

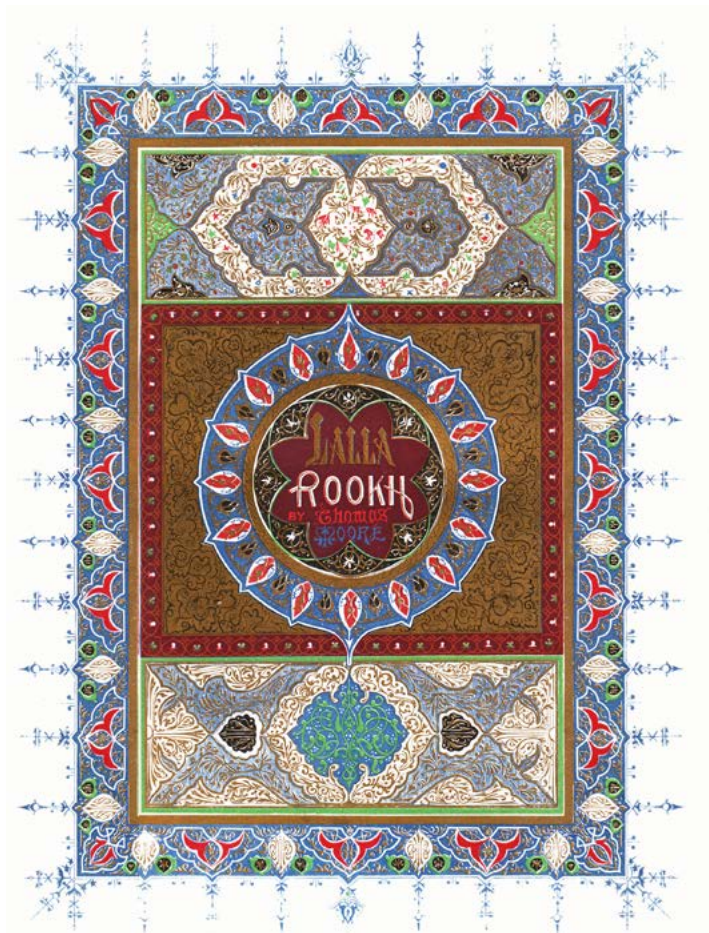
Introduction, by Russell Harris and Marjan Afsharian

Background to the Journal

The dream of any researcher, writer, academic or even curious person is to stumble across a primary source which has not been the subject of any scholarly attention. In some disciplines, the collecting, collating, analysing and annotating of manuscripts is the benchmark for a sense of achievement.

The provenance and discovery of the Pyne Journal are unsensational – the Journal was noticed, just three years ago, in a box among the papers of John Compton Pyne that had been donated to the Military Museum of Devon and Dorset. The existence of a Journal with an interesting title was then mentioned to these authors by one of the museum trustees, Jeremy Archer, who has provided the biography of John Compton Pyne, as well as an epilogue in which we learn of Pyne's life and fate after his walk through Persia. The date of the donation of the Journal

Figure 6: Ornamental frontispiece of an 1861 edition of Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh: an Oriental Romance*. The interpretation of an arabesque bookbinding was executed by Thomas Sulman (circa 1834-1900) and obviously owes much to Owen Jones's 1856 work *The Grammar of Ornament* which had sections treating Arab and Persian decorative elements.



is not known, and neither is the name of the donor. However, as John Compton Pyne never married and was the child of comparatively aged parents (his mother was 44 at the time of his birth), the most plausible suggestion for the Journal's arrival in the Museum's archives would be that the box containing the Journal, his 'Notes on the Egyptian Army' and a few watercolours was donated or bequeathed to the museum by his sister Emily Mary Dillman Pyne (1854-1928). In Julfa outside Isfahan, when Pyne receives his post he comments mysteriously "so the wedding is to be the 11th". At this point an unknown hand has added the only annotation in the whole Journal: "the wedding alluded to, is that of his sister's [sic]." This is the only visible sign that at least one person, most probably from Pyne's family, read through the Journal and helped posterity by adding a small note.

Almost all of the written sections of the journal are a palimpsest inasmuch as they were clearly written first in pencil. One explanation for this is that the author wished to jot down his thoughts quickly in rough and then perhaps edit them later, erasing words, enhancing his text and producing a fair copy. It is perhaps more reasonable to assume that a lead pencil was a failsafe method of notating thoughts. There was no need for the encumbrances of a

bottle of ink and a blotter which an ink pen would have required. At least Pyne seems to have met with none of the suspicion that the Hungarian-British traveller Arminius Vambéry (1832-1913) found in central Asia, where he had to hide his daily notes in his shoes as he informed his readers that the mere act of writing in public would have been a clear indication of spying activities. As Pyne makes no mention of the reaction of his companions, the rustic muleteers, to his writing or drawing we might also assume that he was able to spend some time seated at various spots en route with his brush and watercolours. However, it is impossible to determine whether he made quick pencil sketches in his Journal during the daytime, adding the more time-consuming colours during his evenings. As this was still an age when domestic lighting consisted of oil lamps and candles, it is more probable that Pyne exploited the daylight to produce his watercolours.

At some point, which it is impossible to determine, the pencil writing has been overwritten in pen. This would appear to have been done by the same person, i.e. Pyne himself, possibly in the evening as he lay in his austere stone rooms in the rural caravanserais.¹ In the faint light of a candle he would have been able to make sure that his grey pencil-work became legible and the fluency

¹ De Windt (1891, p 42) comments on his dilapidated lodgings near the Caspian coast: "Our troubles commenced in real earnest at Patchinar, a desolate-looking place and filthy post-house" and goes on to report the graffiti he found on the guest-room walls, including a message from a practical Englishman who had scrawled 'Big bugs here!'."

with which the pencil has been overwritten in black ink indicates that it was done by the same hand.

In attempting to understand the cultural background of 1884, the year Pyne made his journey, and in annotating and providing further illustrations to Pyne's work, the authors of this introduction looked at the decades leading up to 1884 and to some of the political and cultural developments in Europe, Persia and Central Asia, in order to examine some of the ideas, imagery, literature and music that might have had some bearing on Pyne's decision to make his trip. Ancillary illustrations to Pyne's watercolours have been added to enable the modern reader to gain a fuller image of the locations illustrated. In most cases these extra illustrations date from no more than three decades on either side of 1884. This relatively narrow period sits within the later period of the Qajar dynasty and ends before modernisation, restoration or urban developments made any significant changes to these sites.

Cultural background

Unlike other travellers who went to Persia with the intention, upon their return, of publishing a rhapsodic, didactic, reportage or gazetteer-type book, John Compton Pyne took himself to Persia with no stated purpose other than to cross the country from south to north in three months. Although he appears to have studied Hindustani

and to have acquired a knowledge of Persian while in the army in India, the only pointers we have to his interest in Persia are those works which he mentions in his Journal — Saadi's beloved book of poems, the *Gulistān*, and travelogues by European authors such as Ussher. As with any educated British traveller of his time, at school he would have studied, in Greek, Herodotus's accounts of the Graeco-Persian wars. He may even have carried in his mind, as others of his time did, an image of the Persians as the noble foes of antiquity as well as the stereotype of them as being in a state degraded from their glory days.

The Scottish water-colourist David Roberts (1796–1864) had presented the British public with exquisitely composed views of late Ottoman Egypt and Palestine in his *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt and Nubia* (1842–49) and *Egypt and Nubia* (1846–49) and Edward Lear's *Journal of a Landscape Painter in Greece and Albania* (1851) was illustrated with watercolour scenes. There was in late Victorian England simply no shortage of orientalist imagery of a preponderantly Arabic nature. The market for Arab scenes was established and the British public set off a-visiting Egypt most particularly in the hey-day of the builder of the Suez Canal, Khedive Ismail (r. 1863–79). Victorian orientalist painting however concentrated on genre scenes of a not too distant past. In the eyes of painters, the era of the Mamluks and the Ottomans, from the 13th to the 19th centuries, was one during which Egypt had a settled character and represented a painterly

ecosphere free of western influences and offering a courtly mediaeval world of great attraction to the Victorians.²

Pyne may have absorbed the supremely romanticised yet draftsman-like views of Flandin and Coste's *Voyage en Perse 1840 et 1841* whose illustrations, for all their beauty, have been subject to the criticism that everything has been 'tidied up', and every Persian scene clothed with aesthetically placed bowers, pleasingly positioned ruins and architecturally-rendered buildings. Indeed, many of their depictions are populated by a wide array of appropriately dressed and posed locals going about their picturesque activities. Flandin and Coste's magnificent volumes of drawings serve as a locus of orientalisising reverie, as did the French archeologist Madame Jane Dieulafoy's lavishly illustrated *La Perse, la Chaldée et la Susiane*. Pyne could not have seen this work as it was published some three years after his trip, although Madame Dieulafoy's presence is felt in the Journal as Pyne copies some of her photographs during his time in Julfa. This act in itself is a poignant witness to the last throes of

the pre-industrial age when the only easy way to copy a photograph was to draw it by hand.

