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Austen Henry Layard

Excerpt

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NINEVEH AND BABYLON.



Ruined Mosque and Minarets (Erzeroom).

CHAPTER I.

THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM RESUME EXCAVATIONS AT NINEVEH.—
 DEPARTURE FROM CONSTANTINOPLE.—DESCRIPTION OF OUR PARTY.—CAWAL
 YUSUF.—ROADS FROM TREBIZOND TO ERZEROOM.—DESCRIPTION OF THE
 COUNTRY.—VARZAHAN AND ARMENIAN CHURCHES.—ERZEROOM.—RESHID
 PASHA.—THE DUDJOOK TRIBES.—SHAHAN BEY.—TURKISH REFORM.—JOURNEY
 THROUGH ARMENIA.—AN ARMENIAN BISHOP.—THE LAKES OF SHALLU AND
 NAZIK.—THE LAKE OF WAN.

AFTER a few months' residence in England during the year 1848,
 to recruit a constitution worn by long exposure to the extremes

of an Eastern climate, I received orders to proceed to my post at Her Majesty's Embassy in Turkey. The Trustees of the British Museum did not, at that time, contemplate further excavations on the site of ancient Nineveh. Ill health and limited time had prevented me from placing before the public, previous to my return to the East, the results of my first researches with the illustrations of the monuments and copies of the inscriptions recovered from the ruins of Assyria. They were not published until some time after my departure, and did not consequently receive that careful superintendence and revision necessary to works of this nature. It was at Constantinople that I first learnt the general interest felt in England in the discoveries, and that they had been universally received as fresh illustrations of Scripture and prophecy, as well as of ancient history sacred and profane.

And let me here, at the very outset, gratefully acknowledge that generous spirit of English criticism which overlooks the incapacity and shortcomings of the laborer when his object is worthy of praise, and that object is sought with sincerity and singleness of purpose. The gratitude, which I deeply felt for encouragement rarely equalled, could be best shown by cheerfully consenting, without hesitation, to the request made to me by the Trustees of the British Museum, urged by public opinion, to undertake the superintendence of a second expedition into Assyria. Being asked to furnish a plan of operations, I stated what appeared to me to be the course best calculated to produce interesting and important results, and to enable us to obtain the most accurate information on the ancient history, language, and arts, not only of Assyria, but of its sister kingdom, Babylonia. Perhaps my plan was too vast and general to admit of performance or warrant adoption. I was merely directed to return to the site of Nineveh, and to continue the researches commenced amongst its ruins.

Arrangements were hastily, and of course inadequately, made in England. The assistance of a competent artist was most desirable, to portray with fidelity those monuments which injury and decay had rendered unfit for removal. Mr. F. Cooper was selected by the Trustees of the British Museum to accompany the expedition in this capacity. Mr. Hormuzd Rassam, already well known to many of my readers for the share he had taken in my first discoveries, quitted England with him. They both joined me at Constantinople. Dr. Sandwith, an English physician on a visit to the East, was induced to form one of our party. One Abd-el-Messiah, a Catholic Syrian of Mardin, an active and

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CHAP. I.]

CAWAL YUSUF.

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trustworthy servant during my former residence in Assyria, was fortunately at this time in the capital, and again entered my service: my other attendants were Mohammed Agha, a cawass, and an Armenian named Serkis. The faithful Bairakdar, who had so well served me during my previous journey, had accompanied the English commission for the settlement of the boundaries between Turkey and Persia; with the understanding, however, that he was to meet me at Mosul, in case I should return. Cawal Yusuf, the head of the Preachers of the Yezidis, with four chiefs of the districts in the neighbourhood of Diar-bekir, who had been for some months in Constantinople, completed my party.

