

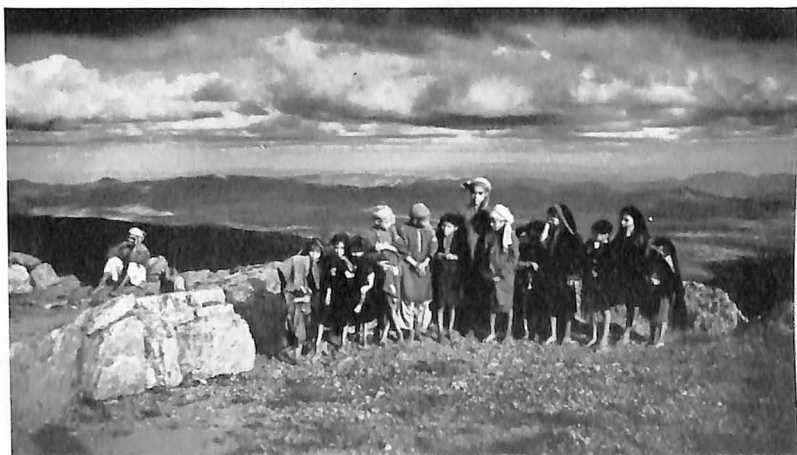
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BY





GHALJI ENCAMPMENT, KURRAM VALLEY

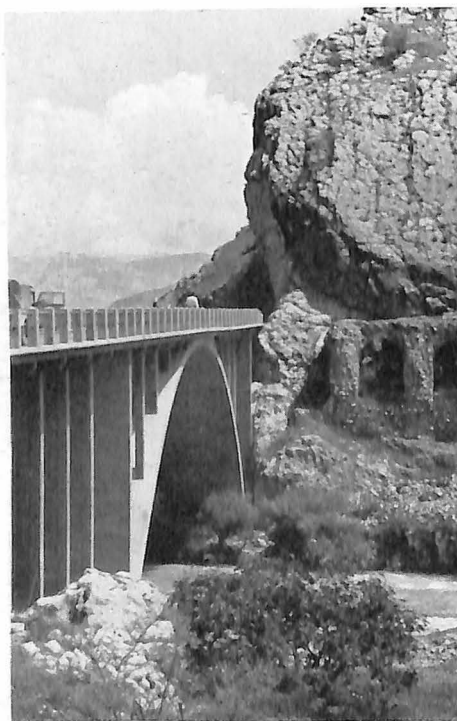


PATHAN CHILDREN, MIRANZAI VALLEY

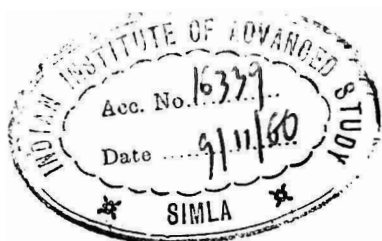
Photos by Maj.-Gen. H. R. L. Haughton, C.B., C.I.F., C.B.E.



A VIEW IN THE "FOURTH PARADISE" ON THE LINE TO BE FOLLOWED BY
THE NEW SHIRAZ-AHWAZ ROUTE. *See opposite*



THE MODERN BRIDGE AT TANG-I-BRIN GORGE
WITH PART OF THE SASSINID APPROACH TO
AN OLDER BRIDGE. *See p. 191*



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BY CAR FROM SHIRAZ TO KHUZISTAN

By P. W. AVERY.

SHIRAZ, described in the thirteenth century by its poet Hafiz as peerless, is still Iran's most beautiful city. The air is temperate and clear at a height of 5,000 ft. above sea level. Gardens with tall cypresses and umbrella pines are reminiscent of Italy, and Shiraz is a city, like Florence, for leisure and thought. Its people are witty and generous, their popular songs and sayings often poetry of the highest order. Their conversation is filled with apposite quotations, and in Shiraz poetry lives as perhaps nowhere else in the world.

On April 27th we left Shiraz, more beautiful than ever in Spring, under a blue sky in the early morning sunshine. We drove out along the Bushire road. By the airfield, about to be modernised and extended, we turned left for Kazarun. We were still in the environs of the city and passing gardens; walled and cool oases in the usually khaki-coloured land which, this year the rains having lasted late into Spring, continued ephemerally green. Driving towards the first of the celebrated *kotals*, the high saddles to be crossed between Shiraz and Bushire, the country opened out into the Dasht-i-Arjan, which reaches to the foot of the Kotal-i-Pir-i-Zan, the Height of the Old Woman.