As Persian had been the court language of the Moghul emperors until their downfall 1857 and had long been in use in many of the princely states for official communications, an educated soldier, such as Pyne, in the service of the British Empire in India in the late 19th century would have been aware of the Persian content of the 'Hindoostani' language. It would have been no difficult task to find a teacher of Persian or a local educated gentleman in India with whom Pyne could attempt to work his way through a poem of Hafez or an episode of the *Shahnamah*. Pyne himself tells us that "everything he [the Haji] saw of mine, knife, watch, pocket compass, Gulistan of Saadi, he wanted me to give him," thereby revealing the fact that he was carrying the *Gulistan* with him. This would suggest that Pyne had benefited from the advice of Sir William Jones,³ founder of Fort William College in India where selections of the book became the primer for British officials learning Persian, which was until 1834, "the medium of

² On the late Victorians' urge to create a "mediaeval" past which possibly had never existed see Paula Sanders, *Creating Medieval Cairo* (Cairo, 2008), particularly chapter 1, 'Constructing Medieval Cairo in the Nineteenth Century'.

³ Lewis 'Golestān-e Sa'di', (p. 81): 'In 1771, Sir William Jones advised students of Persian to pick as their first exercise in the language an easy chapter of the *Gulistān* to translate. Thus the *Gulistān* became the primary text of Persian instruction for officials of British India at Fort William College... with selections of the text being repeatedly published in primer form. Michael John Rowlandson provided a manual to help Persian readers with the Arabic passages (Madras, 1828); diacritics were included to mark the short vowels in at least two *Golestān* editions published in Calcutta (ed. A. Sprenger, Calcutta, 1851; ed. W. Nassau Lee, Calcutta, 1871), and two other editions appended glossaries (ed. F. Johnson, Hertford, 1863; ed. J. Platts, London, 1871).'

official correspondence in India.”⁴ Fort William itself ran an enormous translation campaign, with thousands of works being translated there into English from Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Bengali, Hindi and Urdu, an institutional endeavour which mirrored those undertaken by the Abbasids in 8th-century Baghdad and the Fatimids in 11th-century Cairo

Pyne’s Army Service Record⁵ shows that he was “acquainted with... French, Hindustanee and Persian”. Colonel Stewart, the British Consul at Mashhad, whom Pyne almost meets in Tehran, is perhaps a good example of the uses to which the British study of Persian was put: “In July 1880, in the Second Afghan War, the Afghan Sardar Ayub Khan inflicted a shockingly great defeat on English troops at the battle of Maiwand, going on in September to lay siege to Kandahar, where General Roberts defeated him. Ayub Khan then withdrew to Persia, where he hoped to raise a force to return and overthrow Amir Abdul Rahman, the ruler of Afghanistan, who was supported by the British. To keep watch on the Persian border with Afghanistan and to give warning of the movements of Ayub Khan, Colonel Stewart was sent ‘on special duties’ to Kháf [in Afghanistan], where he stayed for two and a half lonely years, on watch.”⁶

Romantic attraction of Persia and the call of *Lalla Rookh*

Certain sites in Persia held a great fascination for intrepid British travellers, with Persepolis possibly being the prize location to visit. The grandeur of Persepolis, the splendour of its decline, the shimmering allure of its ruins, the chance to describe inscriptions and reliefs which only few westerners had visited — all these temptations led almost every British visitor, until well beyond the time of Pyne’s trip in 1884, to make their own exclusive odyssey to Persepolis and to describe the place in long, well-researched chapters with enormously long and often dreary archaeological and religio-historical annotations. For the Victorian traveller, little frequented spots in remote parts of the world still retained their status as sites of quasi-romantic pilgrimage, a western version of the Islamic custom of *ziyarat* or shrine visitation. Persepolis would certainly have brought to mind a slew of biblical prophecies — “neither shall a son of man dwell in it.”⁷ — which highlight man’s insignificance and transience in the face of God’s wrath and the devastation that had been wrought upon once too proud cities. When gazing on Persepolis, any Victorian traveller would surely have

⁴ Yohannan (1952), p. 138.

⁵ The National Archives, Kew, WO 76 34. Dorsetshire Regt (54th Foot).

⁶ Wynn (2008), p. 28.

⁷ Jeremiaiah, 49:18.

uttered aloud a hemistich or two of Edward FitzGerald's popular edition of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*: "They say the Lion and the Lizard keep / The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep."⁸

It should be noted that Thomas Moore's 1817 deeply evocative oriental romance *Lalla Rookh* and Edward FitzGerald's 1859 exquisite reworking of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* were both bestsellers in a poetry-greedy age and the poets the superstars of their age. These two works of exotic, romantic and orientalising poetry not only defined for the public the intellectual frame of reference for the various visual representations created by orientalist painters, but it is also quite likely they were the driving spirit behind the urge of so many scholars and travellers to discover Persia.⁹

Lalla Rookh may well have held some allure for the young Pyne as, from almost the beginning of the 19th century, Persian poetry in translation or paraphrase, formerly a matter of "merely professional interest for gentlemen in the military and civil service of the Asiatic

empire... [became] in the new century the interest of all Englishmen".¹⁰ The accessibility of Thomas Moore's poetry — dealing with an alien subject, but set in perfectly recognisable metre, in an age when poetry captured the educated imagination and poets set fashions with their oeuvre – undoubtedly sent ripples through British culture. As to the popularity of this genre of pseudo-Persian poetry, one may consider that poetry, as the light entertainment of the day, served a diversionary and transporting purpose for a gentleman and the especially exotic, and much illustrated, *Lalla Rookh* not only served as armchair travel or material for day-dreaming but also provided the reader with numerous lines of poetry to set the heart a-flutter which could be quoted in the politest of society or when courting a lady.

It is *Lalla Rookh*'s very accessibility which led Yohannan, in his article on the fad of Persian poetry in England, to praise it so faintly: "As a whole, however, both song and poem are a tour de force in which a lot of superficial learning about the materials of Asiatic

⁸ Fitzgerald, verse xvii.

⁹ The over-sentimental *Bendemeer Stream*, a short extract from Moore's *Lalla Rookh*, took on a life of its own in musical settings and travelled to the farthest reaches of the Anglo-Saxon diaspora. In his 1857 novel of the American civil war, *Guy Livingstone*, the name of the locale in Persia is a symbol of luxuriance and plenty: "When a subaltern arrives laden with gold, the barrack-yard is a perfect garden of Bendemeer to the tradesmen." (Lawrence, (1868) p. 105). On the far side of the world in 1854, a group of settlers in New South Wales, Australia, decided that the village of McDonald River should be renamed Bendemeer, upon the suggestion of one of the inhabitants whose grandfather had been a friend of Moore.

¹⁰ Yohannan, p. 152.

literature is paraded without any successful penetration to the heart of its mystery.”¹¹ John Compton Pyne would certainly have known these two much-published poems, *Lalla Rookh* and *The Rubáiyát*, but we can only surmise that he was intrigued or inspired enough by something on the cultural horizon to make him want to view the “unclouded skies of Peristan” by trekking through Persia when the opportunity arose in 1884.¹²

Persia in music and applied arts

Examples of the refined taste of Persia were available to a western audience. For example, economically comfortable Victorians had a hunger for pattern books, such as the 1856 *The Grammar of Ornament*, in which Owen Jones, in his short introduction to his chapter on Persian ornament, gives his opinion on Persian architecture: “if we may judge from the representations published in Flandin and Coste’s “*Voyages en Perse*,” [Persian architecture] does not appear to have ever reached the perfection of the Arabian buildings of Cairo.”¹³ Here Jones was referring to

the glorious lithographs of Cairo monuments by Prisse d’Avennes,¹⁴ for Jones himself had not ventured that far from his armchair and his pattern books were all the result of book learning, a fact he himself acknowledges by providing the sources for his patterns. He tells the reader that his pre-Islamic Persian patterns have been adapted from Flandin and Coste’s *Voyage en Perse*,¹⁵ and the Islamic plates have been reworked from “Persian MSS in the British Museum”, “a Persian Manufacturer’s Pattern-Book in the South Kensington Museum” and “a Persian MS in the South Kensington Museum”.¹⁶

The taste for Persian decorative elements was already well established by 1884 with the great exponent of the Arts and Crafts movement, William Morris, confirming: “To us pattern-designers, Persia has become a holy land, for there in the process of time our art was perfected, and thence above all places it spread to cover for a while the world, east and west.”¹⁷ Wallpapers, book illustrations, book bindings, tile-work and, of course, carpets, all took inspiration from Persia. The popularity of Persian carpets in Europe and the United States led to a certain

¹¹ Yohannan, p. 256.

¹² Moore (1861), p. 146. ‘Peristan’ (land of the fairy) is Moore’s own coinage.

¹³ Jones (1856), p. 75.

¹⁴ Prisse d’Avennes (1877).

¹⁵ Jones (1856), p. 27.

¹⁶ Jones (1856), p. 75.

¹⁷ Morris (1879).



Figure 7: Plate XLIV from Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* with Persian pattern details taken from a MS in the British Museum.

amount of interference in their manufacture and to the use of aniline dyes in Persian rug-making — a cause of much lamentation for almost anyone who was writing on oriental carpets at the time.