After my departure from Mosul, in 1847, the military conscription, enforced amongst the Mussulman inhabitants of the Pashalic, was extended to the Yezidis, who, with the Christians, had been previously exempted from its operation on the general law sanctioned by the Koran, and hitherto acted upon by most Mohammedan nations, that none but true believers can serve in the armies of the state. On the ground that being of no recognised infidel sect, they must necessarily be included, like the Druses and Ansryri of Mount Lebanon, amongst Mussulmans, the Government had recently endeavoured to raise recruits for the regular troops amongst the Yezidis. The new regulations had been carried out with great severity, and had given rise to many acts of cruelty and oppression on the part of the local authorities. Besides the feeling common to all Easterns against compulsory service in the army, the Yezidis had other reasons for opposing the orders of the Government. They could not become *nizam*, or disciplined soldiers, without openly violating the rites and observances enjoined by their faith. The bath, to which Turkish soldiers are compelled weekly to resort, is a pollution to them, when taken in common with Mussulmans; the blue color, and certain portions of the Turkish uniform are absolutely prohibited by their law; and they cannot eat several articles of food included in the rations distributed to the troops. The recruiting officers refused to listen to these objections, enforcing their orders with extreme and unnecessary severity. The Yezidis, always ready to suffer for their faith, resisted, and many died under the tortures inflicted upon them. They were, moreover, still exposed to the oppression and illegal exactions of the local governors. Their children were still lawful objects of public sale, and, notwithstanding the introduction of the re-

formed system of government into the provinces, the parents were subject to persecution, and even to death, on account of their religion. In this state of things, Hussein Bey and Sheikh Nasr, the chiefs of the whole community, hearing that I was at Constantinople, determined to send a deputation to lay their grievances before the Sultan, hoping that through my assistance they could obtain access to some of the Ministers of State. Cawal Yusuf and his companions were selected for the mission; and money was raised by subscriptions from the sect to meet the expenses of their journey.

After encountering many difficulties and dangers, they reached the capital and found out my abode. I lost no time in presenting them to Sir Stratford Canning, who, ever ready to exert his powerful influence in the cause of humanity, at once brought their wrongs to the notice of the Porte. Through his kindly intercession a firman, or imperial order, was granted to the Yezidis, which freed them from all illegal impositions, forbade the sale of their children as slaves, secured to them the full enjoyment of their religion, and placed them on the same footing as other sects of the empire. It was further promised that arrangements should be made to release them from such military regulations as rendered their service in the army incompatible with the strict observance of their religious duties. So often can influence, well acquired and well directed, be exercised in the great cause of humanity, without distinction of persons or of creeds! This is but one of the many instances in which Sir Stratford Canning has added to the best renown of the British name.

Cawal Yusuf, having fulfilled his mission, eagerly accepted my proposal to return with me to Mosul. His companions had yet to obtain certain documents from the Porte, and were to remain at Constantinople until their business should be completed. The Cawal still retained the dress of his sect and office. His dark face and regular and expressive features were shaded by a black turban, and a striped aba of coarse texture was thrown loosely over a robe of red silk.

Our arrangements were complete by the 28th of August (1849), and on that day we left the Bosphorus by an English steamer bound for Trebizond. The size of my party and its consequent incumbrances rendering a caravan journey absolutely necessary, I determined to avoid the usual tracks, and to cross eastern Armenia and Kurdistan, both on account of the novelty of part of the country in a geographical point of view, and its political

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interest as having only recently been brought under the immediate control of the Turkish government.

