two, and baking them in ovens, that in truth…I could almost have impaled my own father.'[1212] Violence here appears to exert an intoxicating effect upon the protagonist, reinforcing the perception of inherent cruelty within the Iranian character. His fortunes vary throughout the novel but, finding himself elevated to *Mirza* in the final chapter, Hajji Baba makes another speech to similar effect: 'let those crowns which once submitted to my razor now be prostrate, for he who can cut the head off is at hand.'[1213] Thus, in Morier's portrayal of Qajar Iran, power corrupts in the hands of a Shah, or indeed any ‘Persian, bred and born in the cravings of ambition’.[1214]

[1209] Morier, (1985), 54.
[1210] Morier, (1985), 152.
[1211] Morier, (1985), 152.
[1212] Morier, (1985), 152.
[1213] Morier, (1985), 406.

Morier’s description of a Qajar attack on a Russian-occupied Armenian village acts as a microcosm of all the cruelties an Iranian might inflict in war, from burning villagers out of their houses to slaughtering the Russians in their beds and parading around with their dismembered body parts.[1215] Hajji Baba becomes personally involved when he discovers Yusuf and Mariam, Armenian refugees who put their life in his hands and test his, and through this everyman character, every Iranian’s capacity for mercy. Hajji Baba however has other priorities: ‘I should certainly lose my place and perhaps my ears. No, compassion does not suit me.’[1216] This episode borders on characterising cruelty as an intrinsic Iranian vice and is taken further when cruelty framed is as a royal virtue: ‘our kings must be drinkers of blood and killers of men, to be held in estimation by their subjects and other nations’. This sentiment is reiterated in Hajji Baba’s later pleas for mercy from the Shah: ‘forgive this unfortunate sinner, and he will reap greater reward in heaven than if he had killed twenty Muscovites, or impaled the father of all Europeans, or even if he had stoned a Sûfi.’[1217] Morier’s characterisation of these acts of cruelty as virtuous in the Iranian imagination dehumanises them, rendering them irreconcilably ‘Other’ to European sensibilities. Taking stock of his life towards the end of the novel, and despite having been subjected to cruelty at the hands of the powerful, Hajji Baba shows no sympathy or remorse for those who suffered as a result of his action or inaction: ‘If Nadân be but blown from a mortar, and the chief priest's widow detained and ruined by the Cûrds, I do not see why I may not put my cap on one side as well as the best man in Persia.'[1218]

[1214] Morier, (1985), 407.
[1215] Morier, (1985), 184.
[1216] Morier, (1985), 191.
[1217] Morier, (1985), 211, 259.

Morier not only emphasised his perception of the Iranians as cruel and remorseless but connected this with their supposed greed for material possessions. The relationship between cruelty and greed is demonstrated during Hajji Baba's tenure as assistant to the chief executioner, starkly describing his motivations: 'I could dream of nothing but bastinadoing and getting money.'[1219] He myopically characterises other members of the executioner's entourage as avaricious, while displaying no qualms about extorting peasants for his own gain: 'Unless you have money, ready downright cash, to give, any other offer is useless: with money in your hand, you may buy the Shah's crown from his head; but without it I can only promise you a harvest of bastinadoes.'[1220] The reference to buying the Shah's crown suggests that, in Morier's view, wealth outranked any other form of worldly authority, the Iranians supposedly ever ready to abandon their obligations or betray their compatriots for the promise of gold.[1221] Wealth is also shown as corrupting the delivery of justice, with rich Iranians paying to ameliorate physical punishment or improve the quality of treatment by the executioners: 'a rebel's eyes are to be put out: it depends on what he [the executioner] receives, whether the punishment is done rudely with a dagger or neatly with a penknife,' a disparity highlighted by Curzon and Wills in their travelogues.[1222] Whether to avoid suffering or to ameliorate its application, Morier portrays Iranians throughout the text, as motivated by greed above all else.

[1218] Morier, (1985), 339.
[1219] Morier, (1985), 152.
[1220] Morier, (1985), 157.
[1221] Harrison, (2011), 98.
[1222] Morier, (1985), 150; Wills, (1883), 202; Curzon, (1892), I, 455-7.

According to Morier, the unscrupulous acquisition of wealth was not only the preserve of the aspiring poor but an essential facet of the Qajar monarchy. The custom of gift giving is characterised as poorly veiled extortion, with wealthy individuals such as the court physician, fearing their obligation to host the Shah in lavish style would nullify any material gain which might result from the status conveyed by the visit.[1223] On the other hand, those such as Hajji Baba who lack status, acknowledge that gifts are the only way for them to access the Shah's justice: "I ought to make him a present, without which nothing is ever accomplished in Persia."[1224] Gifts were, however, no guarantee of fair treatment by a grandee, as demonstrated when Hajji Baba appeals to a prince to help him recover his gold from two soldiers. They are beaten for the theft but, nonetheless, the money ends up in the prince's own pocket, a second more formal robbery for which the protagonist has no recourse.[1225] The Shah's exchange with the British ambassador, who was seeking the exclusion of French diplomats because of the Napoleonic wars, demonstrates the monarch's personal greed but also Morier's presumption that the provision of gold can buy any authority or win any argument in Iran. Despite first professing friendship toward all nations, the Shah rapidly changes tack as soon as the British make a monetary offer: 'Oh! That is another case, tell me how much, and then all may be done.'[1226] The Grand Vizier's pronouncement that the 'people of Iran are like the earth; they require *rishweh*' (bribery, literally manure) is clearly intended to apply across the entire social hierarchy. As with both the yearning for power and affinity for cruelty, Morier casts greed as an inherent characteristic of the Iranians throughout the novel, with the acquisition of wealth serving as the primary motivation for most of the characters, none more so than Hajji Baba himself.

[1223] Morier, (1985), 123.
[1224] Morier, (1985), 253.
[1225] Morier, (1985), 35.
[1226] Morier, (1985), 390.

Morier also adheres to the trope of Iranians as untrustworthy, with a speech by the Kurdish slave Zeenab's uncle serving as an outlet for the author's personal disdain: 'You do not know the Persians…you permit yourselves to be lulled into security by their flattering expressions and their wining and amicable manners. …Instead of the sword and spear, theirs are treachery, deceit, falsehood; …lying is their great national vice. What is the use of oaths to men who speak the truth?'[1227] This would certainly be sound advice for anyone encountering Hajji Baba, who Morier characterises as having deceitfulness as a key facet of his personality which he frequently employed to improve his own situation and accumulate wealth and influence.[1228] Yet, as with the previously examined 'national vices', dishonesty is also portrayed as an inherent aspect of the Qajar state itself, observable in the chapter titled 'An Example of Lying Grand Scale'. Following a minor border skirmish with the Russians, the Grand Vizier directs the blatant overestimation of enemy casualties, justifying the lie as a matter of honour: 'It is beneath the dignity of the Shah to kill less than his thousands and tens of thousands…If the thing be not exactly so, yet, by the good luck of the Shah it will, and therefore it amounts to the same thing. Truth is an excellent thing when it suits one's purpose, but very inconvenient when otherwise.'[1229] In Morier's conception, the grandeur and prowess of Qajar Iran and its Shah was constructed upon falsehood, and he mocks the Iranians in the wake of their humiliating territorial losses to the Russians in the Caucasus. For Dabashi, this reflects not only Morier's personal bias but is also representative of an emergent imperial agenda, 'characterising an entire nation as deceitful and thus in need of political domination and colonial control,' again demonstrating the intersection of orientalist literature and imperialism.[1230]

[1227] Morier, (1985), 117.

[1228] Morier, (1985), 145.

[1229] Morier, (1985), 211.

[1230] Dabashi, (2015), 166.

Justification for the Grand Vizier's deception may be found in a further trope, namely that while being grandiose and boastful, the Iranians were also inherently cowardly. These traits are evident in a number of characters in *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, particularly the chief executioner: 'there was everything in his appearance to make one believe he was a soldier and a man of prowess, yet in fact he was a most arrant coward.'[1231] This characterisation is confirmed later in the novel by the executioner's remarks regarding the poor performance of the Qajar army against the Russians: 'O Allah, Allah, if there was no dying in the case, how the Persians would fight!'[1232] The quote was supposedly taken verbatim from a Qajar general of the time, though in later travelogues it is attributed to a wide range of other sources.[1233] The story of the Isfahani merchant flavouring his food with bottled cheese also appears in *Hajji Baba*; its subsequent reappearance in the travelogues of Wills, Curzon, and Browne indicating that these formulaic asides were likely absorbed from earlier British texts, rather than from Iranians directly.[1234]

Boastfulness, as a cover for fear, can also be observed in the figure of the '*chaoûsh'* (caravan guard), who speaks at length of his previous battles against the Turkmen, yet flees at their first appearance and is never seen again.[1235] Cowardice is not only the preserve of supporting characters but is an equally strong characteristic of Hajji Baba himself. He concedes his own lack of bravery to the reader on numerous occasions, most expansively whilst traveling through the territory of Kurdish bandits: 'I who was never famous for facing difficulties with courage, and who would always rather as a preliminary to safety make use of the swiftness of my heels to adopting any other measure…am honest enough to own that time had not strengthened my nerves, nor given me any right to the title of lion-eater.'[1236] While fear in the face of a bandit attack would seem a reasonable reaction, Morier contrasts this with the protagonist's outward bravado, highlighting the irony of his earlier criticism of the chief executioner. Hajji Baba's cowardly nature is explored further when, through inaction and seemingly without remorse he allows others, including friends such as Mullah Nadân, to take the blame for his misdeeds and face the resulting punishment.[1237] The narrative shows not only a lack of courage and a twisted notion of bravery, but also the want of any sense of personal responsibility or willingness to face consequences. It is further demonstrated by a seemingly inconsequential statement following Hajji Baba's initial induction into the entourage of the chief executioner, when he is tasked with clearing the crowds with a large staff so the Shah might pass. Hajji Baba not only appears to enjoy the opportunity for casual brutality, exceeding the level of force deemed necessary, but even seeks to justify his actions: 'I was anxious to establish a reputation for courage.'[1238] While an attempt at humorous irony, Morier implies that for Hajji Baba, and through him as an archetype the Iranians as a whole, the harassment of those weaker than himself was not only justified or advantageous, but actually constituted an act of valour.

