

then exhibited the Society's MSS. of the Shahnameh and some other monuments of Persian and Arabic literature together with pictures of scenes and persons connected with the subject and which are in the Society's possession.

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### Burton Memorial Lecture Luristan

The Burton Memorial Lecture was delivered on 21st October, 1934, before the Society, at 74 Grosvenor Street, W. 1, by Miss Freya Stark, to whom the Society's Burton Memorial Medal was afterwards presented by Lord Lloyd. Miss Stark said :—

We are here to honour the memory of Sir Richard Burton—one of the great travellers, and one who had the fortune to be born into the very Golden Age of exploration. It is surprising to think how near we still are to his time ; to a time when discoveries were still thought of in terms of continents ; when Africa, Arabia, and Central Asia were still practically unknown. An old friend of mine remembers Sir Richard Burton himself as a dark, interesting and rather temperamental visitor in her drawing-room ; Charles Doughty died only a few years ago ; I myself remember as a child how a great monolith of granite was carted away from my home on Dartmoor to cover the grave of Stanley ; at the present day, Sir Aurel Stein is probably more at home in Central Asia than in London ; and Arabia has given up her secrets only within the last four years. The rapidity with which all this has happened is very surprising : in this short space of time the world, which those great men found so refreshingly empty, has become so overcrowded that it is difficult now to go anywhere for a few hundred miles without knocking up against some sort of a policeman.

But there is one form of exploration which is only just at its beginning : it deals not with geography only, but with history also, and so makes a combined study of space and time together. Any plot of ground, however familiar, has

borne a number of successive layers of human life which the historical explorer can discover : this fascinating pursuit has only recently begun to show what pleasures and excitements it can give : and it is rather encouraging to think that the explorer of the future, when there is no corner of the globe left unencumbered with civilization and publicity, may still find mystery and make discoveries in his own back-yard or thereabouts.

With the aid of the slides I have described to you the general character of the landscape of Luristan—the wide and open plains of the north intersected by treeless ranges ; the mountain and forest country of the west and centre, with its great dividing barrier of Kebir Kuh ; the belt of waterless desolation along the Iraq border ; and the connecting thread of the Saidmarreh River and its tributaries, which run through the country like the backbone of a fish and drain it from the north-west to the south-east. I must add that all the mountain ranges follow this same direction, and run from north-west to south-east like parallel waves.

You will see from this description how the features of the country are particularly useful for anyone who is trying to make historical deductions. They have not altered for many ages, and they must always have had a great influence on the life of the inhabitants and on the methods of infiltration, whether peaceful or warlike, of other nations coming from outside. No doubt there was once much more forest and, in consequence, more water : the Lurs all told me that their country is now drier than it used to be, and I expect that their charcoal trade has caused the destruction of great tracts of oakland within the last fifty years : this makes it probable that the country once supported a much larger population than now, and a more sedentary one ; the numbers of mounds and cemeteries, and the ruins of old towns scattered here and there, bear out this supposition.

But several other important factors have come down unaltered through the ages. The river must always have been

the gateway for invaders, and the mountain ranges a barrier against them: all people who entered Luristan must have come either downstream from the north-west or upstream from the south-east; for if they wished to come from any other direction, they would have to cross ridge after ridge of mountains. The distribution of the ancient sites, as far as I could judge, bears out the theory that the people of the bronzes spread along and lived in the fertile river lands and the plains that open out from them: gentle hills on the edge of a valley or plain are the places where the cemeteries are most likely to be found. These are now covered over, usually by 2 feet or so of earth, but the tribesman has become an expert in his own way and, after persistent looting for the last four years, can now judge fairly accurately of what is a likely spot. When first the antique dealers of places like Kermenshah and Harsin on the Luristan borderland noticed the beautiful bronzes brought down by the nomads and began to ask for more, the tribesmen used to take the skewers on which they roast their bits of meat, and probe the ground to find the buried boulders that might indicate a grave: now there is not a colony of black tents that has not got a number of useful iron spikes, 3 or 4 feet long, which they use for this purpose.