We disembarked at Trebizond on the 31st, and on the following day commenced our land journey. The country between this port and Erzeroom has been frequently traversed and described. Through it pass the caravan routes connecting Persia with the Black Sea, the great lines of intercourse and commerce between Europe and central Asia. The roads usually frequented are three in number. The summer, or upper, road is the shortest, but is most precipitous, and, crossing very lofty mountains, is closed after the snows commence; it is called *Tchâirler*, from its fine upland pastures, on which the horses are usually fed when caravans take this route. The middle road has few advantages over the upper, and is rarely followed by merchants, who prefer the lower, although making a considerable detour by Gumish Khaneh, or the Silver Mines. The three unite at the town of Baiburt, midway between the sea and Erzeroom. Although an active and daily increasing trade is carried on by these roads, no means whatever have until recently been taken to improve them. They consist of mere mountain tracks, deep in mud or dust according to the season of the year. The bridges, built when the erection and repair of public works were imposed upon the local governors, and deemed a sacred duty by the semi-independent hereditary families, who ruled in the provinces as Pashas or Dereh-Bey's, have been long permitted to fall into decay, and commerce is frequently stopped for days by the swollen torrent or fordless stream. This has been one of the many evil results of the system of centralisation so vigorously commenced by Sultan Mahmoud, and so steadily carried out during the present reign. The local governors, receiving a fixed salary, and rarely permitted to remain above a few months in one office, take no interest whatever in the prosperity of the districts placed under their care. The funds assigned by the Porte for public works, small and totally inadequate, are squandered away or purloined long before any part can be applied to the objects in view.

Since my visit to Trebizond a road for carts has been commenced, which is to lead from that port to the Persian frontiers; but it will, probably, like other undertakings of the kind, be abandoned long before completed, or if ever completed will be permitted at once to fall to ruin from the want of common repair. And yet the Persian trade is one of the chief sources of revenue of the Turkish empire, and unless conveniences are afforded for its

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prosecution, will speedily pass into other hands. The southern shores of the Black Sea, twelve years ago rarely visited by a foreign vessel, are now coasted by steamers belonging to three companies, which touch nearly weekly at the principal ports; and there is commerce and traffic enough for more. The establishment of steam communication between the ports and the capital has given an activity previously unknown to internal trade, and has brought the inhabitants of distant provinces of the empire into a contact with the capital, highly favorable to the extension of civilisation, and to the enforcement of the legitimate authority of the government. The want of proper harbours is a considerable drawback in the navigation of a sea so unstable and dangerous as the Euxine. Trebizond has a mere roadstead, and from its position is otherwise little calculated for a great commercial port, which, like many other places, it has become rather from its hereditary claims as the representative of a city once famous, than from any local advantages.

The only harbour on the southern coast is that of Batoun, nor is there any retreat for vessels on the Circassian shores. This place is therefore probably destined to become the emporium of trade, both from its safe and spacious port, and from the facility it affords of internal communication with Persia, Georgia, and Armenia. From it the Turkish government might have been induced to construct the road since commenced at Trebizond, had not a political influence always hostile to any real improvement in the Ottoman empire opposed it with that pertinacity which is generally sure to command success.

At the back of Trebizond, as indeed along the whole of this singularly bold and beautiful coast, the mountains rise in lofty peaks, and are wooded with trees of enormous growth and admirable quality, furnishing an unlimited supply of timber for commerce or war. Innumerable streams force their way to the sea through deep and rocky ravines. The more sheltered spots are occupied by villages and hamlets, chiefly inhabited by a hardy and industrious race of Greeks. In spring the choicest flowers perfume the air, and luxuriant creepers clothe the limbs of gigantic trees. In summer the richest pastures enamel the uplands, and the inhabitants of the coasts drive their flocks and herds to the higher regions of the hills. The forests, nourished by the exhalations and rains engendered by a large expanse of water, form a belt, from thirty to fifty miles in breadth, along the Black Sea. Beyond, the dense woods cease, as do also the rugged