Western consumerism inevitably entered into the carpet-making story and it had its keepers of the portal in the form of the great European trading firms based in Persia, such as Messrs. Ziegler & Co.¹⁸ and the Persian Manufacturing Company. This latter firm at the end of the 19th century sent one of its employees, Mr. C. R. Smith, from Kidderminster to Soltanabad charged with setting up a manufactory there and improving the local product's patterns and colours — by setting up a dye-house also, obviously an attempt to avoid the use of the dreaded aniline dyes! There was also a trend in the market away from the

¹⁸ (Helfgott (1993), p. 210, quoting Edwards (1953), pp. 135–136): The British-Swiss firm of Ziegler & Co. became involved in carpet production in Soltanabad, Iraq-e Ajam, in 1881 and “created a carpet production complex that linked a regional cottage industry with a city-based enterprise including a carpet factory, storage facilities, dyeing areas, and a large warehouse.” (ibid, p. 214): “By the mid-1890s the company had offices or agents in Tabriz, Tehran, Resht, Sultanabad, Mashhad, Yezd, and Isfahan; as far west as Baghddad, Basra, Trebizon and Istanbul.”

mechanically reproduced designs of the late 19th century and a reawakening of love for ‘the charm of irregularity’, as *The House Beautiful* magazine declared in 1895.¹⁹ All of this interference very quickly led Mumford, a writer on oriental carpets, to complain that “the Sultanabad carpets are the conceits of European and American designers, working, in a way, on the old Persian models, but changing the colors and supplying such additions as seem likely to meet capricious demands.”²⁰

In the domain of classical music and in both the west European and Russian musical traditions, influences from faraway countries had long been an intrinsic part of a composer’s palette. In the 18th century Mozart could use the already existing *alla turca* dance form and in the next century Princess Eboli in Verdi’s *Don Carlo* could perform a parody of a Moorish love song about a veiled woman and a king, aptly entitled in the French version ‘Au palais des fées’. The French poet, Leconte de Lisle,²¹ in 1884 included an *orientale* ‘les Roses d’Ispahan’ in his *Poèmes Tragiques*, which was set to music by Gabriel Fauré and published the very year that Pyne walked through Persia.²² The French adjective *orientale* was also the name of a specific form of short symphonic, or instrumental, tone poem.

The fact that Persia or Persianate themes and Persianising melodies and harmonies could appear in music and literature presupposes a familiarity on the part of the general public with, or a willingness to be exposed to, the concept of that literary-cultural territory. Borodin’s *In the Steppes of Central Asia* (*В средней Азии*) (1880), Rimsky-Korsakov’s symphonic poem *Scheherazade* (1888), and Robert Browning’s *Ferishteh’s Fancies* (1884) — ‘an examination of philosophic problems cast in the form of questions set before and answered by a Persian sage, with a reinforcement of each answer by a lyric verse’²³ — all indicate that by the 1880s there was both in the west European and Russian creative disciplines a developed and widespread consciousness of the Persianate world, or what was imagined to be so. Composers, poets, writers and painters did not differentiate too strictly between the influences of the Caucasus, Central Asia, Persia, Egypt and Algeria, which all provided elements for a palette of colours that could be artfully blended into a catch-all oriental potpourri.

The widespread acceptance of this subcategory of oriental, particularly in the field of musical composition, with its ripples from the Persian world in the British

¹⁹ See Harris and Miller (2011).

²⁰ Mumford (1900), p. 196.

²¹ Charles Marie René Leconte de Lisle (1818–1894).

²² Gail (2011), p. 56.

²³ Litzinger (1968), p. 20.

national consciousness, is evidenced above all by the fact that the composer Arthur Sullivan, in 1882, produced a highly successful comic opera *Iolanthe; or, The Peer and the Peri* at the Savoy Theatre in London. The apogee of Sullivan's orientalisising satire is represented by his later work *The Rose of Persia*, first produced in 1899.

The orientalisising influence of Persia in opera continued well into the 20th century, as we find Hugo von Hoffmannthal's love-struck central characters of *der Rosenkavalier* startled by the eponymous silver rose's heady aroma. Sophie's exclamation "'Tis a fragrance entrancing—like roses—yes, like living roses" is explained by Octavian: "Yes—some few drops of Persian attar have been poured thereon." The reaction to this alchemic ingredient which transforms an inanimate silver object into a transporting epiphany — "A celestial flower, not of earth it seems. A rose from the sacred groves of Paradise"²⁴— is an exclamation which sums up a standard orientalist conception of Persia as the earthly repose of everything delightful, of the opening of the soul, blind to the consequences, to romantic love. This whole exchange of paradisiac imagery was Secessionist Vienna's updated expression of Thomas Moore's early 19th-century line "and

a dew was distilled from their flow'rs that that gave all the fragrance of summer when summer has gone."

In analysing the historical background of 'Persia in Britain', mention must be made of James Morier's 1824 highly fantastic and humorous novel, *Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, which was seen for over a century as 'as an accurate representation of the Iranian national character'.²⁵ Browne, the author of *A Year among the Persian*, also commended it highly: "Every cultivated Englishman who has not read *Hajji Baba* (if, indeed, the Englishman who has read it not can, in the full meaning of the term, be described as cultivated) should at once proceed to remedy this defect in his education."²⁶ Amanat also points out that the great Scottish poet Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) considered the book essential for an understanding of Persia, and reports that F. J. Goldsmid (of the Indo-European Telegraph Department) wrote of the novel to one of his subordinates "When you read this, you will know more of Persia and the Persians than you would if you had lived there with your eyes open for twenty years."²⁷

²⁴ Hat einen starken Geruch. Wie Rosen, wie lebendige. Ja, ist ein Tropfen persischen Rosenöls darein getan. Wie himmlische, nicht irdische, wie Rosen vom hochheiligen Paradies. Act I, *Der Rosenkavalier* (adapted from English transl. Alfred Kalisch).

²⁵ Amanat, 'Hajji Baba of Ispahan', p. 568.

²⁶ Browne (1893), vol. 1, p. ix.

²⁷ Quoted in Amanat, 'Hajji Baba of Ispahan', p. 565.

The telegraph

The more immediate connection between Britain and Persia and the reason for a number of British engineers being posted in Persia was the installation and maintenance of a telegraph line within Persia. The completion of a telegraph line from Calcutta to London via the Persian coast was an achievement which can hardly be overstated. Fault lines had started to appear in the great edifice of the British empire with the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The following year, telegraph lines began to be laid inside Persia, and by 1862 the major cities were linked to the capital. The speed with which the telegraph was constructed is indicative of the British need and desire for intelligence at top speed.²⁸

The Anglo-Afghan War and, most importantly for our narrative, the war in the Sudan against Muhammad Ahmad bin Abd Allah, the self-declared Mahdi and his followers, were being waged. Fighting broke out in the Sudan in February 1884 (and then again in March 1885), and this would have been in the forefront of Pyne's mind. Any British person, whether connected with the military, the colonial administration or simply a member of the newspaper-reading public, would have been fully

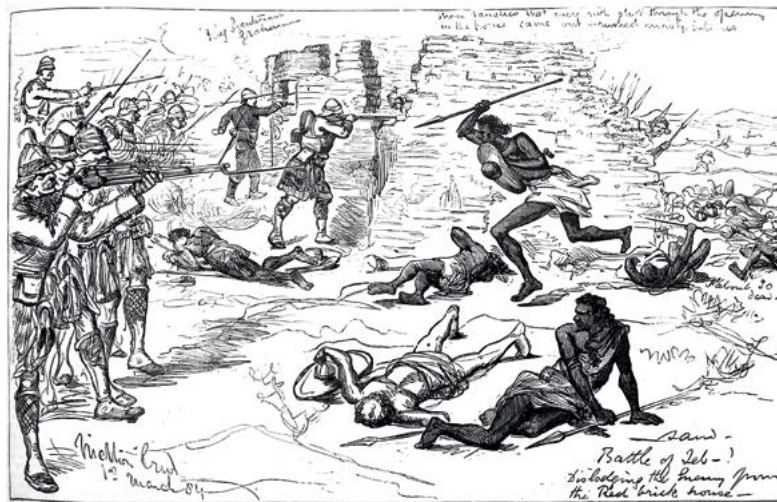


Figure 8: The War in the Sudan. The Battle of el Tel, 29 February 1884. The British illustrated press was replete with vivid and emotive imagery of the war against the Mahdi in the Sudan in 1883–4.

informed in word and line drawing about the Sudan and the ‘mad Mahdi’. British illustrated newspapers since the second half of 1883 had been feeding the public a

²⁸ The dichotomous nature of this modern technology, as with Facebook and Twitter in recent years, is pointed out by Amanat (1991), p. 184: “The Shah could now know immediately what was occurring in the provinces, and issue orders regarding rebellion or sedition. On the other hand, the opposition found the telegraph a useful tool in co-ordinating their movements in 1891–2 and again in 1905–11.” For a full detailed account of the financing, technical and logistical issues relating to the laying of the telegraph line see Goldsmid (1874), pp. 112–248.

constant diet of detailed news items and illustrations of the battles and personalities involved almost to the point of obsession. The good war against a group whom the poet Kipling later immortalised as the ‘fuzzy-wuzzies’²⁹ reinforced in the public’s mind the enlightening and beneficent elements of empire building. Pyne’s aside when