Professor Goddard has written a book with very beautiful photographs of some of these precious finds from Luristan. He thinks that there was a trade relationship with the country on the south-west shore of the Caspian, and that it was there that the ancient Lurs obtained their copper, bringing it down through Kurdistan.

I examined five graves altogether, but I was not lucky enough to find any bronzes actually in place. The tribesmen told me that they usually dig up fifty or sixty before they come upon anything. The best of the graves, according to all local accounts, and the ones which are interesting because horses with the beautiful trappings are said to be buried in them, are in the country of Tarhan, east of the Saidmarreh:

here neither I nor anyone else so far as I know have been able to penetrate since these bronzes have been found, though Major Edmonds crossed the plain long before. Whether the people who imported these horses came from the Caspian north or the Indian south is a question of which the answer probably lies hidden in the mounds that stud the banks and plains of the Saidmarreh.

This problem deals with the *incomings* of people from the north or south : but it is only one of those important questions to which an answer may be found in Luristan. Another and equally momentous one deals with their *outgoings* to the west.

The ancient Elamites correspond roughly with the Lurs. They emerge into history when they break out and ravage and conquer the Sumerian plains round Babylon. The later Kassites were mountaineers of Luristan : Professor Minorsky traces their name in the present Kashgan Rud, an eastern tributary of the Saidmarreh. He says " the lands which are now inhabited by Lurs must have played a great part in ancient times as a passage way between the important centres of the Persian Kingdom ".

The existence of this passage or channel of communication through Luristan must have continued over a very long period of time. I think that the more one discovers of the bronzes, the more one will find them to belong to a number of different periods. Under the Elamites, the union with Iraq is shown by likenesses between many Sumerian and Luristan objects. When Cyrus and Darius made Susa their capital, there must have been a busy time of traffic along the mountain tracks ; and the Sassanians had many cities along the Saidmarreh, whose ruins can still be traced. Alexander the Great's difficulties with the Kassites show that as soon as authority was relaxed, the ancestors of the Lurs took to robbery with the zest that has come undiminished down to their descendants. In Moslem times the Kurds from the north came down and gave the country a period of settled prosperity, if one can judge from the ruined cities they left, probably built on

old Sassanian sites and still to be seen. I visited two of them in the folds of Kebir Kuh and dated them to the thirteenth or fourteenth century by the few bits of glazed pottery I was able to find amid the ruined houses.

The decline of Luristan probably began soon after this period: the old causeways, built of solid boulders, were left untended and gradually sank almost invisibly into the landscape: Iraq, growing ever poorer, would have less and less merchandise to send over the Persian passes: the traders who live in houses would diminish, and the shepherds who live in tents would increase: until in the last few years a climax has been reached, the modern Persian financial policy has stopped even the meagre trade in cotton, tea, and sugar which came up out of the desert, and has left smuggling as the only possible form of commerce in western Luristan.

This must be very melancholy for the patriotic Lur (though I think that, as a matter of fact, he rather enjoys the smuggling); but it makes a perfect field for the archæologist. The mounds and ruins have been untouched for centuries, ever since the nomad came back into his own. And the geography is particularly useful, as I said before, for the mountain passes regulate the traffic now exactly as they must have done from the beginning.

As far as I know, there are only four good ways into the country between Khanikin in the north and Dizful in the south. There is a broad, nearly waterless stretch of mountain all along the border, with the further obstacle of Kebir Kuh on the east of it, an enormous ridge with only two good passes. On the first part of my journey we crossed by a pass which can never under any circumstances have been a highway of commerce. We went, an old guide and I with two smugglers, from Badrah on the Iraq border. We carried our water in a small goatskin and found only one spring at which it was possible to drink at the end of the day—and that was unpleasantly salt. We were not able to sleep near it, since the landscape, though it seemed as empty as the

moon, is overrun by smugglers at night, and it is to one's own interest to be as unobtrusive as possible when "the gentlemen go by": so that it is as well to avoid the only water-hole. We slept in a little gully out of sight. There are no trees in all this belt. It consists of white or reddish rock, untidy limestone, strewn with black fossil shells nearly as big as my fist. The police hardly ever come into this region, but prefer to wait and catch people as they descend into a gentler landscape.