[1231] Morier, (1985), 145.
[1232] Morier, (1985), 208.
[1233] Curzon, (1892), I, 580, 605.
[1234] Wills, (1883), 172; Curzon, (1892), II, 43; Browne, (1893), 214.
[1235] Morier, (1985), 8.

As with so many of the other vices supposedly found among the Iranians, the chief executioner is presented as a prime example of degeneracy, indulging his sexuality through his privileged position: '[he] kept men dancers and women dancers, and was protector of every *lûti* (thug, typically associated with drinking, drugs, and gambling), however impudent and obscene he might be…', evoking some of the more lurid descriptions of Qajar officials found in British travelogues.[1239] The reference to male and female 'dancers' in this context is intended to imply the role of concubines or prostitutes, couched in cultural ambiguity to avoid offending British sensitivities.[1240] This is not the only allusion to homosexuality among the Iranians in Morier's novel: when Yusuf the Armenian presents himself to the Iranian s*erdar* (military commander) to plead his case, it is implied that the officer finds the young man attractive and wishes to seduce him, covertly signalling his interest to the chief executioner.[1241] Even Hajji Baba's own experiences in the *hamam* during his youth, providing massages to paying customers and employing 'all the skill of his hands', could be viewed as having homoerotic implications, whether this was Morier's intention or not.[1242] However, as with so much contemporary orientalist literature, it was the harem which dominated Morier's interpretation of gender and sexual norms in Qajar Iran. Both Greco-Roman and British writers fundamentally misrepresented the function of the harem. It was primarily a vehicle for dynastic continuity and security, rather than a venue for the ruler to indulge his sexual desires, though the two were of course not mutually exclusive.[1243] Morier included a number of harem scenes in *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan,* focusing on the household of the physician Mirza Akhmak, who regularly contrives to sleep with his female slaves when his chief wife is absent.[1244] This leads the members of the harem to conspire against each other to secure their own positions, frequently resulting in violence and betrayal. Having uncovered her husband's infidelities, the doctor's chief wife attacked the slave Zeenab, having her thrown into a reservoir, and is described as a 'demon' during the assault.[1245] This incident provokes a notable response from another member of the harem, the African slave Nûr Jehan: 'You Persians are a wicked nation. We who are black and slaves have twice the heart that you have. You may talk of your hospitality and of your kindness to strangers; but was there ever an animal, not to say a human creature, who was treated in the way that this poor stranger has been?'[1246] The fact such condemnation is delivered by an enslaved black African woman, who would have also resided at the bottom of the social hierarchy in Britain as well as Persia, is Morier's unsubtle method of heightening the social critique, though his assumptions are inherently racist. This speech serves a similar role as that of Zeenab's uncle on the dishonesty of the Iranians, where Morier uses the cover of stinging criticism delivered by a non-Iranian character, to air his own underlying prejudices. Inevitably, Zeenab's narrative does not conclude happily following her appropriation by the Shah at his dinner with Mirza Akhmak. She is thrown from the harem tower for infidelity by none other than Hajji Baba himself, thus adding to the list of characters whose lives he has utterly destroyed.[1247] Morier's depiction of the harem, and indeed of women in Iran more generally, diverges from that of the Greco-Roman sources as, at no point, are they shown to have meaningful power or influence over men.[1248] Rather, they are subject to the demands of men and merely react to the situations they face as a result, denying them any true agency of their own. Morier's dismissiveness towards women, of every status, is epitomised by the Shah's comments on the expansionist reign of Catherine the Great in Russia: 'we all know that when a woman meddles with anything... it is then time to put one's trust in God.'[1249] It is ironic that, in expressing distrust of women having any proximity to power, Morier supplies the Shah with words that could just as easily have originated in Herodotus' disparagement of Atossa in the *Histories.*[1250]

[1236] Morier, (1985), 335-6.
[1237] Morier, (1985), 328-9.
[1238] Morier, (1985), 148.
[1239] Morier, (1985), 145; Wills, (1883), 247; Layard, (1887), 284.

[1240] Dabashi, (2015), 40.
[1241] Morier, (1985), 199-204.
[1242] Morier, (1985), 2.
[1243] J. Peakman, *Licentious Worlds: Sex and Exploitation in Global Empires,* (London, 2019), 190-9.
[1244] Morier, (1985), 97.
[1245] Morier, (1985), 120.

[1246] Morier, (1985), 121.

[1247] Morier, (1885), 217-9.

[1248] Brosius, (1996), 105-119.

[1249] Morier, (1985), 128.

[1250] Hdt. 7.3-4; Bridges, (2015), 58-9.

The Intertextual Impact of *Hajji Baba* on British Travelogue Writing

As Iran became more accessible, and the alluring unknown was superseded by derision of its archaic power structures and military weakness in the face of Russian encroachment, *Hajji Baba* increasingly chimed with opinions critical of both the Qajar monarchy and the Iranian people themselves.[1251] It also came to be regarded as a crucial source for understanding the Iranian character for those intending to work or travel within the country, elevating the novel to something akin to a proto-anthropological field guide. Before departing for Iran, C.J. Wills received a copy of the text as a gift, intended as an introduction to the country and the nature of its inhabitants. Reflecting on his time working for the Indo-European Telegraph Company in Iran, Wills emphasises that 'it is seventeen years since I went to Persia, and I read 'Hadji (sic) Baba' now, and I still learn something new from it,' and recollects the advice of his mentor F.J. Goldsmith: 'When you read this, you will know more of Persia and the Persians than if you had lived there with your eyes open for twenty years.'[1252] Upon his return to England, Wills embarked upon his own career as a writer, publishing seven novels between 1888 and 1894, the most popular of which was the orientalist fantasy *Behind an Eastern Veil.*[1253] The extent to which *Hajji Baba* shaped Wills' engagement with Iran is reflected in his declaration that he 'endorse[d] all that Morier, Malcolm, Lady Shiel and the standard writers on Persia have said,' underlining his prioritisation by placing Morier before Malcolm, the soldier-historian, or Shiel, the travelogue writer.[1254] Curzon effected something similar when he wrote of 'The Persia of

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[1251] Ansari, (2005), 12.
[1252] Wills, (1883), 3.
[1253] Wills, (1883), xxi.
[1254] Wills, (1883), 316.

Malcolm, of Morier, of Ouseley,' though, tellingly, in his case it is Malcolm who takes priority.[1255]

A number of these travelogue writers played an active part in furthering the literary life of *Hajji Baba.* Both Curzon and Browne wrote introductions to 1895 editions of the novel, while Wills commissioned a new edition in 1897 which featured an introduction by Goldsmith, who had originally gifted him his copy.[1256] This included illustrations produced by artists in Isfahan, which provided Wills with a further opportunity to complain about the avaricious nature of the Iranians, as the price rose upon the completion of each picture.[1257] Sykes, on the other hand, produced his own picaresque novel, *The Glory of the Shia World* (1910), which he claimed to be the pilgrimage journal of Khan Bahadur Ahmad Din Khan and was heavily influenced by *Hajji Baba.*[1258] He also took credit for ensuring the endurance of Morier's novel as an influential text, claiming it was on his recommendation that the Persian translation was adopted as a standard language textbook by the British administration in India.[1259] This guaranteed the novel's persistence well into the 20th Century, with Robert Byron stating in *The Road to Oxiana* that 'Persia is still the country of Hajji Baba.'[1260]

That travellers and diplomats in the Victorian era accepted the caricatures, stereotypes, and tropes of the *Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan,* not only as an accurate representation of the Iranians but a source of deep insight, reflects the political approach of the British empire: control, rather than comprehension. Dabashi describes the novel as an example of 'astounding colonial racism… clearly intended to demean, denigrate and discredit a people in order to rule them better,' though this perhaps overstates Morier's aims, which revolved primarily around self-promotion.[1261] Crucially, Dabashi identifies this period in literature, epitomised by *Hajji Baba,* as a specific moment of further deterioration in the external view of Iran: ‘when European Persophilia degenerated into racist bigotry of unsurpassed conceit,’ the mystique and grandeur of ‘Persia’ having dissipated in the wake of Gulistan and Turkmenchay.[1262] *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* was possibly the most widely read orientalising text of the 19th Century with regards to Iran. It introduced a much wider audience to the minutiae of Qajar-era culture and society, as experienced and often misrepresented by Morier, while simultaneously reducing the Iranian people, none more so than the titular Hajji Baba, to the status of dehumanised caricatures.[1263]

[1255] Curzon, (1892), I 465.
[1256] Ross, (2009), 397.
[1257] Wills, (1883), 331.
[1258] Wynn, (2003), 116-7.
[1259] Sykes, (1902), 8.
[1260] Byron, (1937), 85.

4.4 Iranian Travellers and Travelogues: Ethnography, Autoethnography, and Modernity

As demonstrated, the Iranian ‘Other’ in 19th Century British travelogues is often a voiceless, undifferentiated, and inherently passive figure, diminished as a member of a decaying people inhabiting a decaying land. Fictional characters such as the amoral everyman Hajji Baba meanwhile informed British perceptions as to the supposed inner life of Iranians, motivated by greed and cowardice and willing to employ a variety of underhand means to improve their position. Taken together, these portrayals instilled in British readers a sense of the stagnation of Iranian society and the irreducible, often negative characteristics of the populace. This was coupled with assertions regarding the static nature of Iranian intellectual life, insulated from the outside world and displaying little innovation. Far from being a time of intellectual isolation, more than 290 Iranian travelogues were produced during the Qajar period, with the majority written during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, who himself wrote travelogue accounts of his travels.[1264] Spread across numerous archives with more possibly awaiting discovery, many of these travelogues detail mercantile journeys within Iran itself or to Afghanistan and India; or recount pilgrimages to Mecca or the important Shi'a shrines at Najaf and Kerbala. Many of these texts maintain traditional literary forms such as the '*Aja 'ib,* 'book of marvels', a medieval genre popular in Iran and epitomised by Qazvini's *'Aja 'ib al-makluqat,* which describes the 'wonders' of the cosmos.[1265] This theme of 'wonder' in particular directs Nagmeh Sohrabi's analysis of Qajar travelogues, as European scholarship has long assumed that the increasing number of Iranians who travelled further afield, including to Britain, reacted with undiluted admiration for the Western modernity they observed.[1266]

[1261] Dabashi, (2015), 165.