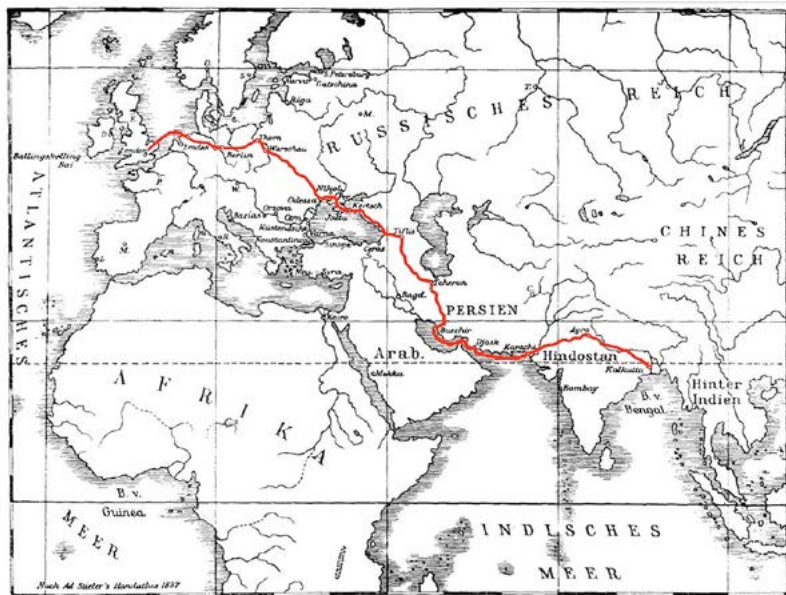


Figure 9: Route of the London–Calcutta telegraph line.

his ship draws into the port of Muskat “No Queen’s ship was there at my visit – probably they are at Suakim [in the Sudan]” evinces an unquestioning acceptance of the essentially colonial nature of the world order as well as its distinctly British flavour.

The speed of communications enabled by the telegraph was an achievement of awe and wonder for the general public: “A feat in telegraphing has lately been accomplished upon the overland Indo-European line. London, Emden on the Baltic, Odessa on the Black Sea, Tehran in Persia, Kurrachee, and Calcutta, were connected up, and messages were sent and received over this enormous length of wire — some 7,000 miles — **at the rate of from 12 to 14 words a minute**, with an ordinary Morse printing instrument.”³⁰ Via this new-fangled installation, the India Office in London could now issue instructions to the Viceroy in India, which meant that not only could India be ruled in “real time”, but the British government could receive information and control events in a way previously unimaginable and at a dizzying speed that made it feel forewarned and forearmed.

This was a revolutionary step towards a Pax Britannica which the public at home felt could only be of benefit to the world, particularly if it gave the British a strategic advantage over the Russians whose incorporation into

²⁹ “So ‘ere’s to you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, at your ‘ome in the Soudan; You ‘re a pore benighted ‘eathen but a first-class fightin’ man.”

³⁰ *Daily Alta California*, 22 July 1884, p. 5. Bold added.

their empire of Turkestan,³¹ an area with almost the same land mass as Persia, had given Russia a common border with Afghanistan. In 1867 Tsar Alexander II issued a decree which was perfectly frank in giving the reason for Russia's annexation of this enormous area: "The most valuable product of this country is cotton, which saves the Russian people many million rubles, because it precludes the necessity of importing American cotton."³²

However, opinion in Britain was rattled by this act of Russian expansionism, with Mr. Eastwick, a member of the British Parliament, pointing out in 1869 the ease of access that Russia now had to the very heart of Asia: "... preparations for the construction of a railroad have begun on this route [from the Caspian into Central Asia]. After the completion of the line, which may be expected within two years at latest, communications by steam will have been established between St. Petersburg and Khojend, in the very heart of Turkestan."³³ The underlying fear, of course, was that Russia would be able to send its army, undetected and at great speed, to within striking distance of Persia.

The same member of Parliament was on his feet again making alarmist statements just a few months before Pyne set off on his journey: "Russia [has] thus become conterminous with the northern frontier of Persia along its entire length, and with Afghánistán, and [has] also made strides towards the Great Wall of China."³⁴ Worries about Russia continued until as late as 1900 with emphasis being given to the pernicious activities of Russian agents: "as Russian influence has become dominant in Khorassan, so has she gone further afield and extended her operations through Northern Persia into Seistan, where of late the Russian agents have been everywhere in evidence, intent on making surveys and conducting secret missions."³⁵ The obituary notice in *The Times* for General Konstantin Petrovic von Kaufman (1818–1882), the first Governor-General of Russian Turkestan from 1867–1882, makes clear the reasons for British-Russian tension, calling him "the bugbear of Russophobists in this country" as his expansion of Russian power in Central Asia had "narrowed the zone of debateable ground which separated [Russia] from the countries under the government or control of England."³⁶

³¹ This Central Asian territory increased the Russian empire's land mass by over 11%.

³² Malahowskii (1910), p. 1.

³³ *Hansard*, HC Deb 09 July 1869 vol 197 cc1544-821544.

³⁴ *Hansard*, HC Deb 22 April 1873 vol 215 cc818-77.

³⁵ Krauss (1900), p. xi.

³⁶ *The Times*, 17 May 1882, p. 12. Kaufman's devotion to this new territory cannot be doubted. "[His] last request [was]: 'I request



Figure 10: General Kaufman, the “bugbear of British Russophobists”. Image from the *Kaufman Album*, courtesy of Library of Congress.

The alarm bells set in motion by Russian expansion into central Asia in the late 1850s rang on through the decades, with highly emotive and exact imagery being used to describe Russian designs: “in the short space of eighteen years Russia has embraced in her iron grasp

a territory that extends nearly 1000 miles from east to west and about 700 from north to south. Like a crab she has stretched out her great claws...”³⁷ Other sages and prophets of British imperialism rang those bells even louder after the Russians constructed a railway line into the heart of Asia — to Tashkent: “From her [Russia’s] home provinces

she can send to that point as large an army as she invaded Turkey with, and an incomparably larger one than any of you can ever hope to send to India; ...in time of war the Russians would cut off all telegraphic communications with abroad, your army of defence would be open to attack the whole of the way to India, for a period of three weeks, by means of cruisers and disguised torpedo-boats. Now that the Merv Turcomans are annexed, Russia has no enemy to fear the whole way to Herat; and while you must guard every inch of your road to India, a serious drain on your resources—she need not detach a single Cossack to defend her forces the whole of the distance to Herat.”³⁸

Although history would see the introduction of telegraph stations throughout Persia as intricately connected to the ‘Great Game’, the term used for the competition for imperial influence in central Asia, Stack who spent six months in Persia in the early 1880s considered that, although the telegraph had been useful in acquainting a greater number of Persians with Englishmen, on the whole “it would be absurd to suppose that the residence of a few telegraph officers in Shiraz and Isfahan can be of any political advantage.”³⁹ He continues

burial here [Tashkent] so that everyone will know that here is true Russian ground where it is no dishonor for a Russian to lie.” (Fedorov, *Istoricheskii vestnik*, CXXXIV, 54–55, quoted in Mackenzie (1967), p. 276).

³⁷ Perowne (1898), pp. 10–11.

³⁸ Marvin (1891), pp. 377–378.

³⁹ Stack (1892), vol. 2, pp. 302–303.

his narrative on the telegraph in Persia with a story so viscerally orientalist that it could have come straight from the pages of Morier's *Hajji Baba*: "A Governor at Abadsk was bold enough to say that the telegraph lied, when the Prince Governor of Shiraz sent him a reprimand, and a threat to expel him if he did not behave better. 'Do you laugh at my beard?' asked the irate governor, after the operator handed him the dispatch, and he had read the ominous significance of the message. 'Will you dare tell me that that iron line can talk? Out with you for an idiot, and a liar, else you will forget how to draw breath!'"⁴⁰

However, while the telegraph stations provided a vital intelligence service, many writers of travelogues through Persia in this period mention only the ever-willing hospitality of the British telegraph officers, stationed in remote and often almost inaccessible locations, Pyne being no exception. The non-Persian-speaking ex-Royal Engineers who manned these lonely outposts were to a man eager for the company of a compatriot, and Pyne for his part also delights in meeting, chatting and overnighing with them. The traveller De Windt, in his 1891 *Ride to India across Persia and Baluchistán*, gives a lively description of the life of these lonely technicians and the first reference to the use of social media: "[it] is a

lonely one, and three or four months often elapse without personal communication with the outer world, except on the wires. By this means, when the latter are not in public use, the telegraphist can lighten his weary hours by animated conversation with his colleague two or three hundred miles away on congenial topics—the state of the weather, rate of exchange, chances of promotion, and so on."⁴¹

Two prosaic lines from *The Statesman's Year-Book for the Year 1884* throw some light on significant aspects of Britain's connectedness with Persia: "at the end of 1879, there were 3,367 miles of telegraph lines... in operation. The number of Telegraph officials was 71 at the same date" and "direct exports from Persia to Great Britain in 1882 consisted mainly of opium valued at [GBP] 41,219, and wheat [GBP] 39,396."⁴²

The completion of the telegraph line from London to Bombay had brought the latest high-technology to Persia around 1862, not only enabling Persia to be in instant contact with the world, but the internal telegraph lines laid for the benefit of, and use by, the Persian administration enabled the country to give itself a common sense of identity and thereby to impart a great sense of prestige to the monarch. The dual purpose of the telegraph line

⁴⁰ Stack (1892), vol 2, pp. 321–322.