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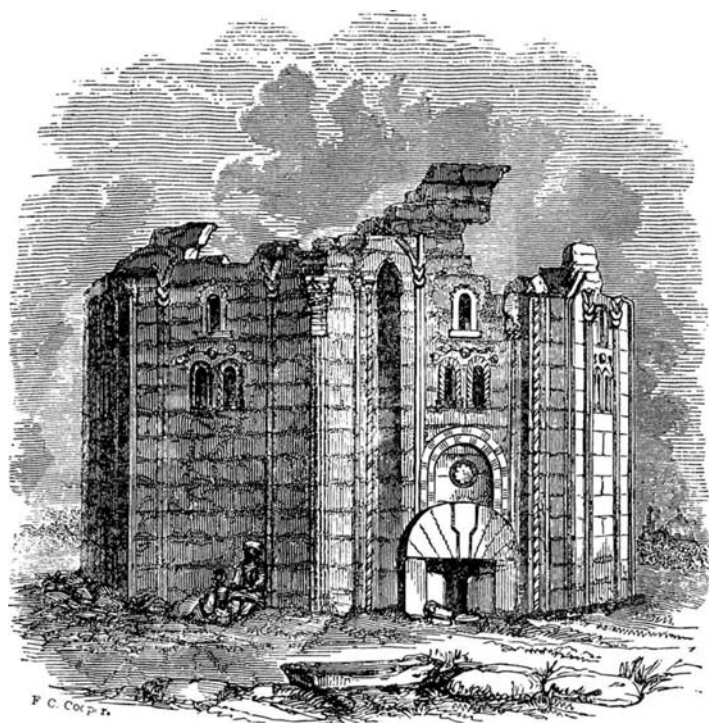
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ravine and rocky peak. They are succeeded by still higher mountains, mostly rounded in their forms, some topped with eternal snow, barren of wood and even of vegetation, except during the summer, when they are covered with Alpine flowers and herbs. The villages in the valleys are inhabited by Turks, Lazes (Mussulmans), and Armenians; the soil is fertile, and produces much corn.

Our journey to Erzeroom was performed without incident. A heavy and uninterrupted rain for two days tried the patience and temper of those who for the first time encountered the difficulties and incidents of Eastern travel. The only place of any interest, passed during our ride, was a small Armenian village, the remains of a larger, with the ruins of three early Christian churches, or



Ancient Armenian Church at Vazaban

baptisteries. These remarkable buildings, of which many examples exist, belong to an order of architecture peculiar to the

most eastern districts of Asia Minor and to the ruins of ancient Armenian cities *, on the borders of Turkey and Persia. The one, of which I have given a sketch, is an octagon, and may have been a baptistery. The interior walls are still covered with the remains of elaborate frescoes representing scripture events and national saints. The colors are vivid, and the forms, though rude, not inelegant or incorrect, resembling those of the frescoes of the Lower Empire still seen in the celebrated Byzantine church at Trebizond, and in the chapels of the convents of Mount Athos. The knotted capitals of the thin tapering columns grouped together, the peculiar arrangement of the stones over the doorway, supporting each other by a zigzag, and the decorations in general, call to mind the European Gothic of the middle ages. These churches date probably before the twelfth century: but there are no inscriptions, or other clue, to fix their precise epoch, and the various styles and modifications of the architecture have not been hitherto sufficiently studied to enable us to determine with accuracy the time to which any peculiar ornaments or forms may belong. Yet there are many interesting questions connected with this Armenian architecture which well deserve elucidation. From it was probably derived much that passed into the Gothic, whilst the Tatar conquerors of Asia Minor adopted it, as will be hereafter seen, for their mausoleums and places of worship. It is peculiarly elegant both in its decorations, its proportions, and the general arrangement of the masses, and might with advantage be studied by the modern architect. Indeed, Asia Minor contains a mine of similar materials unexplored and almost unknown.

The churches of Varzahan, according to the information I received from an aged inhabitant of the village, had been destroyed some fifty years before by the Lazes. The oldest people of the place remembered the time when divine worship was still performed within their walls.

We reached Erzeroom on the 8th, and were most hospitably received by the British consul, Mr. Brant, a gentleman who has long, well, and honorably sustained our influence in this part of Turkey, and who was the first to open an important field for our commerce in Asia Minor. With him I visited the commander-in-chief of the Turkish forces in Anatolia, who had recently returned

* Particularly of Ani. Mons. Texier is, I believe, the only traveller who has attempted to give elaborate plans, elevations, drawings, and restorations of these interesting edifices.

