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978-1-108-07748-4 - Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh: With Journal of a Voyage down the Tigris to Bagdad and an Account of a Visit to Shirauz and Persepolis: Volume 1

Claudius James Rich

Excerpt

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RESIDENCE IN KOORDISTAN,

&c.

CHAPTER I.

Departure from the Residency—Manner of travelling—Description of our Party—Thunder-storms—Kifri—Sassanian Ruins—Beiat Chief's Hospitality—Naphtha Springs at Toozkhour-matee.

Bagdad, April 16, 1826.

To escape the intense heat of a Bagdad summer, I have this year determined upon a visit to the mountains of Koordistan, where we are informed we shall meet with a very different climate to that of Bagdad*. As Koordistan is a country little known in Europe, and I have many acquaintances there among the natives, from whom I have often received pressing invitations to visit them, I am

* The heat for about five months at Bagdad I hardly think is paralleled in any part of the world. Some conception of it may be formed, when I mention that, from April to October, the natives are obliged, during the heat of the day, to take refuge in cellars underground, and at night to sleep on the roofs of their houses, the rooms of the house during that period being uninhabitable. The thermometer generally rises to 115° in a shady verandah; and I have seen it as high as 120° in the middle of the day, and 110° at ten at night, when we suffered much inconvenience from a burning hot wind, smelling strong of sulphur.—*Ed.*

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glad to have another opportunity of gratifying my insatiable thirst for seeing new countries.

I feel it to be my duty on this occasion to travel in my official character; and, therefore, Mrs. Rich is obliged to submit to the disagreeable restraint of performing the journey in a covered litter or takht-revan*, attended by women-servants, and all the state of a haram†. In order, however, to diminish the inconvenience as much as possible, I propose that a horse shall be in readiness for her to mount, when out of the way of observation. On account of public business, I am likewise compelled to take with me many of the officers and servants of the Residency; and others have requested permission to accompany us: so that we shall form a very numerous party; and, instead of incurring the expense of native troops for our protection on the road, I take the guard of twenty-five sepoys and their soubadar allowed the Resident as a body-guard by the government of Bombay. They are a very

* Is this the לֵב of the Hebrews, rendered litter in our version, Is. lxvi. 20? The Septuagint makes it "a mule litter."—*Communicated to the Editor by a friend.*

† The haram means the female part of the family of a Turk; and this one word is used to avoid the indecorum, in the eyes of a Mahometan, of mentioning his wives or daughters. It is likewise the name of that part of the house where the females dwell. The Turks are so scrupulous to avoid speaking personally of their female relations, that they will sometimes, when obliged to refer to them, say "My house is sick," or "My house sends compliments to your house."—*Ed.*

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CH. I.]

BAGDAD.

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respectable, brave set of men, and seem delighted at the prospect of marching.

The pasha has been very kind in doing everything in his power to facilitate our journey, and in furnishing us with abundant firmauns, orders, and letters through his territory, and with warm recommendations to the pasha and chiefs of Koordistan.

I appointed the ruined village of Dokhala, about twenty-one miles to the north of Bagdad, as the place of general rendezvous for the haram, the baggage, the sepoy, and all the rest of the people who did not accompany me.

It was late in the day before I left Bagdad, owing to the many visitors who came to wish me a good journey. This detention was of little consequence, as my first stage was not to be more than five miles distant—to the garden-house of my old and hospitable friend Hagi Abdulla Bey, who has requested me to make his house my first resting-place.

I mounted my horse soon after five in the afternoon, and reached the garden between six and seven, where I was received most cordially by the bey, and found a very splendid Turkish entertainment prepared for me. Mrs. Rich* was equally well received by her friend Salkha Khatoon, one of the widows of old Suleiman Pasha, who was the

* See, in the Appendix, "Fragment of a Journal by Mrs. Rich."