[1262] Dabashi, (2015), 165.

[1263] Morier, (1985), xviii.

This is not borne out by the Qajar travelogues themselves, which present far more ambiguous reactions, and indeed reflect stereotyping from an Iranian perspective. New terms appear with increasing frequency in Iranian travelogues of the 19th Century, often in connection with the objectives of travel itself. These include *tamasha,* equivalent to 'sightseeing' or 'seeking information', and *gardish*, 'wandering'; undercutting the assertion by British writers, including Curzon and Sykes, that Iranians and indeed Muslims more generally travelled only on pilgrimage or for trade, lacking the 'adventurous spirit' with which they credited themselves.[1267] Sohrabi highlights a key difficulty both with analysing Qajar travelogues and indeed for evaluating the Qajar era more widely. Viewing these texts solely as precursors to the Constitutional Revolution, and the rapid modernisation which followed, risks dismissing the emergent modernity and heterogenous viewpoints they represent, and the unique circumstances of their production.[1268] Change is evident both in the emergence of *sadah nivisi,* a simpler and more personal writing style which became popular in the late-Qajar period, and the advent of *tafarruj,* namely 'travelling for pleasure.'[1269] This should prompt reconsideration of the 'decline narrative' trope so prevalent in the British travelogues, along with recognition of the significant developments occurring within Iran itself and through its relationships to the wider world. This section aims to complicate and challenge British assumptions of stagnancy and stasis in Qajar Iran, providing a counterpoint and contextualisation to the close analysis of travelogues in the preceding chapter while underlining the inherently dialogic nature of travel writing and the exchange of ideas.

[1264] Sohrabi, (2012), 3, 82.
[1265] Sohrabi, (2012), 31.
[1266] Sohrabi, (2012), 29.
[1267] Curzon, (1892), I, 1-2, 107; Sykes, (1902), 21.

Qajar-era Iranian Travelogues of Britain

Mirza Abul Hasan Khan, known in Britain as 'Ilchi' (ambassador), produced among the first travelogues of England written by an Iranian: *Hayratnamah,* the 'Book of Wonder'. This text has been heavily criticised in both British and Iranian scholarship: by the former as a dull and formulaic account of mundane travel and by the latter as exactly the sort of uncritical, awestruck account of Europe which devalued Iranian culture, angering later nationalist intellectuals.[1270] However the travelogue, while stylistically reflecting the archaic *'aja 'ib,* contains more nuance regarding both his perception of England and his confrontation with the English perception of the Iranians. Differences in etiquette immediately struck Abul Hasan, particularly the lack of *istikbal* (ceremonial reception) surrounding his entrance into

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[1268] Sohrabi, (2012), 7.
[1269] Sohrabi, (2012), 33.
[1270] Sohrabi, (2012), 21-5.

London in 1809.[1271] Morier, his reluctant travelling companion, interpreted this as proof of Iranian backwardness, stoked by adherence to archaic and unchanging traditions, rather than as a snub to himself and, crucially, to Fath' Ali Shah Qajar, as Abul Hasan perceived it.[1272] Various misconceptions on the part of the English abounded. Abul Hasan had to disabuse his hosts of the idea that he was a 'sun-worshipper' or Zoroastrian, retorting that this would be impossible as, in England, the sun was 'invisible.'[1273] This episode is recounted in *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan in England,* with Abul Hasan renamed 'Mirza Firouz'.[1274] Such an assumption highlights the permeation of Zoroastrian characters into British awareness, as in the case of Beckford's sinister 'Giaour'. Morier seems to have increasingly disliked his travelling companion and housemate, evidenced by the portrayal of Mirza Firouz as cynical and corrupt in both *Hajji Baba* and *Hajji Baba in England*. A passage in the latter explicitly mocks Abul Hasan by drawing disparaging contrast with Herodotus' and Xenophon's descriptions of the ancient Persians: 'There was a youth who enquired whether we were famous now for being good horsemen… he then asked if we were taught to draw the bow…At length, he asked if we were famous for speaking the truth. We then saw that he had, in fact, all this time been laughing at our beards and making game of us.'[1275] Morier's antipathy was not shared by the wider public as Abul Hasan, at that point the most high-status Iranian to visit Britain, attracted curious attention from London high society, who deluged him with social invitations.[1276] Generally perceived by his hosts as polite, his travelogue elucidates small moments of surprise or discomfort with British norms. The prevalence of salted beef and pork was not to Abul Hasan's liking, though it certainly inspired 'wonder': 'God protect us from this food, how they manage to stay alive is truly a case for wonder and astonishment.'[1277]

[1271] Sohrabi, (2012), 40-1.
[1272] Sohrabi, (2012), 42-3.
[1273] Mirza Abul Hasan Khan, *Hayratnamah,* quoted from Sohrabi, (2012), 39-40.
[1274] Morier, (1985) 398-9; J.J. Morier, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba in England,* (London, 2013).
[1275] Morier, (2013), 69.
[1276] Sohrabi, (2012), 39-40.

Abul Hasan aroused such widespread fascination that he featured prominently in the British press. The wide and shockingly personal intrusion of journalism caused him consternation, inspiring reflection on the apparent lies and exaggerations to be found in newspapers, with certainly no sign of awestruck admiration.[1278] The general lack of privacy in London compared with Iran, and the ridicule he perceived as implicit in his depiction in the press as an 'idolater' and 'debauchee', seem to have unsettled the ambassador more than any other aspect of his residence in England. It also elicited his most vehement critique of English society: 'You consider the news from France lies but have no idea what your own news is like… there isn't a single true word in your newspapers', while the fleeting nature of the newspaper's relevance also baffled him - 'today's news is only useful as toilet paper the next day.'[1279] Critiquing not only the invasion of his privacy and its time-limited relevance, but also the fundamental veracity and purpose of the 'news', could be considered the inception of the Iranian discourse on the perceived dishonesty of the British, which would gather momentum during the 19th Century.[1280] Both Iranian and European scholars, as well as contemporaneous English commentators such as Morier, instead interpreted this resentment of the press as a stubborn rejection of modernity by Abul Hasan, unable to appreciate the significance of newspapers, and by extension the printing press, in the establishment of democratic governance.[1281] Sent to formalise and sign the 'Preliminary Treaty of Friendship and Alliance', Abul Hasan's discourse on England is generally diplomatic and measured.

[1277] Mirza Abul Hasan Khan, *Hayratnamah,* cited from Sohrabi, (2012), 35.

[1278] Sohrabi, (2012), 38.

[1279] Mirza Abul Hasan Khan, *Hayratnamah,* cited from Sohrabi, (2012), 38-40.

[1280] A. Amanat, 'Through the Persian Eye: Anglophilia and Anglophobia in Modern Iranian History' in *Iran Facing Others,* A. Amanat and F. Vejdani (eds.), (New York NY, 2012).

[1281] Sohrabi, (2012), 41-2.

While it certainly expresses ‘wonder’ at aspects of British modernity, particularly the urban planning and infrastructure of London, the *Hayratnamah* is not fundamentally or exclusively a work of praise for European or British institutions.

Mirza Fattah Khan Gamrudi’s travelogue, *Chahārfasl* (‘Four Seasons’) and its addendum *Kitāb-i Shabnamah* (‘Night Letter’), contrast starkly with the *Hayratnamah.* As deputy to ambassador Husayn Khan Ajudanbashi Muqqadam, Gamrudi accompanied him on a diplomatic mission from 1838-9 which took them to London via Vienna and Paris.[1282] While withholding the appropriate *istikbal* was likely unintentional upon Abul Hasan’s arrival; Ajudanbashi and Gamrudi’s muted reception in London was deliberately calculated to ‘Europeanise’ the ambassador and underline that, with Napoleon defeated, Iran was no longer of much significance to British foreign policy.[1283] This alienation was exacerbated by the Qajar siege of Herat and retaliatory British occupation of Bushehr and Kharg island.[1284] Though a temporary incursion with limited impact on the population, this confrontation had a significant impact on reshaping the British, in the Iranian imagination. I’tizad al-Sultanah’s contemporary history, *Iksir al-Tavarikh,* criticised the British for making ‘promises without credibility’, a reaction to the withdrawal of support for the Qajar army and their subsequent aggression.[1285] Such sentiment led to the rise of popular sayings such as *Engelis-e Portadlis* (‘deceitful English’) and *Dast-e penhan* (‘hidden hand’), a reflection of growing anxiety regarding the extent of British power, which was increasingly characterised as cunning and ruthless.[1286] Informed by this context, the *Shabnamah* harshly critiqued England and its customs, rather than Europe as a whole, reflecting Gamrudi’s trepidation regarding the threat posed to Iranian sovereignty by British imperial hegemony.[1287] Later Iranian travelogues and discourse would, by contrast, focus increasingly on comparing the conditions of Qajar rule with facets of European modernity. Foremost among the social norms Gamrudi criticised were the sexual mores of English women. Encompassing promiscuity and allegedly extending to bestiality, Sohrabi argues this equated the threat of female sexual agency with the threat of British expansionism, although this did not appear to dissuade Gamrudi from sexual liaisons with multiple English women.[1288] The agency and assertiveness of these women was supposedly matched by the cuckoldry of English men, and the naivete and stupidity of the population at large. British merchants are also criticised for their dishonesty, a seemingly universal characteristic of travel writing regardless of the cultural context.[1289] Dismissed as a straightforward rejection of British modernity, Gamrudi was instead reacting to imperial conditions and diplomatic tensions, which undoubtedly encouraged negative stereotyping.

[1282] Tavakoli-Targhi, (2001), 65.
[1283] Tavakoli-Targhi, (2001), 65.
[1284] Johnson, (2012), 33-4.
[1285] Sohrabi, (2012), 60.
[1286] Amanat, (2012), 132, 146.