In Dasht-i-Arjan we saw the first of a number of groups of Qashgais moving towards Shiraz on their way to summer quarters further north. Near the city they turn off in a north-westerly direction towards Semirum, on the road to Isfahan. I was told those we passed, with their asses and camels, were the Dareh Shuri, the largest *tirah* of the Qashgais, said to comprise twelve thousand families. Hatred of the Qashgais is almost a natural instinct among the citizens of Shiraz, whose memories are filled with orchards uprooted and gardens despoiled. These Turki-speaking tribesmen are still, after two centuries, an anomaly in Fars. With the exception of groups like the Kashkulis, who, though speaking Turki, are remnants of old tribes native to Fars, locally the Qashgais are still regarded as newcomers and interlopers. The squalor of these people on the move, struggling with recalcitrant beasts bearing all their possessions, was too obvious to be lessened by the appearance of an occasionally brightly dressed girl or handsome young man on gaily caparisoned horses. But squalor or not, a little thought gives rise to the supposition that certain long term economic and sanitary adjustments must be envisaged before these people can become settled, and that over hasty attempts at settlement could result in a variety of difficulties, not least being a disruption of the grazing industry.¹ We were to meet these nomads, old women on asses, infants tied like bundles on the backs of camels, all the way to Kazarun. There their progression ceased and we passed into the territory of others.

Before ascending the first *kotal*, we went through the oasis of Chesh-

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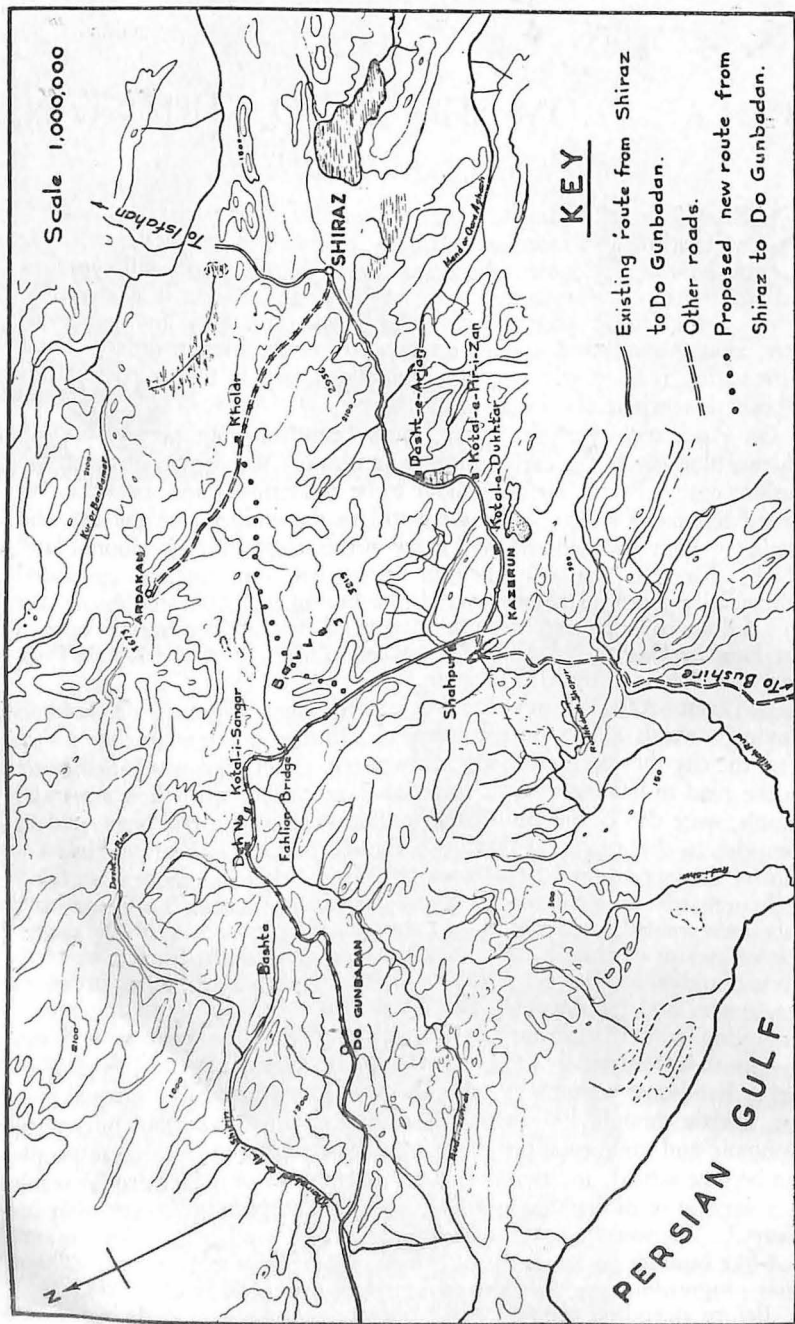
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meh-ye-Salman. This is the reputed burial place of the father of the celebrated Salman-i-Farsi, whose history provides an interesting field for continued research, though much has already been done. He was the Persian intimate of the Prophet Mohammad and, if the Tradition "Salman is to me a member of my household" be true, was clearly accorded a very special place at Medinah among the Prophet's followers. Did he flee from Iran because he was a Mazdakite, and therefore, though wise and venerable, a political outcast? Most Iranian scholars have no doubt that this was in fact the case, while speculation is also justified on his rôle as the Prophet's adviser in Near Eastern history, legend, culture and military affairs. In this connection verse 105 of Chapter XVI of the Qoran² is significant and should be read with Abu'l Futuh's Persian (but therefore possibly biased) commentary. After the conquest of Mada'in (Ctesiphon) Salman was appointed Governor and the place still bears his name, being called Salman Pak and resorted to each year by the barbers of Baghdad as the burial place of Salman, whom they regard as their patron. Here he seems clearly to have been a guide and counsellor to the Muslim army in its conquest of Sassanid Iran; it is known that he had earlier been military adviser to the Prophet at the Battle of the Trench. His part in the conquest of Iran is of interest in the assessment which has to be made of the function of an Iranian "5th column" in this conquest, a problem of importance in the study of Iranian social history as it marks a stage in tracing the origin of the cleavage between Government and people in Iran which appears to have been characteristic. According to the *Futuh-ul-Buldan*, Salman was awarded, at the Caliph 'Umar's special command, the sum of 4,000 dirhams, and explicitly accounted one of the Muslims entitled to a share of the spoils.³