⁴¹ De Windt (1891), pp. 144–145.

⁴² Kelti (1884), p. 798.

through Persia, with its network of ‘telegraph posts’ or isolated outposts of European engineers and telegraph operators, was not lost on either the Persians or the French traveller Vilmorin who first praised the whole enterprise: “the traveller would be seriously disadvantaged if he did not have the Indo-European telegraph line to guide him”,⁴³ before damning its patron and repeating a commonly held canard: “after all, England does not exclusively use protestant missionaries as a means of propaganda: she also employs the agents of the Indo-European Telegraph”.⁴⁴

The author of the quaintly titled book *Celebrities of the Army*, a lavishly illustrated best-seller known to posterity as the *Book of Famous Moustaches* — referring to the late-Victorian ultimate symbol of virility, informs us of the lore surrounding the Royal Engineers who had constructed this monumental feat of modern engineering, some of whom Pyne was to meet and whose hospitality was willingly extended and accepted: “[a]ccording to an ancient military rhyme, the whole duty of a Royal Engineer consists in ‘a-digging up of holes, and a-sticking in of poles, and a-building up of barracks for the soldieree.’”⁴⁵ The ancient Iranian institution of *bast* should also be mentioned here, as Keddie points out that “[m]osques and

shrines as well as... foreign-owned telegraph offices were chief areas of *bast* or refuge from the government.”⁴⁶ For all the time he spent with the telegraph officers, not only does Pyne never mention, even in a reported conversation with a telegraph officer, a case of refuge-seeking, but he also avoids any mention of criminality at all. Our genteel traveller also manages to avoid noting the famous Sevruguin studio photographic prints of public executions or heads minus bodies, which images are found widely across the albums collected by more leisurely or perhaps more anthropologically-inclined travellers.⁴⁷

Persia in Europe

It is abundantly clear that the influence of Persia was not limited just to the cultural realm. Britain had long had political interests in Persia and Afghanistan, as well as a history, until 1857, of good relations with the princely courts in India where, to a great extent, Persian was the official language of written communication. Indeed, many of the maharajas, a title borne by Hindu rulers, vaunted a Persian phrase in their regnal names. Even in the late-Victorian period Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda (1853–

⁴³ Vilmorin (1895), p. 118. English translation and all following translations by this author.

⁴⁴ Vilmorin (1895), p. 250.

⁴⁵ Napier (1900), p. 27.

⁴⁶ Keddie (1991), p. 179.

⁴⁷ Cf. the C.R. Smith Album held by the V&A London, no accession number.

1939) was known officially as His Highness *Farzand-i-Khas-Daulat-i-Inglishia*, or the “special friend of England”. Queen Victoria, for her part, after being made Empress of India in 1877 used the Persianised translation as a title: *Kaiser-i-Hind*. British high culture, for an abundance of reasons, was imbued with orientalist and orientalisng lyricism and imagery.

In mid-1873 excitement in London over the forthcoming visit of the Shah was bursting out in the public arena: “The expected visit of the Shah of Persia next week excites an unusual amount of public attention and interest. All parties and classes are anxious to give a cordial welcome to the illustrious guest...”, and in contrast to the vaudevillian exaggerations of his character seen on the stages of the West End, the *Illustrated London News* lauded his enlightened attributes: “He is a Sovereign of many years’ standing, of considerable capacity, of superior intelligence, and of broad culture.”⁴⁸

However, this praise was in stark contrast to another piece in the same edition. In giving an overview of Persia, the newspaper took its cue from opinions published by Ussher in his *Journey from London to Persepolis*, a book which Pyne had with him as part of his small travelling library, and told the readers that “[n]o Asiatic State has

witnessed the perpetration of more atrocious cruelties within the last few years, and in none are the lives, liberties, and property of its subjects more deplorably exposed to the caprices of despotic tyranny than in the Shah’s dominions.”⁴⁹

Knowledge among the British general public about Persia, particularly in the period surrounding Naser al-Din Shah Qajar’s 1873 visit to Paris and London, was generally limited to the caricature and stereotype, and “what overshadowed everything in London and permeated the stage and the music-hall was the brilliant visit of the Shah. ‘Have you seen the Shah?’ was the catchphrase of the hour. His photograph was in every window and his picture in every paper...”⁵⁰ The *Illustrated London News* used highly inflated language in its report of the visit but the underlying excitement of the British public at this exotic visitor can hardly be denied: “A Series of ‘Arabian Nights’ Entertainments,’ Extending from the Moment When the Shah Quitted the Port of Ostend down to the Present Date, Has Been England’s Mode of Making Known to the Persian Sovereign the Hearty Welcome Which She Feels at the Appearance and Stay within Her Borders of Her Royal Guest”⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Illustrated London News*, 14 June 1873, p. 550.

⁴⁹ *Illustrated London News*, 14 June 1873, p. 551.

⁵⁰ Furness (1919), p. 22.

⁵¹ *Illustrated London News*, 28 June 1873, p. 598.

The London stage naturally took the opportunity to add something Persian and hence fashionable to its offerings and “in addition to the slight piece at the Globe [theatre], called ‘Doing the Shah,’ a more important one, from the pen of Mr. Burnand, has been produced at the Opéra Comique. The latter is called ‘Kissi-Kissi; or, the Pa, the Ma, and the Padisha.’ This new Persian extravaganza is accompanied with Offenbach’s music, and goes remarkably well.”⁵² 1873 also saw the sheet-music sellers issue works with titles such as *The Shah of Persia Quadrilles*,⁵³ *The Shah of Persia’s Grand March*,⁵⁴ and *Royal March. Composed... on the occasion of the state visit of ... the Shah of Persia to the Royal Italian Opera ... for Pianoforte*.⁵⁵ The acceptance of a Persian backdrop or a theme also carried the after-life of Thomas Moore’s poem into the realms of the burlesque such as William Brough’s *Lalla Rookh – or, the Prince, the Peri, and the Troubador* of 1858; the ‘Oriental Extravaganza’ (by Jacques Offenbach), operas by Félicien David (*Lalla-Roukh*, 1862), Anton Rubenstein (*Feramors*, 1863) and cantatas by Robert Schumann (*Das Paradies und die Peri*, 1843).⁵⁶

On the literary level, the durability of Persian cultural influence can be seen in Pierre Loti’s 1900 outpouring of his emotional reaction to Persia in his *vers Ispahan* with the invitation to the reader in its opening lines: “whoever so desires to come with me to see the rose season in Isfahan, let him ride along slowly at my side, stopping off here and there, just as in the Middle Ages”.⁵⁷ The modern reader of Loti will find that his work reads as a combination of exoticism, sentimentality and self-obsession, and much of *vers Ispahan* fits the statement made by Loti himself in the preface to his 1888 novel *Madame Chrysanthème*: “Although the longest role appears to be that of Madame Chrysanthemum, the three principal characters are Me, Japan, and the Effect that country has had on me.” Loti’s travelogue, although that mundane word hardly describes the emotionality of his writing, was to inspire the French composer Charles Louis Eugène Koechlin (1867–1950) to compose his *Heures Persanes*, 16 pieces for piano with instantly transporting titles such as *Sieste, avant le depart* and *Derviches dans la nuit*.⁵⁸

⁵² *Illustrated London News*, 19 July 1873, p. 59.

⁵³ British Library, Music Collections h.1483.i.(30.).

⁵⁴ British Library, Music Collections h.1320.b.(19.).

⁵⁵ Composed by Augusto Vianesi. British Library, Music Collections R.M.6.h.16.(9.).

⁵⁶ Ghuman (2014), p. 188.

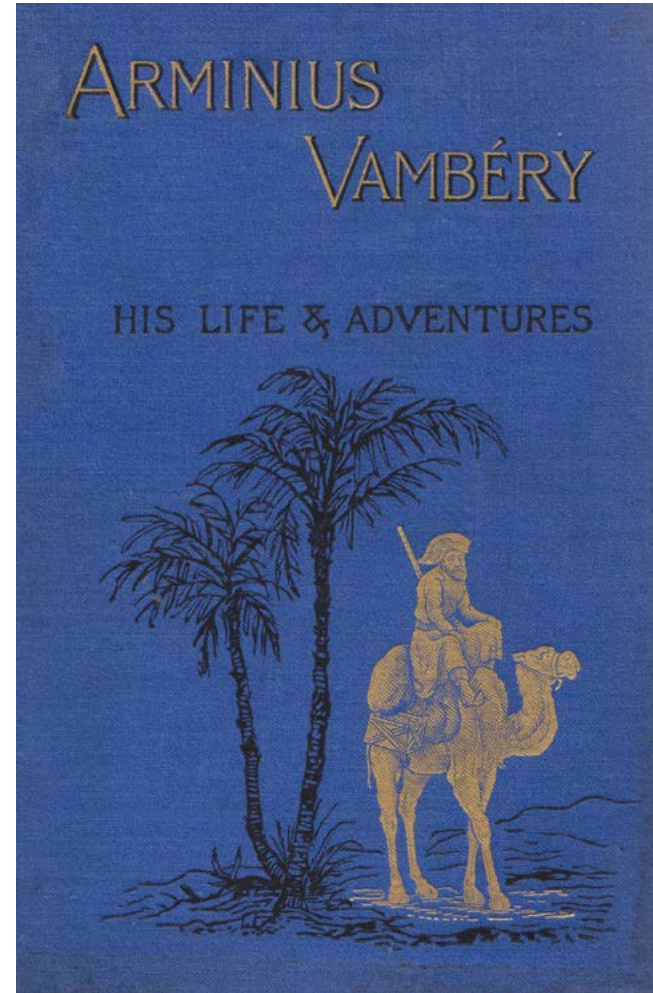
⁵⁷ Loti (1900), p. 2.