Mirroring the often-overwhelming focus of British travelogues on the Shah, Naser al-Din Shah is the best-known Iranian traveller of the Qajar era in Britain, undertaking three journeys to Europe in 1873, 1878, and 1889.[1290] He was, however, not the first Qajar to reach Britain. In May 1836, Reza Quli Mirza, Najaf Quli Mirza, and Timur Mirza arrived in England, seeking protection and, possibly, mediation from the British government, following the contested accession of Mohammad Shah Qajar.[1291] Both Reza Quli Mirza and Najaf Quli Mirza wrote accounts of their journey and residence in England, *Zikr-i vaqāyi' -i vafāt-i Khāqān* and *Rumūz al-siyāhah* respectively. An English translation of the latter also exists, entitled *Journal of a residence in England, and of a journey from and to Syria, of Their Royal Highnesses Reza Koolee Meerza, Najaf Koolee Meerza, and Taymoor Meerza, of Persia*. Sporting a suitably verbose title appropriate for an English travelogue of the period, it was translated from Persian by As'ad Ya'qub Khayyat, the chief interpreter for the British diplomatic mission in Damascus.[1292] Just as Mirza Abul Hasan Khan's presence had caused excited fascination among high society in London, so the Princes were also bombarded with invitations to dinners and social receptions, including from the Prime Minister Lord Melbourne.[1293] As in the *Shabnamah*, differences in norms of heterosociality made a particularly strong impression. Najaf Quli Mirza describes a crowd of as many as 5,000 women assembling outside the Princes' accommodation at York House, before some gathered the courage to enter. The women were then asked to leave a note of their names: 'in this way we had about a thousand visitors of these most illustrious *houris*.'[1294] Of English women generally they concluded that they were superior in both intellect and education to their Iranian counterparts. Much of the Princes' time was additionally taken up by studying languages with young English men, becoming 'schoolmasters of Persian and pupils of English.'[1295] The Princes however also clearly chafed under the pressure of being a 'spectacle' in London, just as Abul Hasan had, unused to the scrutiny of the press and the accompanying dissection of their public appearances.[1296] Eventually receiving guarantees they would not be killed or detained upon returning to Iran from Mohammad Shah via the British government, the Princes departed for the Ottoman empire; still hesitant to return to Iran lest the Shah rescind his guarantees upon their arrival.[1297]

[1287] Sohrabi, (2012), 121.
[1288] Tavakoli-Targhi, (2001), 66.
[1289] Sohrabi, (2012), 66-7.
[1290] Scarce, (2007), 464.
[1291] R.M. Savory, 'The Visit of Three Qajar Princes to England' in *Iran and Iranian Studies,* K. Eslami (ed.), (Princeton NJ, 1998), 220-2.

[1292] Savory, (1998), 223.

[1293] Savory, (1998), 226.

[1294] Najaf Quli Mirza, *Journal of a Residence in England,* (Farnborough, 1971), I, 260-1.

[1295] Najaf Quli Mirza, (1971), I, 262.

[1296] Sohrabi, (2012), 38-40.

[1297] Savory, (1998), 236.

By contrast with the sojourn of the Qajar princes in the 1830s, the visits of Naser al-Din Shah were grand public events featuring processions and receptions, not only providing many inhabitants of London their first opportunity to observe an Iranian, but the Shah himself. Naser al-Din's three journeys to Europe inspired five volumes of travelogues. Primarily describing his personal reactions and travel itinerary, rather than the political dimensions of his travels, they have been frequently discounted in scholarship as a result.[1298] The relative mundanity of what was recorded, speaks to the normalisation of travel to Europe for Iranians who had access to both earlier Iranian travelogues and, increasingly, translations of European travelogues and guide books.[1299] Just as close proximity to the Bakhtiari eroded Layard and Bird's romanticised notions of the 'noble savage', so exposure to the Shah in person had a markedly de-exoticising effect, in contrast with the residence of the Princes. Naser al-Din's invitation to boxers and wrestlers to compete on the grounds of Buckingham palace for his amusement had the opposite effect on Queen Victoria, as did his discarding bones on the floor during a formal dinner, to which Wills exclaimed in his travelogue: 'So much for the civilisation of the 'Asylum of the Universe', the 'King of Kings!''[1300] While the visits of the Shah and his entourage stoked interest in aesthetic Iranian culture for many among the wider British public, as the Iranian exhibits at the Great Exhibition had done in 1851, it disabused some of their archaising and romantic conceptions of the grandeur of an 'Oriental despot.'[1301] This marks a further notable milestone in the evolution of British 'Persophobia' as it contributed directly to the broader stereotype of the Persians, who were largely assessed through their ruler, as inherently degenerate and decayed by comparison with their ancient precedents.[1302]

[1298] Sohrabi, (2012), 74.
[1299] Sohrabi, (2012), 105-7.
[1300] Wills, (1883), 405.
[1301] Scarce, (2007), 455, 464.
[1302] Dabashi, (2015), 176.

Two further Iranian travellers produced notable examples of *Safarnamah* including descriptions of visiting Britain in the late 19th Century; demonstrating growing familiarity with travel and, specifically, with London.[1303] Hajji Pirzadeh Na'ini, a Sufi dervish and favourite of the Qajar court, was received in London in 1885 by a range of dignitaries, including William Gladstone, at a dinner orchestrated by Malkam Khan, the then Qajar ambassador.[1304] Na'ini also met Edward Browne ('Mr Brownie'), and was impressed by the young scholar's budding linguistic skills and enthusiasm for Iranian culture and mysticism. Browne praised Na'ini as a sage and spiritual guide, who in response bestowed upon Browne the grand sobriquet *Mazhar-e Ali* ('manifestation of Ali') along with a set of Sufi robes.[1305] Browne would carry these around Iran a few years later, a literal accumulation of pre-travel baggage.[1306] His use of both the title and clothing during meetings with Iranians, and the former in his Persian correspondence, corroborates Curzon's assertions regarding Browne's growing 'Persianness', along with the resultant imperial anxiety it prompted.[1307] The use of Persian clothing by British travellers in Iran is attested to in the travelogues of Layard, Wills, Bird, and Sykes, calculated to ward off unwanted curiosity and the perceived 'fanaticism' of the inhabitants.[1308] Browne's adoption of the guise of a spiritual figure is, however, distinct in the context of Iran, further highlighting his desire to inhabit the trappings of the 'East', as Lord Byron had done in Greece.[1309] Despite the warm welcome, and his clear regard for Browne, Na'ini was nonetheless highly critical of social norms in London, particularly in relation to heterosociality and sexuality.[1310] Unlike Gamrudi, however, this primarily emanated from his own conservative views, as opposed to anxiety regarding British-Iranian relations reflected in the *Shabnamah.* By contrast, Ibrahim Sahhafbashi, who travelled to Europe and the USA as a gemstone trader, offers critiques of both Iran and his destinations, marking him out as a new generation of Iranian traveller who was neither fully ‘West-struck’ nor overcome with xenophobia.[1311] His travelogue and Na’ini’s both demonstrate a significant degree of prior knowledge of Europe, underscoring the steady normalisation of travel and the intertextuality of Iranian and translated European travelogues. Sahhafbashi, as a nationalist with constitutional sympathies, also actively sought to rectify errors in previous accounts and counterbalance the uncritical ‘wonder’ conveyed by earlier travellers.[1312] For example, his failure to master bicycle riding after observing American women seemingly-effortlessly succeed, as described in the previous chapter, provoked reflection on the blinkering effect of misogyny upon ‘us poor, stupid people,’ including himself in criticism of Iranian men as a whole.[1313] Sahhafbashi’s travelogue demonstrates that, for late-Qajar era Iranians, travel not only encouraged outward scrutiny but also increasingly prompted self-reflection and critique, a reflexivity often absent from their British counterparts.

[1303] Sohrabi, (2012), 105-6.
[1304] Sohrabi, (2012), 113.
[1305] G.M. Wickens, J. Cole and K. Ekbal, 'BROWNE, Edward Granville', *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* Vol.IV Fasc. 5, 484.
[1306] Seshan, (2020), 5.
[1307] Curzon, (1894).
[1308] Harrison, (2011), 107.
[1309] Bayly, (2002), 93.
[1310] Sohrabi, (2012), 119-20.

Autoethnography and Modernity: Iranian Discourse on Change in the late-Qajar Period

While travel allowed Iranians to form clearer impressions of Britain and its people, the experience also prompted reflection on the contemporary state of Iran. ‘Modernity’ was a key component of this discourse, though as Milad Odabaei has stressed, this should not be conflated with the direct recreation of European political institutions, economies, or technologies. Similarly, while there was an influx of European intellectual terminology, particularly thanks to the expansion of translation efforts under Naser al-Din Shah, these terms were employed in different, and historically rooted contexts within Iran, and their use should not be interpreted as the wholesale adoption of European political philosophies or ideologies.[1314] Indeed, resistance to Qajar rule, coupled with growing anti-imperialist sentiment and nationalism, was evident among the *bazāris* and *ulema*, who had far less engagement with Iranian intellectuals and members of the wider Qajar elite, let alone with European political texts.[1315] Jamal al-Din Asadabadi, better known as 'Afghani', also contributed to debates around modernity, from an Islamic perspective. His critique of Qajar rule was framed through denunciations of tyranny present in the *Qur'an* and Shi'a theology, though he himself claimed to be an Afghan Sunni to promote the spread of his Pan-Islamic ideology into the Ottoman empire.[1316] Mirza Reza Kermani, the assassin of Naser al-Din Shah, was directly influenced by Asadabadi; demonstrating the blinkering effect of Islamophobia in British travelogues which largely dismissed the Shi'a majority in favour of identifying minorities such as the Zoroastrians or Babis as potential agents of radical change. Secular and religious discourse both contributed to the modern Iranian anti-tyranny discourse, which has asserted itself in various manifestations ever since. When Ayatollah Montazeri, then considered the de-facto heir to Ayatollah Khomeini, became critical of the direction Islamic Republic in the late 1980s, he described the implementation of the system of *velayat-e faqih* ('guardianship of the jurist') as 'tyranny' and the unrestrained authority of the supreme leader as 'despotic'; echoing the rhetoric of Asadabadi and the clerical leaders of the Constitutional Revolution.[1317] Similarly, when contemporary anti-government protesters chant '*marg bar diktator*' ('death to the dictator', directed at Ayatollah Khamenei) they are employing a secular Latin-derived political term, absorbed into the Iranian political lexicon in the late-Qajar period, to criticise a theocratic leader.[1318] There was, therefore, a degree of adaptation and integration of European political and philosophical terms into the Islamic philosophical tradition, though again these acquired nuance and interpretive baggage.[1319] Reflection on Iranian perceptions of Britain and British perceptions of Iran tie back to Pratt's conceptualisation of 'autoethnography', the indigenous people seeking to present themselves in terms, and through knowledge frameworks; intelligible to the imperial power with the aim of achieving recognition, legitimacy, and ultimately equality.[1320] A significant aspect of this process, in the Qajar context, occurred through translation.