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governor of Bagdad upwards of twenty years, and died in the year 1804. He was a Georgian slave of his predecessor, but was a man of considerable ability; and, by his energy, promptitude and wisdom, subjected the various tribes within, and kept in awe those without, his dominions. Agriculture and commerce were thus promoted; and Bagdad became very flourishing under his paternal and judicious government. He left three sons, who were much beloved by the people of the town for his sake; and much respected, therefore, by his successors in the Pashalik. The two remaining ones live with their respective mothers, affluent, and as much at ease as affluent people of consequence can be in a place where they are watched with a very jealous eye by the government; especially since another son, the eldest, had made himself very formidable, and finally succeeded, through much treachery and falsehood, in becoming pasha. He enjoyed his dignity but a very few years, and was overpowered by his own brother-in-law Daoud, who put him to death, and afterwards received from the Porte the firmaun confirming him in the government.

April 17.—I took leave of Hagi Abdulla Bey, and left his garden-house at a quarter past seven in the morning. The road was through a very uninteresting country; and at a quarter to one I arrived at our camp, which I found already pitched at

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Dokhala. Mrs. Rich arrived about an hour afterwards; and in the afternoon I went round the camp, to see that all our party were assembled, and were comfortable. To have accommodated such a number of people in the villages on the road would have been out of the question. I had, therefore, been obliged to take tents; and we were accompanied by a body of Arab tent-pitchers, to pitch and raise the camp every night and morning. It consisted of fourteen or fifteen tents: as small a number as we could possibly do with, for a party of between fifty and sixty people*. There was a good deal of noise and confusion through the day, until every one had fallen into his place, and things were put in order. At night there was a storm of rain, to which the poor muleteers, tent-pitchers, and animals were exposed, no tents ever being thought necessary for them.

* The commander of this party, composed of Christians, Jews, Turks, Armenians, Persians, and Indians, was Aga Minas, the principal native officer of the Residency. He was of a respectable Armenian family, long in the service of the British government. The situation which he held, and his own abilities, constituted him director of Mr. Rich's household at Bagdad; and on this journey he continued to act in the same character. He was purse-bearer and aide-de-camp; entertained all our numerous guests on the road, directed the camp, and was, in short, the person to whom everybody looked for orders and for help, and with whom often no one was satisfied, only because he could not accomplish impossibilities. He had all the patience and good humour which such a post required—was unwearied in his endeavours to make every one comfortable, and most zealous in the discharge of his duty—*Ed.*

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April 18.—Mr. Bellino* and I, accompanied by some of the light horsemen of our suite, mounted at a quarter past six, before the rest of the camp was ready to start; but I was glad to escape the confusion and noise of the many voices in many tongues, which, together with the snorting and neighing of horses, jingling of the bells of the mules, and barking of the dogs, are the usual accompaniments of an eastern camp.

Mrs. Rich, in her takht-revan, followed us at some distance, accompanied by her female attendants in kajavahs, or a kind of cradle, swung one on each side of a mule—and by some horsemen as an escort.

Turkish etiquette required our parties to be quite separate; and we allowed our people to have their own way, and to marshal us according to their own notions of dignity and decorum. I have always made a rule of conforming to the native customs, so far as my conscience and the honour of

* Mr. Bellino was a German gentleman, a native of Tubingen in Suabia, with whom Mr. Rich had become acquainted in Vienna, where he was at college. His love of oriental literature, and desire to visit the East, induced him to propose to Mr. Rich, through M. Von Hammer, the historian of Turkey, a common friend, to accompany him back to Bagdad; and Mr. Rich was glad to have it in his power to offer him a situation as private secretary. He was a most amiable, well-educated young man, with much of the enthusiasm, perseverance, and *naïveté* of his countrymen, and no small share of learning. His favourite study, grammar and language, he pursued with an ardour and devotedness truly Germanic.

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my country would admit. The Turks are a very ceremonious people, and a people who think state and show indispensable ; and any one by whom these are despised is looked upon by them as vulgar and ignorant, and unaccustomed to good society. But, above all, they have a horror of women being seen or heard ; and I am inclined to believe, that a Turk who overcomes his dislike to this has lost some of his best feelings : at least, with all such whom I have seen this has been the case ; and I am, very sure, that the respect and kindness with which we have generally been received among the Mahometans has been greatly owing to our not offending them in these things, and not shocking their feelings, by despising harmless prejudices, from which, at any rate, we could not expect to turn them.