⁵⁸ “Summing up *Les Heures Persanes*, Koechlin said he had tried to evoke the spirit of Arabic music rather than directly reproduce it.” Programme notes by Edward Blakeman for Koechlin: *Les Heures Persanes*, Chandos 9974, 2003.

Figure 11: Vambéry in disguise on a camel.

The same process of the culture of Persia seeping into the European consciousness can be seen with settings of the poems of the great 14th-century Persian poet Hafez, in translation of course, with the published French, German and English classical song repertoire containing almost 200 settings. In the late Victorian period, any respectable family would have had a piano and amateurs of all ages would have played their way through volumes of German art song by the most popular composers. This is not to say that an educated Englishman, such as John Compton Pyne, would have sat down with Goethe's 1819 *West-östlicher Divan* or Friedrich Rückert's 1822 *Östliche Rosen*. Furthermore, we have no indication, for example, that he knew any German, but it is certain that he would have come across, heard or possibly even played piano transcriptions of some of the more famous settings of Rückert's Persian-based lyrics such as Franz Schubert's *Du bist die Ruh*⁵⁹ or settings by Johannes Brahms, Felix Mendelssohn or Franz Schubert.

⁵⁹ For an examination of Hugo Wolf's use of the Persian *ghazal*, see Seelig (1992).



Tourism and adventure in the Orient

Although tourism to the Middle East was well established by 1884, with Thomas Cook & Son establishing themselves in Egypt in 1868, a trip through Persia still represented what some people might still deem real travel, i.e. taking a route fraught with danger to visit places few other western eyes had seen, to go out on a voyage of discovery whose route, although planned, would involve a constant series of decisive moments, unforeseen stimuli and physical tests. Most travellers, Pyne apart, took rather an extensive amount of luggage with them. One traveller in 1882 states without any irony that “No very extensive outfit is needed for a six months’ tour in Persia” and then astonishes the modern reader by listing the prerequisites: “He ought to take a travelling-suit of stout drill, and another of pattu or other coarse warm cloth... A single waistcoat of warm material... Four flannel shirts and a couple of extra warm shirts of flannel... and a couple of white shirts and collars... A respectable black coat and waistcoat...with a pair of light tweed trousers... If the traveller intends to visit Teheran, he will do well to carry a dress-suit with him... Boots ought to be stout and solid, laced up the instep... a couple of pair of these, and a good pair of riding boots,

ought to be enough. Add a pair of drill riding-trousers, and the wardrobe is complete... Some medicines are necessary; to wit, several dozen of quinine pills, a couple of boxes of Cockle’s pills, a couple of bottles of chlorodyne, and two or three dozen pills compounded of opium and gallic acid... a couple of broad flannel belts to be worn next the skin at times and places where considerable variations of temperature are to be expected.”⁶⁰

Adventure, unknown or little visited places, unexpected dangers en route from local tribesmen – these were all challenges which Victorian boys were brought up to adore and late-Victorian boys’ illustrated magazines were a mass of derring-do stories.⁶¹ This constant stream of aspirational and illustrated fiction perhaps united the public schoolboys of Great Britain in terms of instilling in them certain manly and imperial principles. Fulton points out that ‘undoubtedly the magazines did purvey a certain set of political and social concepts, overtly and covertly, some more patriotic, nationalistic, imperialistic, Evangelical, racist, or xenophobic than others.’⁶²

It will be apparent from Pyne’s *Journal* that on his trip through Persia he was constantly and serendipitously meeting other Europeans, but, apart from Pyne, none of them could be called tourists, and most fitted the categories

⁶⁰ Stack (1882), pp. 311–312.

⁶¹ Fulton (2010), p. 1, for example gives a total of 500 Victorian titles which appeared between 1860 and 1885.

⁶² Fulton (2010), p. 1.

of “missionaries, teachers, traders, developers, bankers, messianic dreamers, and empire builders”⁶³ to whom travel enterprises catered in the early years. Almost all the Europeans Pyne met have names which made at least a dent in history — Colonel Ross, Mr McIntyre, Captain Murdoch Smith, Rev. Robert Bruce, Mr. Preece and the missionary Miss Isabella Read. The great paradox of this Irish lady’s placement, or dislocation, in the Christian Mission School in Julfa is that in the mid-Victorian era female behaviour in Britain was highly restricted and one of the few avenues of emancipation open to respectable single women of no great class or money was the profession of teaching and by extension that of missionary activity.

The aura of Christian sanctity that the missionary societies and the congregations back home attached to a lady missionary in a hardship posting meant that her independence of action was further enhanced by the fact that she alone, and not the male missionaries, could gain entrance into the *anderun* or women’s section of Persian houses. There was a certain virtue inherent in performing the role of a missionary attempting to bring Christianity to Persia, a country that two decades after Pyne’s visit was described in a 1906 survey of missionary activity as “another illustration of an unprogressive nation, caught

long ago in the toils of a decaying civilization, hampered by absolutism, and lying in intellectual stagnation under the incubus of a narrow and persecuting religious cult.”⁶⁴

In 1889, the great Hungarian-born linguist, anthropologist and explorer, Arminius Vambéry, in dedicating the account of his travels in disguise in Central Asia to ‘the boys of England’, was doing no more than adding to an enormous well-established literature aimed at spurring teenage males on to devote themselves to or even sacrifice themselves in the cause of the British Empire. In this spirit Vambéry advises the boys of England that “a journey to Asia is quite worth the trouble involved in it,” thereby providing Victorian youth with a guide to a contented life. He also appears to promise the prospect of a delightful old age: ‘The joy and utmost satisfaction which I felt whilst looking on the scenes for which my earliest juvenile fancy longed, that same joy I derive now from the recollection of those bygone adventures, and I feel really happy in unfolding the delightful and variegated picture of my former life.’⁶⁵ It would appear that Pyne was carrying out this very same task by notating and illustrating his journey, so that at some point in the future he would be able to relive it and sup on the drug of nostalgia.

⁶³ Hunter (2004), p. 28.

⁶⁴ Denis (1906), p. 64.

⁶⁵ Vambéry (1899), pp. xviii–xix.



Figure 12: The Englishman Thomas Stevens (1854–1935) at the start of his journey around the world on a penny-farthing. His luggage, seen tied to the handlebar consisted of socks, a spare shirt, a raincoat that doubled as tent and bedroll, and a pocket revolver.

It would not be too far-fetched for us to think that Pyne might have read the March 1883 *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* in which Colonel Sir John Underwood Bateman-

Champain, who had been involved in the construction of the Calcutta to London telegraph line, wrote of the underdeveloped state of the road system in Persia: “[w]heeled vehicles are practically unknown, excepting on the road from Cazvin to Tehran where quite lately a service of troikas on the Russian system has been organised with tolerable success. Caravan routes are but tracks worn over steep and stony mountain ridges or over

gravelly plains by the feet of mules and camels for century after century. Bridges are rare, and where most wanted are too often represented by the ruined piers and abutments of some clumsy massive construction of a bygone age.”⁶⁶

Upon setting off on his trip, Pyne informs us that his kit only weighs about 82 lbs. There were those who did greater feats with even less, such as Thomas Stevens, who made a round the world trip on a penny farthing. Although Stevens does in fact give long descriptions of the people he met and the places he visited on his bicycle, the immediate image he gives of himself, as seen in the colour illustration (Figure 12), is of a man with very little luggage for a trip which would take him from San Francisco via Tehran to Yokahama. The illustrations throughout his two-volume travelogue show him everywhere in the same clothing and wearing his pith helmet in all seasons.

Many authors who passed along the route through Persia taken by Pyne had written of mules teetering over the edge of the Kotal-i Dokhtar or Pir-i Zan passes. Champain described the first leg of the route as “peculiarly difficult. No less than six severe passes have to be surmounted between the sea and Shiraz, a distance of 180 miles, and at two spots the track rises to an altitude of nearly 7000 feet.”⁶⁷ However de Windt more graphically paints a hypochondriac’s nightmare scenario: “The

⁶⁶ Champain (1883), p. 121.