[1311] Sohrabi, (2012), 108.
[1312] Sohrabi, (2012), 122.
[1313] Sahhafbashi Tehrani, (1978), 89, quoted from Sohrabi, (2012), 121.

[1314] M. Odabaei, 'Shrinking Borders and Expanding Vocabularies: Translation and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution' in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906,* A.M. Ansari (ed.), (London, 2016), 99-100.

[1315] Gheissari, (2016), 17.

[1316] M.E. Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity,* (Berkeley CA, 2002), 272-3.

[1317] Amanat, (2017), 862-4.

Travel, and the publication of travelogues in Iran, was accompanied by a rapid growth in translations, including historical, geographic, and scientific texts, as well as European travelogues of Iran. Mirza Saleh Shirazi's *Safarnamah* recounts the inception of this process, describing his journey to England with a small group of students to learn English, French, and Latin at the behest of Abbas Mirza, Fath' Ali Shah's reform-minded crown prince.[1321] Shirazi particularly focused on the concept of 'freedom', in the context of England, remarking how it seemingly shielded 'men, however poor they might be, from the will of the sovereign.'[1322] His travelogue first conveyed this concept into the Iranian political lexicon, where it would play a prominent role in the later discourses of constitutionalists and nationalists. With texts having previously been translated into Persian via their prior translation into Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, or Russian, the mid-19th Century saw a significant rise in direct translations of English, French, German, and Italian texts and, thus, a greater, more direct engagement with the ideas of the enlightenment, the French Revolution,

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[1318] Hanrahan and Shalmashi, (30. Sep. 2022), accessed 21.05.23.

[1319] Seidel, (2016), 218-9.

[1320] Pratt, (1992), 9.

[1321] Amanat, (2012), 137-8.

[1322] M.S. Shirazi, *Safarnamah,* (Tehran, 1968), 207.

Marxism, and ethno-nationalism.[1323] Translations of German texts, additionally, provoked initial Iranian engagement with the reinvented term ‘Aryan’ and the associated racial discourse.[1324] Shirazi was also involved with the translation of English texts for Abbas Mirza, with the *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* and Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* among the first translations commissioned by the crown prince.[1325] The accession of Naser al-Din saw further growth in the production of translations, including the establishment of the ‘Royal House of Translation’.[1326] Having acquired linguistic skills, during his time trading throughout Iran, Edward Burgess became involved in this process, selecting and translating atlases and encyclopaedias for the young Naser al-Din.[1327] Many such translations subsequently contributed to the production of textbooks in Persian for institutions organised along European lines such as the *Dar al-Funun*, though this focused on military and engineering innovation rather than intellectual content.[1328] Providing translations for the Shah could, however, be a fraught undertaking. Malcolm’s *History of Persia* was considered so disparaging, regarding the conditions of 19th Century Iran and the atmosphere of the Qajar court in particular, that Amir Kabir allegedly dissuaded Naser al-Din from having a full version translated into Persian, lest it crush the young Shah’s aspirations.[1329] Translations continued to be dedicated to Muzaffar ad-Din during his reign, though he seems to have been less engaged than his father with literary culture, while other Qajar grandees, such as the Zil es-Sultan and ‘Abd al-Hossein Farman Farma, increasingly commissioned their own private translations leading to a greater diffusion of printing and publication.[1330]

[1323] Seidel, (2016), 205.

[1324] J. Wiesehöfer, ‘Zur Geschichte der Begriffe “Arier” und “Arisch” in der Deutschen Sprachenwissenschaft und Althistorie’ in *Achaemenid History V,* H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and J.W. Drijvers (eds.), (Leiden, 1990), 166-7.

[1325] Odabaei, (2016), 105-9.

[1326] Sohrabi, (2012), 84.

[1327] Amanat, (2008), 74-5.

[1328] Seidel, (2016), 216.

[1329] Amanat, (2008), 130.

[1330] Seidel, (2016), 214-15.

By the 1890s, Iranian travel writing was increasingly employed to critique the domestic situation and began to overlap with other literary forms, including fiction and satire. This is evident in the *Siyāhatnamah-ʻi Ibrahim B*āyg (1895), a fictional travelogue published in Cairo which directly criticised the Qajar dynasty and was particularly popular among nationalists and constitutionalists.[1331] Iranian intellectuals were tending to leave Iran for fear of persecution; so Cairo, Istanbul, Beirut, T'bilisi, and subsequently the western European capitals, gradually became diasporic hubs of cultural exchange and ideological crystallisation.[1332] While manuscript translations had been worked on throughout the 19th Century, the first widely available Persian translation of *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan,* was published in Calcutta in 1905 and followed by many others.[1333] It initially prompted horror and revulsion in Iranian literary circles at the debased depiction of their 'voice' through the British lens.[1334] However, the excesses of the protagonist and their relationship to the system in which he resided also chimed with nationalist intellectuals, who increasingly saw the governance of the Qajar dynasty itself as impervious to reform; perpetuating ignorance, stagnation, and corruption.[1335] Translations were, thus, laying bare the contempt many British writers held for Iran, while radicalising Iranian intellectuals and encouraging them to respond to such a depiction. Practical manifestations of modernity facilitated the proliferation of ideas, as Iranian intellectuals harnessed technology originally introduced through the Qajar court and imperial powers; with the telegraph and printing press enabling the rapid dissemination of textual information.[1336] Initially a propaganda tool for the Qajar dynasty who imported the first daguerreotype cameras in 1842, circulating images of the Shah, his family and ministers, photography increasingly become a key weapon of the

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[1331] Sohrabi, (2012), 121.
[1332] Malayeri, (2016), 130.
[1333] Amanat, (2003).
[1334] Dabashi, (2015), 165-6.
[1335] Matin, (2016), 91.
[1336] Amanat, (2017), 177-8, 255.

Constitutional movement. Not only could images of revolutionary leaders and politicians be easily disseminated, but also images of the *bast* in the grounds of the British legation, or the torture and execution of political prisoners, used to galvanise further resistance.[1337] Repurposing and adaptation also took place in the literary context where satire and caricature, the literary legacies of *Hajji Baba*, would play a significant role in emergent modern Iranian literature. This is observable in Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh's collection *Yeki Bud Yeki Nabud* (1921), particularly the short story *Farsi Shakar Ast* ('Persian is Sugar'), which caricatures both conservative clerics and westernised *fukuli* in the context of the final years of the Qajar dynasty; suggesting that though they might nominally speak the same language, there was little chance of comprehension.[1338] The tension between western-style modernity and Perso-Islamic tradition, encapsulated in Iranian travelogues, real and fictional, as well as outright fiction, would dominate Iranian intellectual discourse during the final years of Qajar Iran and within the diaspora. This continued under Reza Shah Pahlavi, who eventually banned not only Jamalzadeh's fiction but also all Persian translations of *Hajji Baba,* judging it a degrading and long-outdated portrayal.[1339]

Another key discourse of modernity from the late-Qajar period revolves, ironically, around the ancient past, which British travellers consistently identified as the greatest period of Iranian civilisation. Early Qajar Shahs engaged with pre-Islamic Iranian history primarily as a means of reinforcing their domestic legitimacy, evidenced by appearance of Qajar carvings and inscriptions alongside Achaemenid and Sassanian reliefs at key sites such as Bisitun, Persepolis, Naqš-i Rustam, and Taq-i Bostan, coupled with framing their rule in traditional Perso-Islamic terms and tying themselves to the Safavid legacy.[1340] This involved the Qajars portraying themselves as the nation's foremost guardians, supreme arbiters of justice, and the archetype for the nation's manhood; qualities reinforced through elaborate ceremonial displays, royal hunts, and conspicuous consumption, incorporating the dichotomy of *razm va bazm,* 'fight and feast'.[1341] Kianoosh Motaghedi also asserts that Fath' Ali Shah actively encouraged comparisons between his own royal imagery and those of the Achaemenids; his presentation with elaborate beard, throne, Kayanid crown, and sceptre evoking the enthroned image of Darius I or Xerxes at Persepolis.[1342] This initially-domestic focus did not preclude growing curiosity among the Qajars regarding the European perception of Iran's ancient history. Henry Rawlinson observed that Mohammad Shah Qajar had kept himself updated on the decipherment of Old Persian cuneiform and had commanded the governor of Kermanshah to have a Modern Persian translation of the inscription engraved at Bisitun. Rawlinson characterised this as the Shah 'wishing to emulate the petroglyphic fame of his remote ancestor on the throne of Persia, or at any rate to render the antique annals of the empire intelligible to the multitude,' though the translation was ultimately not completed.[1343] Mohammad Shah Qajar also drew explicit comparisons between the introduction of new uniforms for the Qajar army and the clothing of the Achaemenid 'immortals' on the friezes at Persepolis.[1344]

[1337] Helbig, (2016), 58-60.

[1338] M.A. Jamalzadeh, *Once Upon a Time (Yeki Bud, Yeki Nabud),* trans. H. Moayyad and P. Sprachman, (New York NY, 1985), 34-40.

[1339] Amanat, (2003).

[1340] Sami, (1954), 30; Amanat, (2017), 185-6.

Walking the knife-edge between competing imperial powers and internal unrest, Naser al-Din continued to draw legitimacy from Perso-Islamic traditions of kingship while increasingly fostering association with ancient dynasties, evidenced by the reproduction of motifs copied from Persepolis and Susa in the tilework of his palaces.[1345] Translations of Greco-Roman texts into Persian, including Herodotus' *Histories* and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and *Anabasis*, were also made for Naser al-Din Shah, who wished to comprehend the texts he believed had shaped the British perception of Iran, particularly the narrative of decline. Struck by the scale and grandeur of the Achaemenid empire, and the might of Cyrus and Darius I, Naser al-Din was equally dismayed that his own epoch was so directly disparaged by comparison.[1346] Subsequent Qajar sponsorship of archaeological surveys could be interpreted as attempts to tie themselves more closely to the pre-Islamic past, and 'autoethnographically' project their legitimacy to the imperial powers.[1347] Efforts to outwardly associate themselves with the European perception of the Achaemenids were, however, liable to draw derision from their intended audience. Though they might have believed in the survival of archaic forms of governance and ceremony in Iran, few Europeans saw real commonality between the Qajars themselves and the ancient dynasties, but rather a failed imitation of that ancient grandeur.[1348] This was further hardened by the popularisation of 'Aryanism', which further excluded the Turkic Qajars from association with the pre-Islamic Persians, with Browne comparing them instead to Ghaznavid or Seljuq interlopers.[1349] Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's lavish celebration of '2,500 years of Iranian monarchy' at Persepolis in October 1971, which prompted largely bemused and dismissive reactions in Britain, could thus be considered the peak of an autoethnographic trend which began under the Qajars.