The trade routes are made by the rivers which force their way through this God-forsaken land into the plain of Iraq, and offer not only an easier gradient, but also drink and fodder for horses. On my way back, I followed the northern of these streams, the Gangir River, which comes out at Mandali and dies there in the desert. Along its course one can trace here and there mounds and cemeteries, and later crumbling remnants of Moslem architecture, bridges or domes, and scattered stones in one or two level places, where probably some little dead commercial city lies under the ground.

It is these old highways that I think it would be interesting to investigate before new motor roads are made to overlay and obliterate their courses. The commerce and the movement of the country must have followed them from the very beginning as a matter of geographical necessity, and successive waves of people have probably left some trace along them. If, for instance, the Sumerians came down upon Iraq from the east, these gateways into their country may hold important clues. An expedition here would find a friendly people to deal with, and one particularly kindly disposed to the British: they are well under control of the Persian Government, and far easier to deal with than the more eastern Lurs.

Apart from the interest of archæology, I think one must be really lacking in imagination if one does not feel the lure and magic of an old road. I think that perhaps the most subtle charm of Asia lies in these interminable highways; they are just grassy tracks as often as not, stretching from

village to village with great distances of empty land between, but their ends lie in China or Turkestan, Turkey, Russia, or the Mediterranean. They go far out of sight not only of the eye, but of the mind, fading away into distances of time as well as space, linking together centuries and civilizations, more permanent than armies, dynasties, or religions, stronger than anything except the physical changes of geography. They are the very thread on which our human life in the world is strung. The sight of them gives one a feeling of infinite time, of infinite leisure, almost of eternity. Even the lorries, that now traverse them, lose their mechanical hurry, as I know to my cost, for I drove in one from Qum to Daulatabad and took thirty-six hours instead of seven. No doubt one will soon see nothing but motors; but I am glad still to have been in time to watch the long strings of camels padding in the dust over the passes to Antioch or Baalbeck; or the droves of little Persian donkeys, with their noses slit in the most ugly manner to make them breathe better, trotting along under heavy pack-saddles day after day across the Persian plains.

In all western Luristan, however, they do most of their carrying on the backs of small black oxen, which seem to be quite sure-footed and comfortable on the stony tracks of the passes. I met a stream of these caravans constantly going north from the lands of the Saidmarreh, with grain, or gum tragacanth, or charcoal from the forest for the markets of Nihavend or Kermenshah, or even Hamadan, where groups of Lurs can be seen though it is two good days' ride from their country. In the evening they make a half-circle of their bales to keep the wind off; their animals browse untethered around them; and their fires can be seen twinkling in the solitude, with six or seven dark figures gathered around them drinking tea while their supper, which is just a wedge of dough, is getting black and burnt under the embers.

Considering the vastness of the country, the comparative handful of police could not do more than they do at present.

There was no particular reason, however, for me to be caught in so big and uninhabited a country, with the nomads all in sympathy with the bandits. They moved about it by night, and though the tribesmen knew more or less where they might be at any given moment, one was never quite sure whether one might not find them at the top of a pass or not. I usually used to walk on ahead with my hat off when we got near the top (also to encourage my wretched guide). As I was dressed in an ordinary European skirt and short jacket, I felt sure that any normal bandit would be too much intrigued by curiosity at the sight of such an unusual apparition to shoot without a little conversation beforehand. But I always had a rather uncomfortable feeling when coming to the rocky part of the ridge, rather like the helpless feeling one has in the Alps, if one is climbing an ice-slope and stones begin to roll down from above.

I must say here that I am sure that women run much less danger than men in this sort of a country, and that it is a mistake to discard one's feminine costume or to wear anything but the most modest garments one can. Tribeswomen have often expressed their approval of my high neck, long sleeves, and decent length of skirt, and the approval of the women is very useful if any difficulty does arise.

When we got over the barrier wall from Nihavend, we found ourselves in the last line of very old settled villages which still fringe the north and east of the plains of Alishtar and Khava. This country has a lot of interesting Islamic tombstones. They are especially numerous near Alishtar and the village of Dah Ram to the west of it, and possibly date from the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries like the bits of pottery I found on the site of the old Alishtar, which was a flourishing Kurdish city in the fourteenth century.