One of the extremer Sufi orders of Iran, the 'Ali Ullahi 'in (Ahl ul Haqq), ascribes its spiritual origin to Salman, called Salman-i-Patali. The Cheshmeh-ye-Salman, with its streams and willow trees, is the scene of a legend about Salman riding near this spot, through the wild narcissus of early Spring, and meeting the spirit of 'Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law. 'Ali's spirit taught him the secrets of the Invisible and endowed him with the powers of *velayat*, sainthood.

When we passed the willows at Cheshmeh-ye-Salman were like those of Norfolk, but the difference was in the mountains and rocks all round. Though the associations of this place with Salman are strong, he is also reputed to have been born at Isfahan and at Ram Hormuz, in Khuzistan. But the famous letter,⁴ attributed to the Prophet himself, exempting Salman's family from taxation, makes it appear that all events his relatives resided in Fars.

The history of Salman-i-Farsi continued the main topic of interest while we passed the Qareh Aqach river and the Kafeh-ye-Dasht-i-Arjan, a lake said to have the sweetest water in Iran. The ascent of the Kotal-i-Pir-i-Zan, however, diverted attention from this popular saint to the splendid view behind us of the Dasht-i-Arjan and the mountains round Shiraz, revealed as we neared the top. Over the crest we saw the stair-like old pack road down the other side, and the grass covered ramparts and flat roofs of the stout caravansai at Mian Kotal. Next came the Dasht-

i-Barm, between the two passes. We passed over the second, smaller *kotal*, the Kotal-i-Dukhtar, and then through green crops and numerous villages to Kazarun. On the narrow bridge at Abgineh the passage of timid camels belonging to the trekking Qashgais held us up, the burden of one of them slipping as in a panic the beast galloped past our terrifying yellow Landrover. The falling baggage brought him painfully to the ground with heart-rending groans, but fortunately no serious damage was done.

Kazarun, the reputed home of resourceful Sayyids and people considered even sharper at driving a bargain than those of Isfahan, surprised us by its smallness. It seemed more like a group of scattered villages than a town. Ramazan, of which April 27 this year was the 26th day, was apparently being scrupulously observed so that lemonade and tea had to be obtained discreetly behind closed shutters. The blue skies of our setting out had gone and rain had started which continued for the rest of the journey. We left the Bushire road shortly after Kazarun for the much worse track across southern Persia towards Khuzistan. The going was now up towards Shapur, with its huge rock walls and rich valley. No wonder this was formerly a great centre of civilisation, for it was most beautiful country. We did not visit the famous though by no means completely investigated archaeological sites of Shapur, being pressed for time. This was to be deplored as the whole country compelled, not driving through, but walking over with leisure for study in one of the world's greatest depositories of history.