[1341] Amanat, (2012), 128.
[1342] K. Motaghedi, 'Qajar Royal Wall Paintings', The Idea of Iran, online conference, (28. Nov 2020).
[1343] RGS Archives: *Excursion from Baghdad*.
[1344] Tavakoli-Targhi, (2001), 103.
[1345] Abdi, (2001), 53-4.

Iranian intellectuals also began to pay greater attention to the pre-Islamic past in the late-19th Century, echoing British discourse by decrying the decaying contemporary state of Iran. Prominent figures such as Mirza Fatali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878), Malkam Khan (1833-1908), and Mirza Agha Khan Kermani (1855-1898), were all influenced by this trend, responsible for innovations in literature and literary criticism as well as drama.[1350] Kermani's conception of desirable Iranian modernity in particular incorporated not only elements of Enlightenment philosophy and Liberalism derived from intellectual engagement with British and wider European discourse, but equally drew upon influences from Iran's history and mythology. Particularly influential among the latter were the idealised portrayal of Cyrus as a benevolent and tolerant ruler derived from Biblical and Greco-Roman sources, and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* which detailed multiple incidences of unworthy rulers, epitomised by the demonic Zahhak, losing the *farr* (literally 'glory', divinely bestowed right to rule) and being overthrown.[1351] Greater regard for Zoroastrian philosophy, and thus for the Parsi communities of India, who were regarded as 'preserving' ancient Persian custom and language, is also reflected in Kermani's writing; a growing sympathy also exhibited by other Iranian nationalists.[1352] Kermani blamed the role of the *shari'a* in Iran for mandating separation and inequality between genders; encouraging the persecution of minorities, permitting slavery, and mandating harsh punishments.[1353] His nationalist historical perspective, encapsulated in *Tārikh-e Iran-e Bastan* and *Nāmeh-ye Bastan,* thus aligns with many of Browne's views. Both praised the pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian past in comparison with the Islamic present, viewing the Babi movement as a manifestation of the former and a potential vector for national revival.[1354] They both fundamentally conceived Iran's modernity as emanating from re-engagement with its 'ancient glory', increasingly synonymous with the Achaemenids. Kermani also credited Europe's ancient past for furnishing it with the tools for creating its own modernity. He alleged the polytheism of Greece, Rome, and Carthage, which provided the ability to choose one's objects of devotion and emulation, as opposed to the constraints of Abrahamic monotheism, had led Europe on a path to ‘pluralistic enlightenment’, immune to absolutism.[1355] Kermani’s dismissal of the impact of Christianity on European philosophy and political development, and attribution of all positive cultural aspects to ancient cultures, again brings his discourse proximate to that of Browne, though incidentally also to wider British privileging of the Achaemenids. This interest in ancient European history also prompted Kermani’s attempt to translate *Les Adventures de Télémaque,* François Fénelon’s didactic philosophical novel. It describes Telemachus’ (son of Odysseus) travels and observation of political forms in the company of Mentor, his tutor, who at the conclusion of the narrative is revealed to be the goddess Minerva.[1356] Kermani’s enthusiasm for the novel’s setting, and exploration of political innovations including parliamentary representation and international cooperation, illustrates the growing popularity of ancient history in Qajar Iran coupled with the influence of European political thought, while adapting these concepts to the Iranian context.[1357] This further underlines the dialogic nature of nascent Iranian modernity; driven by ‘dialogue between the indigenous cultural heritage and the modern Western culture and philosophy. […] Persian thought was not only a receiver of Western civilisation but also reconstructed its own progressive potentials and ideas through understanding and observing the West.’[1358] This took place under the specific conditions of late-Qajar Iran; encapsulating tensions between reform and revolution, innovation and tradition, change and stasis; defying and complicating assertions of stagnation and apathy central to the decline narrative so prominently displayed in British travelogues. Superstition, tradition, lack of education, and fear were instead the key factors identified by late-19th Century Iranian intellectuals for the persistence of despotism in Iran, not any innate or essential characteristics unique to themselves or ‘Asiatics’ more broadly.[1359] They thus realised the potential for imminent change in Iran which eluded so many British travellers.

[1346] Amanat, (2008), 430-2.

[1347] Abdi, (2001), 53-4; Sami, (1954), 63.

[1348] Browne, (1893), 109; Tavakoli-Targhi, (2001), 120.

[1349] Browne, (1893), 109-10; Matin-Asgari, (2012), 182.

[1350] Malayeri, (2016), 140-1.
[1351] Abdolmohammadi, (2016), 118, 121; A. Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh,* trans. D. Davis, (London, 2007), 9-27.
[1352] Gheissari, (2016), 29.
[1353] Abdolmohammadi, (2016), 125.
[1354] Browne, (1893), 236, 410, 432.

[1355] Abdolmohammadi, (2016), 123-4.

[1356] Seidel, (2016), 217.

[1357] Odabaei, (2016), 100.

[1358] Malayeri, (2016), 136-7.

[1359] Malayeri, (2016), 131-2.

Conclusion

Though varied in style and perspective and drawing from a range of textual influences, the British travelogues examined here nonetheless demonstrate adherence to a perception of late-Qajar Iran informed by tropes and stereotypes. Close examination of the travelogues of Curzon, Browne, and Sykes, as well as their immediate precedents in the 1880s, demonstrates adherence to tropes with manifestations in both the Greco-Roman literary tradition and Orientalist literature, particularly *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan.* Treated as a combination of guidebook and anthropological survey, rather than the picaresque novel it was, *Hajji Baba* impacted heavily upon the expectations of British travellers while reinforcing their often-superficial retrospective observations on the inherent nature of the 'Persian character', which Morier judged amoral and utterly corrupt.[1360] A triangulation of confirmation bias is thus observable. The influence of Greco-Roman literature, superficially accessed within the public school system, permeated Victorian culture; cultivating the perception of an inherent and ancient divide between Persia and Greece, East and West, Asia and Europe, and despotism and liberty. This was amplified and recontextualised by Orientalist literature which provided the contemporaneous *mise-en-scene* of Qajar Iran: cruel and licentious Shahs who executed their courtiers on a whim and harems populated by scheming concubines and sinister eunuchs, while the impoverished common people scraped an existence by trickery, deceit, and theft. These layered, stereotyped conceptions of Iran were reinforced by the experiences of the travelogue writers themselves who, often lacking the ability to communicate fluently, superficially observed the Iranians and laid their own preconceptions onto them, recording largely what they expected to see.

[1360] Dabashi, (2015), 165.

Equally, an observable pattern of accumulated intertextual ‘baggage’ weighed upon the production of travelogues: fantastical tales encouraged travel and the production of travelogues, which in turn inspired the creation of literature and poetry, driving further travel and travel writing.[1361] This facilitated the accumulation of tropes and the formation of stereotypes, as layers of fact and fiction accrued and mutually reinforced each other.

All the travelogues examined during this research exhibit some manifestation of a ‘decline narrative’ as applied to Iran, primarily predicated on amplifying the Achaemenid and Sassanian empires as the apogees of Iranian civilisation while diminishing, or actively dismissing, the achievements of later Islamic polities. This perception was particularly influenced by Gibbon’s History of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Malcolm’s *History of Persia,* which employed some of the former’s themes while constructing a historical framework informed by Iranian historiography.[1362] This was not maintained in *Persia and the Persian Question,* where Curzon drew heavily from Malcolm’s *History* as he could not directly engage with Persianate historiography, while constructing his historical framework from Greco-Roman histories and later European historiography and travelogues. Though it had precedents in the 18th Century and earlier texts, it was during the 19th Century that the stereotype that Iran was incapable of change became truly consolidated in British discourse, albeit with institutions degraded by comparison with their ancient counterparts. This became intertwined with the emergent racial theories of Aryan supremacy, casting the Turkic Qajar dynasty as interlopers responsible for the corruption of a once ‘pure’ Iran, while amplifying the wider fear of miscegenation in the late-Victorian mentality.[1363] Tellingly, this is observable in Browne’s travelogue, as well as those of Curzon and Sykes who were generally more preoccupied with categorising the various ethnic groups of Asia and reconstructing their histories along Eurocentric lines. The key differentiation is that Browne envisaged an ‘Aryan renaissance’ primarily emanating from minorities such as the Zoroastrians and Babis, rather than the ‘civilising’ influence of Britain or an ‘enlightened Oriental despot’, as the only viable means of reversing this decline; his views aligning with a distinct current of emergent Iranian nationalist discourse.[1364] While he became a vocal supporter of the Constitutional movement, and sought to influence British policy through his participation in the Persia Committee, Browne’s travelogue must also, by Pratt’s definition, be considered a ‘concessionary narrative’.[1365] Browne’s *Year Amongst the Persians* gained status as an intellectual ‘anti-conquest’ of Iran, due to his willingness to critique specific British policies and negative stereotyped attitudes, while he was fundamentally still a constituent and beneficiary of the imperial system which facilitated his travel to Iran as a scholar.[1366] His political connections and communications with the Foreign Office, and various other facets of British Imperial administration throughout his life, illustrate his proximity to, and repeated interactions with, these institutions.[1367] While his academic inquiry into Persian literature remains a current source, and his positive reputation in both Iran and the Iranian diaspora endures, it is important to correctly identify Browne as an eccentric ‘imperial Liberal’ rather than a political radical; his political activity ultimately confined to taking contrarian positions and seeking to ameliorate imperial policy.

[1361] Seshan, (2020), 1-5, 10.
[1362] Malcolm, (2014), 357-9.
[1363] Sheffield, (2013), 30-1.