⁶⁷ Champain, p. 123.

climate of Shiráz is delicious, but dangerous. Though to a new-comer the air feels dry, pure, and exhilarating, the city is a hot-bed of disease, and has been christened the “Fever Box.” Small-pox, typhus, and typhoid are never absent, and every two or three years an epidemic of cholera breaks out and carries off a fearful percentage of the inhabitants. In spring-time, during heavy rains, the plains are frequently inundated to a depth of two or three feet, and the water, stagnating and rotting under a blazing sun, produces towards nightfall a thick white mist, pregnant with miasma and the dreaded Shiráz fever which has proved fatal to so many Europeans, to say nothing of natives.”⁶⁸

The peak of anaemic recommendations was achieved by “[a] matter-of-fact Scotch traveller who visited the country describes it as being divided into two portions — “one being desert with salt and the other desert without salt,”⁶⁹ and the sheer pointlessness of going there to observe beauty was emphasised by Arnold: “One cannot ride twenty miles in any part of Persia... other than upon the salt desert or the mountain tops, without seeing ruined villages and broken watercourses bounded by fields which have relapsed to infertility”⁷⁰ — a statement quoted without attribution by *The Church Missionary atlas*

three years later with the implication that being stationed in Persia, with its lack of verdant valleys and “England’s mountains green”, constituted a virtue in itself.

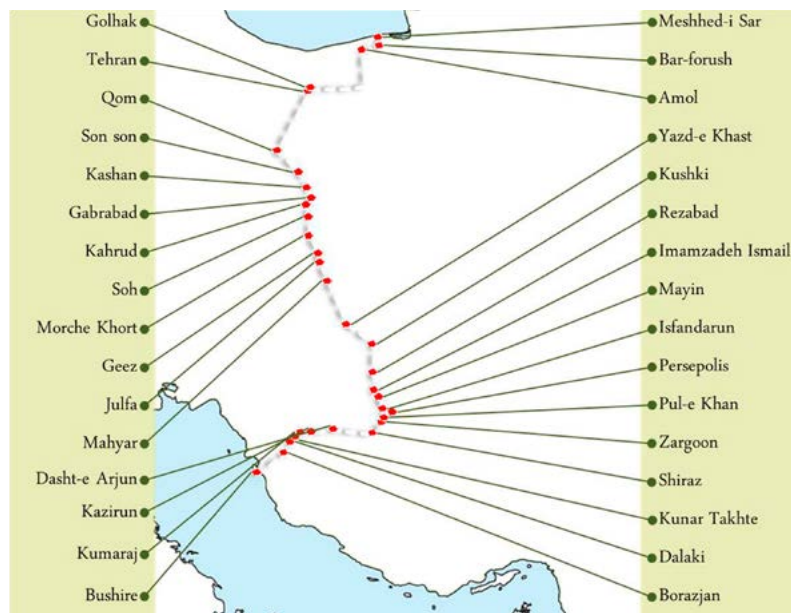


Figure 13: The standard south-north route followed by Pyne and some of the sites he mentions along the circa 1300 km (circa 800 mi.) journey.

⁶⁸ De Windt (1891), p. 177.

⁶⁹ Cutler and Yaggy (1888), p. 517, quoting Lady Shiel (1856) who is in turn quoting an anonymous traveller.

⁷⁰ Arnold (1876), p. 255.

From the time taken on Pyne's walk through Persia, i.e. three months, his deficiencies in Persian, the lack of archaeological-historical essays in his journal and the meagre number of historic sites he visited, it is clear that Pyne's ambition was to *walk through Persia* rather than to notch up a list of buildings or monuments or to provide a generally edifying oeuvre on the country for the educated public back home. His journal is thus not didactic, but self-didactic as evidenced by his narrative itself and some pages of the Journal which have been filled with Pyne's Persian vocabulary, written down in transliteration, and covering a large range of subjects from wildfowl to vegetables.⁷¹ Pyne must have had a knowledge of Persian, but perhaps not a practical or contemporary vocabulary. He does not mention speaking Persian until he has to speak it in the telegraph office in Kashan where he has only one language in common with the Russian-speaking wife of Dr. Vigneau: "Madame Dr. not knowing English I had to talk to her in Persian." Further on, in Astrakhan, he bemoans his deficient French: "I exchanged a few words in French with a Russian infantry officer, a good sort I should say, but he was not very much better at the language than I" — an odd comment, given that it was one of the languages listed on his Army Service Record. On the other hand, it was a characteristic etiquette of the times that a man should disparage his own abilities,

rather than commit the ungentlemanly gaffe of being full of oneself. On page 66 of his Journal, Pyne comments on his own ability as a watercolourist next to his painting of the landscape: "a jolly place, a wide open plain about 7,000 feet elevation. If only I could paint!"

However, unlike some of the characters he meets en route, such as Colonel Robert Murdoch Smith or Mr. Preece, Pyne had no interest in unearthing antiquities, discovering an important manuscript or shipping *mihrabs*, or prayer niches, or even an individual tile back to museums or galleries in Britain. One of the refreshing aspects to his journal is the absence of historical background digressions, and lengthy archaeological or art-historical descriptions. Pyne reveals clearly his lack of interest in providing this standard educational fare found in other travelogues. Of Shiraz and Isfahan there were acres of descriptions to be found in English published works, and of the ruins of Persepolis he actually instructs his reader: "Books must be read to know all about them, look under heading 'Persepolis'". He appears particularly thrilled at certain moments on his walk when he is standing in the same spot as the author of one of the books he has with him, and although his journal was for private consumption, or perhaps written as a memoir for a future wife, Pyne is scrupulously honest when a picture in his album is not from life but his copy of a photograph by Madame

⁷¹ These pages, tellingly, were not overwritten in ink, as were his Journal pages.

Dieulafoy or of an illustration by Ussher. It might also be noted that Pyne's greatest moment of communication comes when he has a soirée in the caravanserai with two local musicians, and their baboon, in the universal language of music. The violin which he lists among his kit for the journey serves its purpose, and even though Pyne later argues with the musicians who think his tip too small, this does not detract from that evening having represented a transcendental moment for Pyne.

Pyne follows a well-trodden path through Persia, and one which had been written about to the extent that Champain in his 1883 report to the Royal Geographic Society does not even bother to depict in any detail as "The road [from Bushire] to Shiraz has been described over and over again, and I need not waste time by saying more than that it is execrably bad."⁷² However, where others before Pyne stopped and gazed in romantic awe or disappointment at landscapes or monuments of some repute before writing down copious descriptions, he feels no obligation to poetise, pontificate or sermonise. Detailed descriptions of buildings are lacking and when he is in a hurry to get to Tehran he admits that some places are of no interest to him: "I halted a day a Koom, but only because the halting of the caravan compelled me." His topographical writing, about Qom for example, is also terse in extremis "This is a

large city held very sacred among Persians on account of its containing the tomb of a lady called Fatimah."

The state of Persia

In giving an account of the various countries in which the Church Missionary Society was 'labouring', the *Church Missionary Atlas* of 1897 provides the following lamentation: "Persia, once so pre-eminent among nations that her king could say, 'All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me,' is now fallen very low, and seems destined to fall still lower. Her Caucasian provinces have been taken from her by Russia, her wonderful natural resources are neglected and undeveloped, her people are impoverished, and her lands are falling out of cultivation."⁷³

A country thus depicted, while providing limited resources for its inhabitants, was a boon territory for collectors, both independent and those commissioned and funded by museums in Britain and elsewhere, eager to start up or enlarge their Persian holdings. Manuscripts were sought by academics, but the commissioned collectors generally looked to the applied arts. An example of this is the catalogue of *An Exhibition of Persian Art & Curios: The Collection formed by J. R. Preece, Esq.* The catalogue

⁷² Champain (1883), p. 123.

⁷³ *Church Missionary Atlas* (1897), p. 53.



Figure 14: The *mihrab* bought apparently piecemeal from Kashan by Preece and removed from Iran. Now in the Museum für Islamische Kunst Berlin (Pergamonmuseum), Inv.-Nr. I. 5366. Source: Glover, 1913.

published by the Vincent Robinson Gallery in London, where the objects were on sale, obligingly explains how Mr Preece, the British Consul whom Pyne met in Shiraz, built up his collection: “[he] filled for many years the post of Consul-General to his Majesty’s Government at Ispahan, and his residence there afforded him many exceptional opportunities for the acquisition of interesting examples of Persian Art of all kinds, opportunities of which his knowledge and artistic taste enabled him to take the fullest advantage...”⁷⁴ The prevailing attitude to the rescue of artefacts incorporated the wholesale removal of *mihrabs* and *minbars* from mosques in territories from Morocco to Persia. The sale of artefacts, or the *nobles débris d’une civilisation*,⁷⁵ at the Great Exhibitions also set in motion an East-West transfer of antiquities with a museum’s cachet gaining more prominence the larger its collections became.⁷⁶ The Victoria and Albert Museum’s 15th-century

⁷⁴ Glover (1913).

⁷⁵ Edmond (1867), p. 199.

⁷⁶ See, for example: Science and Art Department, *List of the Objects Obtained during the Paris Exhibition of 1867 by Gift, Loan, or Purchase and now Exhibited in the South Kensington Museum* (London, 1868).