from a successful expedition against the wild mountain tribes of central Armenia. Reshid Pasha, known as the "*Guzlu*," or "the Wearer of Spectacles," enjoyed the advantages of an European education, and had already distinguished himself in the military career. With a knowledge of the French language he united a taste for European literature, which, during his numerous expeditions into districts unknown to western travellers, had led him to examine their geographical features, and to make inquiries into the manners and religion of their inhabitants. His last exploit had been the subjugation of the tribes inhabiting the Dudjook Mountains, to the south-west of Erzeroom, long in open rebellion against the Sultan. The account he gave me of the country and its occupants, much excited a curiosity which the limited time at my command did not enable me to gratify. According to the Pasha, the tribes are idolatrous, worshipping venerable oaks, great trees, huge solitary rocks, and other grand features of nature. He was inclined to attribute to them mysterious and abominable rites. This calumny, the resource of ignorance and intolerance, from which even primitive Christianity did not escape, has generally been spread in the East against those whose tenets are unknown or carefully concealed, and who, in Turkey, are included under the general term, indicating their supposed obscene ceremonies, of *Cheragh-sonderan*, or "Extinguishers of Lights." They have a chief priest, who is, at the same time, a kind of political head of the sect. He had recently been taken prisoner, sent to Constantinople, and from thence exiled to some town on the Danube. They speak a Kurdish dialect, though the various septa into which they are divided have Arabic names, apparently showing a southern origin. Of their history and early migrations, however, the Pasha could learn nothing. The direct road between Trebizond and Mesopotamia once passed through their districts, and the ruins of spacious and well-built khans are still seen at regular intervals on the remains of the old causeway. But from a remote period, the country had been closed against the strongest caravans, and no traveller would venture into the power of tribes notorious for their cruelty and lawlessness. The Pasha spoke of re-opening the road, rebuilding caravanserais, and restoring trade to its ancient channel—good intentions, not wanting amongst Turks of his class, and which, if carried out, might restore a country rich in natural resources to more than its ancient prosperity. The account he gave me is not perhaps to be strictly relied on, but a district hitherto inaccessible

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may possibly contain the remains of ancient races, monuments of antiquity, and natural productions of sufficient importance to merit the attention of the traveller in Asia Minor.

The city of Erzeroom is rapidly declining in importance, and is almost solely supported by the Persian transit trade. It would be nearly deserted if that traffic were to be thrown into a new channel by the construction of the direct road from Batoun to the Persian frontiers. It contains no buildings of any interest, with the exception of a few ruins of those monuments of early Mussulman domination, the elaborately ornamented portico and minaret faced with glazed tiles of rich yet harmonious coloring, and the conical mausoleum, peculiar to most cities of early date in Asia Minor. The modern Turkish edifices, dignified with the names of palaces and barracks, are meeting the fate of neglected mud. Their crumbling walls can scarcely shelter their inmates in a climate almost unequalled in the habitable globe for the rigor of its winters.

The districts of Armenia and Kurdistan, through which lay our road from Erzeroom to Mosul, are sufficiently unknown and interesting to merit more than a casual mention. The map will show that our route by the lake of Wan, Bitlis, and Jezirah was nearly a direct one. It had been but recently opened to caravans. The haunts of the last of the Kurdish rebels were on the shores of this lake. After the fall of the most powerful of their chiefs, Beder Khan Bey, they had one by one been subdued and carried away into captivity. Only a few months had, however, elapsed since the Beys of Bitlis, who had longest resisted the Turkish arms, had been captured. With them rebellion was extinguished for the time in Kurdistan.

Our caravan consisted of my own party, with the addition of a muleteer and his two assistants, natives of Bitlis, who furnished me with seventeen horses and mules from Erzeroom to Mosul. The first day's ride, as is customary in the East, where friends accompany the traveller far beyond the city gates, and where the preparations for a journey are so numerous that everything cannot well be remembered, scarcely exceeded nine miles. We rested for the night in the village of Guli, whose owner, one Shahan Bey, had been apprised of my intended visit. He had rendered his newly-built house as comfortable as his means would permit for our accommodation, and, after providing us with an excellent supper, passed the evening with me. Descended from an ancient family of Dereh-Beys he had inherited the hospitality and polished man-