Certain tropes remain remarkably constant across the travelogues, reflecting both their prominence in the minds of the travellers and their need to fall back on generalisations when unable to form their own nuanced interpretations due to a lack of language skills, limited access, or short exposure; all crucial factors for the British reception of Qajar Iran. These tropes could also be conceptualised as features of the Qajar state, as well as of the Iranian individual. Focus on the Qajar Shahs, particularly Naser al-Din, as prime examples of ‘Oriental despotism’ and tyranny is prevalent in all of the travelogues, though there is wide variation in the writers’ personal opinions of the Shah. Despite this, they consistently emphasise the archaic character of the monarchy, an observation heightened by the Qajar dynasty’s attempted autoethnographic and domestic legitimation through association with the Achaemenid and Sassanian dynasties.[1368] Ultimately though this was a failed imitation of the centralised authority and grandeur of these dynasties on the part of the Qajars, further contributing to British manifestations of disappointment and the de-exoticising trajectory to ‘Persophobia’.[1369] The Iranians were supposedly predisposed to this despotic monarchy because of their inherent servility, an assertion supported by citing historical precedent along with the assumption that Iran was immune to change. This fed into the emergent belief, clearly observable in Sykes’ travelogue, that British imperial interests were best served through the support of amenable ‘strongman’ clients in Asia; a belief which endured throughout the 20th Century and continues to inform British foreign policy in terms of explicitly prioritising ‘stability’ and economic access.[1370] There is, similarly, a noticeable preoccupation with arbitrary violence and cruelty across the travelogues with frequent detailed descriptions of punishments, such as the bastinado, elaborate tortures, and executions. The brutal suppression of minorities by the forces of the Qajar state also feature prominently. The travelogues do generally agree on the reduction of violence in Iran during the reign of Naser al-Din, reflecting his ability to maintain a balance of power between Russia and Britain and suppress domestic threats to the Qajars such as the Babis or nomads.[1371] However, this pacification is primarily attributed to European, and particularly British, influence, rather than any amelioration of the cruelty widely believed to be an essential characteristic of the Iranians. Similarly ubiquitous are descriptions of the avaricious and corrupt nature of officialdom and the grasping, obsequious behaviour of the lower classes. The tendency to highlight these characteristics as inherently Iranian within the travelogues of Curzon and Sykes ultimately elevates greed to the primary motivation of the Iranian people, again exhibiting the influence of *Hajji Baba* and maintaining its core thesis.

[1364] Gheissari, (2016), 29-30.
[1365] Pratt, (1992), 8-9, 98.
[1366] Pratt, (1992), 8-9; 72-3.
[1367] Nash, (2005), 165-6.

[1368] Amanat, (2017), 185-6.
[1369] Dabashi, (2015), 205.
[1370] Sykes, (1902), 240-1.
[1371] Amanat, (2008), 407-9.

These tropes retained their centrality, in the British perception of the Iranian character, particularly because they were relevant to the concerns of imperial control as exercised upon the Shah through economic hegemony backed by the threat of military action. While references to the, allegedly, universal cowardice and dishonesty still appear in many of these travelogues, they became less relevant to the stereotyped conception of the Iranians specifically. By the close of the 19th Century, all 'natives' were considered 'lesser'; inherently deficient in courage and honesty by comparison with British perceptions of themselves as racially superior.[1372] Favoured 'martial' tribes and minorities were meanwhile incorporated into the imperial military hierarchy as disposable shock troops.[1373] Some tropes, however, seem to be emphasised or ignored based on more personal perceptions and the experiences of the traveller whilst in Iran. Wills, for example, made no explicit references to cowardice, while Browne recorded only Iranian anecdotes on the subject, making no assertions of his own.[1374] Layard, Bird, Curzon, and Sykes, however, all continued to depict the Iranians as inherently cowardly, characteristics often compared unfavourably with the Kurds and particularly the Bakhtiari Lurs, who were superficially conceptualised as 'noble savages'.[1375] They were supposedly untainted by the habits of the urban populations, which both Layard and Bird deemed corrupt and effete by comparison. However, close interaction with subsistence nomads, increasingly hard-pressed by the gradually centralising Qajar state, was equally de-exoticising for both British travellers for whom the Bakhtiari, while sympathetic to a degree, remained irreconcilably 'Other.'

[1372] MacKenzie, (1984), 212-3; Pratt, (1992), 149.

[1373] Said, (1994), 216.

[1374] Wills, (1883); Browne, (1893), 189-90.

[1375] Layard, (1887), 272; Bird, (1891), II, 128.

The respective travelogue writer's level of language comprehension also clearly dictated how rigidly they adhere to certain tropes, particularly in the case of dishonesty. Linguistic comprehension, primarily exhibited by Browne and Sykes, facilitated greater and more nuanced interactions with Iranians out with the rarefied sphere of the Qajar court. This led to more varied and extended records of the Iranian 'voice' in the resulting travelogues, and also more accurately conveys the intention of *ta'arouf* etiquette and non-literal rhetorical elements such as *gholov.*[1376] Most notably, there is a marked decline in focus on issues relating to gender and sexuality across the examined travelogues, reflecting rapidly shifting attitudes in Iran, such as greater hetero-socialisation, coupled with a general waning of the British obsession.[1377] In contrast to the wondrous and exotic spectacles described in travelogues of the 17th and 18th Centuries, by the late 19th Century the 'Orient' was becoming de-mystified and de-exoticised through familiarity; facilitated by the greater ease of travel and communication.[1378] Greater emphasis on maintaining 'British standards' in India, and indeed across the empire, prompted by the fear of 'going native' and miscegenation, were products of growing imperial anxiety, which widened the 'colonial divide' between imperial rulers and their subjects, and indeed all 'Others'.[1379] It was in this context of greater paranoia, separation, and division that each of these travelogue writers attempted to define the Iran which they encountered and explain who the Iranians 'are' and 'were.'

The presentation of late-Qajar Iran and the Iranians through a series of tropes, particularly the narrative of decline and apathy widespread across British literature, limited the ability to perceive the potential for meaningful change. In the context of these travelogues, this is observable in reactions to the Tobacco Protests of the early-1890s, which entailed surprise that such a broad coalition of Iranians was able to effectively exert pressure on the Shah, forcing the cancellation of the concession, while undermining the reputation of the monarch as an all-powerful despot.[1380] Browne actively sought to find evidence of Aryan rebirth and coming revolution in Iran, emphasising the Tobacco Protests as the inception point of Iranian modernity and resistance to the monarchy, contributing to the perception of these events as a direct precursor to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906.[1381] However, tending to prioritise his focus on the specific minorities he idolised, Browne underestimated the growth of anti-monarchy sentiments among core constituencies of the Shi'a majority. These were primarily the *ulema* and the *bazāris,* who played a key role in supporting boycotts, organising and attending street protests, and ultimately the occupation of British diplomatic installations for *bast*.[1382] Iranian nationalism, influenced by the increased ability of Iranians to travel and dialogically engage with aspects of British and wider European modernity, before transmitting their observations through their own travelogues and other printed publications, was similarly ignored by the vast majority of British commentators, with Browne the notable exception. Following the First World War however, Browne's influence in Britain waned, as his Liberal worldview was rapidly considered outmoded amidst the post-war dominance of ethno-nationalism and class-based politics, coupled with the growing importance of Iranian oil to the British imperial economy.[1383] Curzon's *Persia and the Persian Question* ultimately became regarded as the definitive British work on Persia for the first half of the 20th Century, its assertion of decline, stasis, and fundamental 'Otherness' impacting heavily on much subsequent discourse.[1384] It would be invoked, along with Sykes' travelogue, by a range of British travellers, including Robert Byron whose *Road to Oxiana* was heavily coloured by initially experiencing Iran through the 'imperial eye[s]' of these two men.[1385] The Constitutional Revolution, and the discourses of renewal, nation-building, and personal liberty associated with it, however still retain a high degree of resonance in contemporary Iran, inspiring new generations to assert their desire for change.[1386]

[1376] Pratt, (2022), 133-4; Koutlaki, (2010), 44, 59.

[1377] Najmabadi, (2005), 55.

[1378] Sancisi-Weerdenburg, (1991), 31.

[1379] Pratt, (2022), 241-3.

[1380] Abrahamian, (1982), 73.
[1381] Ansari, (2018).
[1382] Gheissari, (2016), 17, 34-5.
[1383] Nash, (2005), 167; Kelly, (2012), 54-6.
[1384] Bosworth, (1995), 115.

British writers have continued to produce travelogues of Iran throughout the 20th Century and into the 21st, though at a far lower rate than in the Qajar period. To varying degrees they have continued to draw on tropes and stereotypes observable in the late-Qajar travelogues, invoking Victorian travellers as bygone 'experts.' Some still tend to display their own contemporaneous manifestations of the 'imperial eye' pontificating on potential solutions, as Curzon did a century before, while ignoring or distorting the role Britain has played across the region in the intervening decades.[1387] This is particularly observable in Sarah Hobson's *Through Persia in Disguise* (1973), which quotes from both Curzon and Sykes's travelogues directly.[1388] It displays deference for their knowledge and absorbs some of their biases and assumptions while ignoring much of their imperial context. The influence of their discourse is identifiable in the maintenance of negative attitudes to certain communities, such as characterising the Turkmen whom she encountered as 'savage', 'barbaric', and 'vicious'; alleging that 'their cruelty seemed limitless' but that that they were nonetheless 'more independent' than the sedentary Iranians, an echo of the 'noble savage' trope.[1389] Hobson's *modus operandi* while travelling, namely to disguise herself as a male youth, directly contravened both Curzon and Sykes' exhortations not to risk arousing the 'fanaticism' of Iranian Muslims.[1390] Her experience in the religious centre of Qom contradicts this; her disguise gaining her admittance to a *medreseh* where she was hospitably welcomed and engaged in a number of spiritual debates with two scholars, Hasan Ali and 'Jesus Christ'.[1391] Experiencing a degree of guilt at her seemingly successful deception, Hobson recorded her shock when, during their final meeting, Hasan Ali quietly made a request of her: 'Don't tell your friends in England you cheated us.'[1392] Her supposedly foolproof disguise had immediately been seen through and, yet, rather than 'fanaticism' or hostility, she had been met with tolerance, kindness, and curiosity, leaving Hobson unsettled and self-conscious regarding her use of disguise. Direct interactions thus retain the ability to encourage the formation of new perceptions and access unexpected experiences, undercutting the accumulated intertextual baggage weighing on British travellers and shaping their expectations of Iran.