The small tombstones in the modern cemeteries are also very interesting, because the Lurs are in the habit of carving on them all the belongings which the departed was interested in—his horses, his goats, his gun, his wives. On a woman's



tomb I saw a ring, a rosary, a pair of scissors, a mirror, and a comb. The most surprising of these tombstones had an elephant cut in relief. I was told that it had been carved forty or fifty years ago: and I should be glad to hear of any explanation of how an elephant came to be carved among the flocks and herds of Luristan.

I saw another elephant, on a coin found in Tarhan, and which I bought from a Lur in Khava: Mr. Walker, of the British Museum, suggests that it is a Syrian coin of the third century B.C., the king unknown. When Professor Goddard wrote about the Luristan bronzes, he thought that no evidence of Greek influence existed in these hills. However, I found one little bronze figure obviously Hellenic, which I was unfortunately not able to buy as the tribesmen wanted too much for it. I also found a drachm of Alexander the Great which had been dug up in a jar in the ruins of a village in the Pusht-i-Kuh: the ruins did not look older than the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and the finding of the drachm there goes to show how these later sites must often be looked upon as places continuously inhabited back into much earlier times. I think that intercourse with Luristan existed through all the civilizations of antiquity from the Elamites downwards and probably before. There is nothing really surprising in a Syrian coin being found here; it may possibly have been handed to a Kassite by some merchant of Alexander's day, before that monarch stopped the blackmail on the passes just as Riza Shah is doing now.

After visiting Alishtar and the governor of northern Luristan I managed to spend a few days south of what corresponds in Luristan to the "Highland Line", among the real nomads who never live in houses at all. Their tents, as might be expected, are much more substantial affairs than those which one sees near the villages. Sometimes they protect them for the winter by making all round them low mud walls, about 5 feet high to cut the wind. Otherwise the surrounding fence is made of river reeds, woven closely together with

wool; the western Lurs use coloured wools, and weave these reed fences into gay patterns, like the tribal carpets.

By the end of September I found the nights cold but the days delicious. The people were going to leave in a month's time for the winter camping grounds, along the Saidmarreh and in the lowlands of Tarhan. They resent the government's efforts to make them live in one place all the year round, because they say that so much of their stock dies in the cold northern pastures in winter. Perhaps the cold, too, accounted for the fact that I found very few insects: I was not troubled by them, in spite of the fact that I was travelling very light for greater safety and had no bed with me, only a sleeping sack which I used to put on to any mattress which was offered me, only taking the precaution to spray it well with Flit beforehand.

I found that Sir Arnold Wilson and Major Edmonds were both remembered as having travelled in the south and east of the country, and they were remembered in a very friendly manner.

I like to remember this fascinating country, for the people were kind and pleasant, and kept up the fine tradition of their hospitality. But it is all changing very quickly, and no doubt has altered a good deal even in these last two years. Eighteen Luristan chiefs were hung or executed for rebellion a year or so ago; and the making of a network of roads which is to run up and down along the whole line of the western frontier is being pushed on at a great rate, and will bring more changes than anything else. I trust that somebody will go to investigate the antiquities scientifically before these changes have gone too far; and if anyone here is thinking of excavations in Luristan, I hope they will invite me to join them.

Lord Lloyd, when presenting the Medal, said that the parts of Miss Stark's lecture which had appealed most strongly to his imagination and memory were, first, her description of the endless line of the road leading across an empty land. Leading not only from the Caspian to the Indian Ocean,

from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, but from prehistory to modern times and from one civilization to another. It brought back visions of what he himself had so often seen and felt in his travels. And secondly, her fascinating and encouraging suggestions about the explorer of the future and the mysteries which were yet awaiting solution underground.

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As it has been found necessary, owing to the financial situation, to reduce the number of pages in the JOURNAL of the R.A.S. for the present, the space available for reviews of books has been proportionately restricted and the Editor regrets that he is unable to publish a review of every book presented to the library of the Society.

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