Mamluke *minbar*⁷⁷ is perhaps one of the most outstanding examples of an important and intrinsic piece of mosque furniture having a provenance that can be taken no further back than the 1867 Exposition Universelle held in Paris, at which Owen Jones spent £2,261 to purchase for the museum “some of the finest specimens of Cairene wood-carving of the 14th and 15th centuries that can be seen anywhere, together with a complete pulpit from a mosque.”⁷⁸

The idea that western museums and collectors were doing eastern cultures a service by removing their treasures is epitomised in the conclusion of another traveller’s rhapsody over an illuminated manuscript by Sa’di: “It is a joy to turn the half-soiled pages of this old book, with its fine calligraphy enclosed in irregular cartouches shaped like clouds... Some leaves have a solid border, where gold, indigo, and carmine, glitter as though laid but yesterday. ... The delicacy of the flowers, the intricacy of design, and the perfect taste, are beyond praise. The whole book is like jewel work; turning the pages, it is painful to think that negligence will soon destroy it unless saved by sale to a foreigner, which elsewhere could be vandalism.”⁷⁹



Figure 15: Here a local in Khiva is photographed removing tiles from a mosque to fulfil an order for a collector. Source: d’Allemagne, 1911.

Pyne mentions the firm of Hotz whose owner, the Dutch Merchant Albert Hotz, had recently sold to the National Museum of Ethnology in the Netherlands more than

⁷⁷ Museum no: 1050:1 to 2-1869.

⁷⁸ ‘Saracenic Art at the South Kensington Museum’, *The Times*, 23 October 1884, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Moore (1915), pp. 403–404.

“400 [miscellaneous Iranian] items, including armour, horseshoes, candle sticks, mirrors, models of ships, and even parts of doors. There are also many items of clothing and footwear.”⁸⁰ Hotz was also a keen photographer some of whose images have been used here to provide a different aspect to locations visited by Pyne. For the ardent collector, however, extracting a collection of artefacts from Persia was not all plain-sailing. Correspondence between the Victoria and Albert Museum and Murdoch Smith shows that a little help from high officials was necessary: “Murdoch Smith acted to protect his purchases by seeking the aid of Iranian court officials. In the fall of 1875 Prime Minister Sepah Salar Azem issued an order exempting the ancient tiles and other items (a total of six crates of artefacts) from any interference by the government during their periods of storage and movement from Tehran to Bushire. He ordered that the crates not be opened and exempted them from all taxes and duties normally collected by local governors and customs officials. Smith confided to his employers at the museum that ‘without such an order I hardly know how I could have got the semi-sacred contents of the cases out of the country in safety.’”⁸¹

⁸⁰ Vogelsang-Eastwood, p. 4.

⁸¹ Correspondence dated 28 December 1875, quoted in Helfgott, p. 173.

Conclusion

In reviewing the *dramatis personae* of the Journal, it becomes apparent to what extent Pyne was the prisoner of orientalist values. Whereas the European characters are noted, even if without description, at least by recognisable and correct names, the paucity of Persian names and misnotated place names in the Journal points to various possibilities: that Pyne’s spoken Persian was so weak as to exclude extended verbal interchange, or that Pyne was interested in a historic and romantic Persia and felt, like many other European travellers, that the modern inhabitants were debased in culture and expression and thus could be overlooked, or painted in, as by the great orientalist painter David Roberts, as smallish characters who really serve only to set the scale of the background monuments or as romantic and picturesque touches on the greater image.

By the time Pyne had travelled through Persia, crossed the Caspian Sea and sailed up the Volga to Tsaritsin, he seems to have made up his mind. Perhaps the first inkling can be gained from his comment upon reaching Astrakhan: “There’s such good bread and butter here!!!” It would seem that Pyne thus demarcates his passage from the lands of flat bread to the lands of recognisable food in

terms of the bread loaf whose slices one can spread with butter.

Pyne had been drawn to Persia by a composite image of the subliminal yet widespread Persianate elements he would have come across during his upbringing. We also know something of his Persian language study and obvious interest in the poetry of Sa'di. However it would seem that the Persian gentleman who bombarded him with "hundreds" of impertinent questions at Tsaritsin railway station was the straw that broke the camel's back, leading Pyne to comment, possibly hours later, in his Journal: "I am sick of Persians, they & their country, and religion and all connected with them, except their language and literature, which I like..."

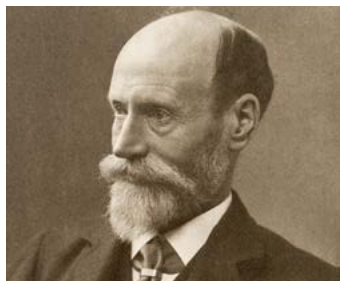


Figure 16: Sir Robert Murdoch Smith (1835–1900) "has bestowed some of his leisure hours in collecting specimens of the ancient artwork of Persia".⁸² Photograph by R. L. Webster, Edinburgh.

This untypical bad-tempered outburst might be interpreted as orientalist in nature, with Pyne preserving a yearning to see the romantic pictorial aspects of a culture while disparaging the owners of that culture as unworthy of a heritage. Many of his contemporaries would have thought works of eastern art were better preserved in western museums and galleries, providing viewers with some three-dimensional objects to admire alongside Orientalist paintings.

Pyne appears to have gone through a process of alienation or deep disappointment on discovering that the facilities and daily life of Persia were far from the diaphanous romanticism which the orientalisising music and literature of his age promised. It is significant that the longest description of a place is that of Karachi, before he arrived in Persia. One might conclude that the ease of functioning in Karachi, with its lingua franca of English and its British infrastructure, meant that Pyne had some leisure. In Karachi he had no need to negotiate with muleteers, or expend his energy merely functioning, taking care of his own luggage or laundry and exhausting himself to get through each day. Here he could behave like a European gentleman, and he noted down the monuments of the city in more detail than at any point later in his journey. Pyne's mention of the brass plaque in memory of the fallen at recent Battle of Maiwand and his

⁸² Arnold (1877), p. 193.

observation about the 3rd Bombay Native Infantry (Jacob's Rifles) being stationed at Karachi, both show that empire and the sacrifice one might have to make for it could never be far from a young man's thoughts.



Figure 17: Stevens is met by Mr. McIntyre (on horseback).

His walk through Persia was gruelling due to the nature of mule travel, the challenging geography, the condition of the roads in Persia and the fact that he never lingered in any of his way-stations long enough to do what intrepid travellers were expected to do and wander leisurely around every last monument, ruin and historic site. Pyne's motivation seems to be that of a doer, not a scrutiniser. After weeks of scant conversation as he traversed the precipitous passes of southern Persia and then the long haul to Tehran, Pyne must have found the group of educated, official-class Europeans in Tehran to be an animated tableau vivant presaging the familiar European civilisation awaiting him at the end of his journey. Even the hardy Stevens, crossing the world on his bicycle, felt constrained to complain after being hosted by the genial telegraph engineer Mr. Macintyre: "Only those who have experienced it know anything of the pleasure of two Europeans meeting and conversing in a country like Persia, where the habits and customs of the natives are so different; and to most travellers, uncongenial and only to be tolerated for a time."⁸³

Shortly after Tehran, Pyne was once again travelling on modern modes of transport such as a steamer and then finally by train from Tsaritsin almost all the way to his house in Nevendon where he expresses his relief by

⁸³ Stevens (1888), vol. 2, p. 61.

adding to his Journal a watercolour of his home in its gentle English countryside setting.

Pyne had made his trip as an endurance test. The phrase “three months” in the title of his Journal indicates from the outset that his walk was timed and was done for the purpose of getting from one end of Persia to another, rather than as an autodidactic voyage of discovery. It was the sort of thing that a slightly mad young fool with time on his hands might do and then years later be admired by the chaps at his club.

The Journal

In preparing this Journal for publication it was felt that many of the places mentioned, but not drawn, by Pyne might be illustrated with recourse to a number of works of travel from within a few decades either side of 1884. It is no criticism of the intrinsic value of the Journal to point out that his descriptions can be rudimentary and fleeting and leave the reader with a feeling of insufficiency. The ancillary illustrations have been added by the authors for this reason and also for the argument that different people's views, even photographic, of the same place add interpretive dimensions to the captured image. As Pyne's illustrations are sometimes no more than a timid peephole into a country he traversed on mule-back, the added images serve a similar purpose to the annotations in that they further illuminate to the reader some of the

obscurities thrown up by the text. By doing like Pyne and avoiding acres of art-historical or architectural description, in addition to allowing Madame Dieulafoy and Messrs Coste and Flandin *inter alia* to inject a contrast in the aesthetics of photographic depiction and architectural exactitude, it is hoped to enlarge the view of Persia gained by the readers.

Some few pages of the Journal have not been reproduced below: the pencil lists of Persian vocabulary, a graph of location altitudes and some pages of his hand-drawn map of his route through Persia.

Within his Journal, Pyne sometimes uses eccentric transliterations of local names. The authors feel that it would be too pedantic to correct every mis-transliteration or Victorian spelling (i.e. Koum, modern Qom).

Quotations from French works have been translated into English by the authors.