[1385] Byron, (1937), 202, 205, 207.

[1386] Helbig, (2016), 50-1.

[1387] Pratt, (1992), 9.

[1388] Hobson, (1973), 18, 97, 120, 122.

[1389] Hobson, (1973), 129-32.

[1390] Hobson, (1973), 1, 19; Curzon, (1892), I, 161; Sykes, (1902), 458.

Jason Elliot's *Mirrors of the Unseen* (2006), a comparatively sympathetic example, minimises commentary on the political realities of post-Revolutionary Iran in favour of focusing on the author's personal fascination with medieval architecture.[1393] Though Elliot expresses admiration for multiple aspects of Iranian culture and creates space for Iranian voices, as Browne did to some extent, the text also evokes the popularity of 'aesthetic orientalism' in the late-19th Century; the British traveller demonstrating appreciation for aspects of Iranian history, art, and architecture which they perceive as neglected by Iranians themselves.[1394] This is somewhat counterbalanced by including Iranian perspectives on their own history, as in the case of an elderly man in Kermanshah who encouraged Elliot not to rely on the classics: "The trouble with Herodotus is that he never knew enough about Iran to give a balanced picture… and it's the same with the other Greek authors: they never saw the things they described with their own eyes. I hope you won't rely on Greek sources alone for your book. It would be an injustice."[1395] Most crucially, what this travelogue captures in relation to analysis of the endurance of stereotype in travelogue literature is the awareness among Iranians, stoked by media such as *300* and its sequel, that their depiction in Britain and the West remains hampered by overreliance on a trope-laden and unreliable Greco-Roman lens.[1396] The blinkering impact of this overreliance, and its contribution to maintaining perceptions of an unbreachable 'East-West' divide, is key to understanding the continued inequalities of perception in the 'contact zone'.

[1391] Hobson, (1973), 68.

[1392] Hobson, (1973), 168-9.

[1393] J. Elliot, *Mirrors of the Unseen,* (London, 2006), 211.

[1394] Dabashi, (2015), 2-3.

In terms of recent travelogues, these inequalities have been most directly challenged in Lois Pryce's *Revolutionary Ride* (2017), which recounts her technically-illegal solo motorcycle journey through Iran.[1397] Rather than her own desire to travel or explore, this journey was instigated by a note left on her motorcycle by 'Habib', inviting 'him' (the presumed owner) to visit Shiraz and experience Iran beyond the stereotypes: 'WE ARE NOT TERRORISTS!!! These are our governments, not the Iranian people. I wish that you will visit Iran so you will see for yourself about my country.'[1398] Gender, inevitably, plays a significant role in the ensuing travel narrative. This includes Pryce highlighting her admiration for the travelogues of previous female travellers, particularly Freya Stark who herself drew inspiration from Isabella Bird, further highlighting the continued intertextuality of female British travel writing on Iran.[1399] Pryce engages with a wide range of viewpoints during her journey: from Baha'is resolutely opposed to the regime, and teenagers desperate to leave Iran hoping for a better life in the diaspora, to those more ambivalent to the West, determined to stay and remain rooted in their culture.[1400] She displays her clear appreciation of Iranian culture and hospitality, while not erasing the political dimensions of her journey or the authoritarian nature of the Islamic Republic itself, as Elliot's *Mirrors of the Unseen* tends to do. Pryce also criticises 'Shah nostalgia', as a reaction to the worst excesses of theocratic government, while sympathising with the conditions which encourage its appeal.[1401] Her writing is generally thoughtful, reflexive, and critical of all assumptions; representing a high point of equality in this particular 'contact zone'. Undertaken in a period of relative diplomatic thaw during the presidency of Hassan Rouhani, and the establishment of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, *Revolutionary Ride* was created under conditions which have since been disrupted by rising tensions across the region and greater instability within Iran itself.[1402] Pryce's travelogue may thus represent the last of its scope for the foreseeable future. The erection of physical barriers to travel and interaction will inevitably contribute to an increase in intellectual barriers, ensuring that the Manichean divide between Britain and Iran endures.

[1395] Elliot, (2006), 211.
[1396] Elliot, (2006), 212; Kofler, (2007), 165-6.
[1397] L. Pryce, *Revolutionary Ride,* (London, 2017).
[1398] Pryce, (2017), 2.
[1399] Henes, (2012), 69, 108.

British stereotyping of Iran and the Iranians in the 21st Century has been reinvigorated post-2001 by its intersection with resurgent Islamophobia and anxieties around immigration and terrorism.[1403] Persistent adherence to an inflexible, stereotyped perception of Iran continues to impact on British foreign policy, with current British-Iranian relations at a lower point than at any time in the 21st Century.[1404] There is also a discernible double-standard in how comparable regimes are characterised by British governments, a fact not lost upon

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[1400] Pryce, (2017).

[1401] Pryce, (2017).

[1402] Amanat, (2017), 878-9.

[1403] F. Halliday, *Two Hours that Shook the World: September 11, 2001: Causes and Consequences,* (London, 2002), 209-11; Fisk, (2006), 1036-7.

[1404] J. Landale, 'UK to sanction Iran after credible threats from regime', *BBC News,* (6. Jul 2023), accessed 21.10.23.; 'Iran summons British Ambassador as tensions soar' *Al Jazeera* (30 Jan 2024), accessed 06.02.24.

Iranians across the political spectrum, as highlighted by Narges Bajoghli's research.[1405] Demonising the Islamic Republic, while excusing the autocracy and human rights violations of the Gulf States, highlights the agenda of successive British governments. The failings of the former are amplified, while glossing over those of the latter in favour of maintaining the stability of the petrochemical industry and promoting British exports, of which the most lucrative are typically armaments.[1406] This is most starkly observable by comparing British political approaches to Saudi Arabia and Iran. Both are controlled by quasi-theocratic authoritarian regimes; which utilise proxies, assassinations, torture, and capital punishment to maintain their power.[1407] Both constrain the rights and opportunities of women in society, with Saudi Arabia significantly more extreme in this regard, while a small elite enrich themselves to the detriment of the state and society at large.[1408] Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman's 2017 purge of the Saudi elite, in the so-called 'night of the beating' when hundreds were held in Riyadh's Ritz Carlton hotel, unwittingly echoes some of the travelogue descriptions of extortion by agents of the Qajar state: 'The former detainees, many of whom were stripped of fortunes, portray a scene of torture and coercion, of royal court advisers leading chaotic attempts to understand the investments behind the wealth of the kingdom's most influential families, then seizing whatever they could find.'[1409] It is hard to envisage a better illustration of despotic and arbitrary rule in the 21st Century, yet Saudi Arabia remains a key regional ally of the UK. New arms deals worth £1.39bn were signed by the British government in February 2021, concluded even after the U.S. administration had paused its own arms sales in response to widespread human rights abuses and the state-sponsored assassination of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi.[1410] These arms, primarily missiles and bombs, have been used in Saudi Arabia and the UAE's proxy conflict with the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen, implicating the British government in the intense suffering of the Yemeni civilian population and highlighting the hypocrisy of their denunciations of Iranian 'barbarism' across the region.[1411]

[1405] N. Bajoghli, 'Iran Reframed: Anxieties of Power in the Islamic Republic', webinar, (15. Dec 2020).
[1406] I. Overton, 'UK Arms Exports Surge in 2022: An Analysis', AOAV report, (5. Oct 2023), accessed 03.12.23.
[1407] Bajoghli, (2020).
[1408] Bajoghli, (2020).
[1409] M. Chulov, 'Night of the Beatings': details emerge of Riyadh Ritz-Carlton purge', *The Guardian,* (19. Nov 2020), accessed 19.10.21.

This particular British view of Iran still relies upon tropes, stereotypes, and generalisations. It is laden with anachronisms and nostalgia for imagined imperial pasts while lamenting the contemporary situation, an archaising mentality with concrete links to the Victorian literature which underpinned Britain's conception of empire; epitomised in the Iranian context by Curzon's *Persia and the Persian Question.* Jason Burke's analysis of the 'War on Terror' highlights how this archaising mentality has affected the British Government's perception of, and thus political approach to, a host of Muslim-majority countries; characterisations of Saudi Arabia as 'medieval' or Afghanistan as 'a 13th Century country' demonstrating clear parallels with characterisations of Iran as 'ancient' or 'unchanging' in the 19th Century, with a similarly corrosive impact on dialogue or understanding.[1412] Such rigid thinking, lacking nuance or reflexivity, actively impairs the ability to envision a peaceful future for British-Iranian relations, or for Iran itself. This is observable in reactions to the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, which British diplomats had completely failed to anticipate; a spokesperson for the Foreign Office summarising their reaction as 'this guy appears to be a throwback to the 1980s, which is a bad thing,' conceding that their policy towards Iran now amounted to 'wait and see', and concluding that ‘trying to predict events in Iran is a mug’s game.’[1413] In the context of further rising tensions and conflict, reliance upon stereotypes has the potential to erect further barriers, dehumanising Iranians as a monolithic and sinister ‘Other’. Iranians, however, retain the ability to subvert British expectations, as in the case of the widespread protests which erupted in response to the killing of Jina Amini in September 2022; the tactic of unveiling as a form of anti-clerical, anti-authoritarian protest possessing precedents in the late-19th Century.[1414] While much British discourse still underestimates the potential for radical change in Iran or confines it to a small sub-section of the population, the late-Qajar period instead demonstrates that, regardless of how static and repressive the government of the day may be, or how unchanging the society may appear to outside eyes, Iranian futures are constantly in the making.

[1410] Overton, (2023).

[1411] Overton, (2023); D. Sabbagh, 'British Arms Sales Prolonging Saudi War in Yemen', *The Guardian,* (22. Feb. 2021), accessed 11.12.23.

[1412] T. Coghlan, 'Afghans accuse Defence Secretary Liam Fox of racism and disrespect', *The Times,* (24. May 2010): J. Burke, *The 9/11 Wars,* (London, 2012), 482.

[1413] *The Guardian,* (26. Jun 2005): K. Naji, *Ahmadinejad,* (London, 2008), 87.

[1414] Moghissi, (2018).

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