We had great trouble from the mud through this day's march. Between eight and nine we alighted to take a cup of coffee, at a place called Mukhsen Pauk, a little imaum on a canal from the Khalis*. We reached our halting-place, the bed of an old canal, at a quarter to twelve.

April 19.—The weather yesterday afternoon became very stormy from the E. and N.E. ; and at half-past seven there was a squall of rain, with thunder and lightning. The night then partially cleared up ; but at midnight it came on again to

* The Khalis is a canal which is cut from the Diala to the Tigris.

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blow hard, with heavy rain, thunder, and lightning, which lasted till morning. The tents, by this time, became so heavy, that the striking and loading them was almost impossible; and the country, besides, was quite covered with water, so that there was no thinking of marching to-day. The ground, where we encamped on the old canal, is full of scorpions; our farrier, in levelling what he thought a snug nook for his bed, in the bank of the canal, turned up four: many others were found about the tents. This is commonly the case in all heaps, or mounts, in this country. There is a mount near Shehraban which is quite alive with them. At 4 P.M. a heavy squall from the west came against the prevailing wind, which was S.E.

Thermometer—at 7 A.M. 66°; at 3 P.M. 76°; at 10 P.M. 66°.

April 20.—Heavy rain continued pouring down upon us last night, to the great annoyance of our poor people; and to march to-day is out of the question. At noon we had a storm of thunder and rain, which passed quickly over; but from one to three there was a continued roll of thunder from the north-west. Most of the storms, however, passed to the north of our camp; and afterwards the sky became quite clear, with a gentle air from N.N.E. I never remember so curious a season; and its effects are most unpleasant to us travellers.

Thermometer during the storm, 66°.

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April 21.—During the night there was lightning all round the horizon, with distant thunder, which kept us in a state of great anxiety. In the morning, wind east and south-east.

We marched at half past six in a smart shower of rain from the S.E. The cloud from which it fell accompanied us for some time, occasionally favouring us with a discharge. We had ten or fifteen peasants with us to act as pioneers, in repairing bridges and smoothing bad passages for the takht-revan. We had a difficult march, wading through water and mire most of the way; and at 10 A.M. arrived at Tchubook, where we encamped on our old ground*, which happened to be quite dry. The takht-revan marched half an hour before, and arrived ten minutes after us. One of the disadvantages of travelling with a large party is, that the peasants conceal every supply of a tolerable quality which they may happen to have, from fear of having it taken from them by force, especially if they perceive any government officers among the party.

In the evening, the sky again became overcast. The lightning first appeared after sunset in the N. and N.W.; and a gentle breeze soon set in from that quarter, but was forced to yield to the more powerful S.E. The horizon grew black as a raven's

* This refers to a journey which Mr. Rich had lately made into S. Koordistan, to examine the ruins of Kasri Shireen and Haoush Kerek. This journal will be found in the Appendix.

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STORM.

[CH. I.]

wing all round, and the lightning was repeated from every quarter in the most rapid succession of flashes I think I ever remember; but the thunder was very distant. In the west the colour of the horizon was that perfect black, that total absence of light, which Lord Byron has fancied in his horrible dream of the extinction of the sun. We were only conscious of this fearful darkness in the short intervals of the lightning, which was peculiarly vivid in that quarter; streams of fire seemed every now and then to be darted into the earth. The glare of the lightning showed at each flash an Indian sentinel resting on his musket, a tent with a group of muleteers, or a small party of travellers winding their weary way through the solitude of the desert. To a poet the scene would have been invaluable; but it only kept us in painful suspense as to what storm or torrent we were about to be exposed, which our light and half-worn tents could but ill stand. At last, after having been driven about by the contending upper currents in every direction, the tempest seemed to burst to the S.W. of us; and we only received a part of the discharge in a very heavy shower of rain, which lasted about three hours (from nine to twelve), and was succeeded by some strong blasts of wind from the S.E. The fleas, the mosquitoes, and a return of my Bagdad complaint, kept me awake till near morning, when I fell asleep.

April 22.—When I awoke the next morning; at