The country where the Mongol-eyed Qashgais are seen was now behind us and we were in the district of the milder, more Iranian featured Mamasanis. These are one of the ancient tribes of Fars, settled and agrarian now but still keeping sheep on the neighbouring hillsides. The district we were passing through belonged to the Bakish *ta'ifeh* of the Mamasani. Near their centre of Nurabad we saw where the new Shiraz—Ahwaz Road, whose construction begins this summer, will join the existing route after dropping down from the Bavvans, the Bavvan-i-'Uliya, Usta and Sufia. The new route, from Shiraz to this point, follows the more ancient road through Kholar, famous for its vineyards, and through the region Arab geographers called one of the Four Paradises of the world.⁵ This is the Sh'ib-i-Bavvan, of temperate climate and many fruit trees in high, down-like country descending through the three platforms mentioned above, the Higher, Middle and Nether Bavvans. It is to be hoped that, once the new road is completed, better development of this fertile area will be possible. Istakhri mentions "large cities" in it which have, of course, long since disappeared. With the improvement of communications it seems that a revival may be expected.

After Nurabad the Fahlian river is crossed nowadays by a fine and recently completed bridge into the district of the Rustam group of the Mamasani. The valley on both sides of the river was filled with corn and barley crops of an almost prairie-like extent. There could be no doubt about the region's rich agricultural potential, but the existing road was the worst possible, a bare rock track at the foot of the hills till we crossed the valley and reached the Kotal-i-Sanger, the Pass of the Stone Wall.

This name derives from the remains of a wall across the valley which must be over 1,000 yards long and which has, of course, given rise to a number of legends. Sir Aurel Stein⁶ thinks it was here that Alexander encountered a stiff Uxian opposition. Locally it is attributed to the Afghans fleeing before Nadir Shah. Another story attributes it to Mohammad Khan Baluchi, who is supposed to have thrown up the wall to obstruct Nadir, pursuing him from Do Gunbadan. This was in 1733 A.D. when Nadir, having treated with Ahmad Pasha, left Baghdad on account of Mohammad Khan's insurrection. Mohammad Khan fled eastwards and was finally attacked by Nadir Shah, no doubt in the vicinity of the *Sangar*, and routed. Nadir's maritime interests may be said to have begun by his concern to have the Gulf ports blockaded to prevent Mohammad Khan's subsequent escape over the water. He was eventually captured on the island of Qais.⁷ Whatever the truth of its history, the remains of this barrier testify to a remarkable structure, not of a kind that could have hastily been built by a fleeing army. Rather it would seem to be a "peace-time" construction, no doubt erected as a toll barrier on this once much used route. Sir Aurel Stein's assessment of its antiquity must be accepted as ante-dating the *Sangar* long before Nadir Shah; though the latter certainly marched and fought this way.

Between Kazarun and our destination on this now so little used track there are only two *qavehkhaneh* (coffee houses) where hunger and thirst may be appeased. At one of these we lunched off curds and dates with a little rice, no meat or eggs being available. With the rain and the freshness everywhere of an English April, the summer transformation of the landscape from green to brown in temperatures reaching forty-seven degrees Centigrade seemed incredible. At the next group of villages, Deh No, water was sufficiently abundant to permit rice cultivation. Here the people were collecting leafy branches for their summer dwellings, the *kapar*, which we saw being constructed on square wooden frames to provide a cool shelter in the summer heat.

By the time the frontier between Fars and Khuzistan at Tang-i-Brin gorge was reached, the stunted oaks seen all the way from Kazarun had become full-sized trees. The gorge was full of foliage and, besides a modern bridge built just before the Second World War, contained the imposing remains of two others. The huge conglomerated masses of fallen masonry in the rushing water were as impressive as similar brickwork at the Pul-i-Dukhtar in the Kashgan gorge, between Andimeshk and Khorramabad, which, like the first of the Tang-i-Brin bridges, is also attributed to the Sassanians. The viaduct at Tang-i-Brin, connecting this bridge with the gap through which the road emerges and strung on arches along a sheer rock face, affords a comparison with similar structures at both the Kashgan bridges, the Pul-i-Dukhtar and the ruin at M'amulan. According to Sir Aurel Stein, the causeway carried on these arches was 10 feet wide. On the approach to the second bridge it was 15 feet wide. This bridge is apparently an early Islamic structure. Happily Sir Aurel Stein's forebodings have been proved groundless and the building of a new bridge at Tang-i-Brin has not resulted in damage to these interesting remains. Their presence recalled the clamour and crowds of past genera-

tions; in marked contrast to the solitude and silence at Tang-i-Brin today. However, when the new Shiraz—Ahwaz road is built, this region will no longer be so far off the beaten track. During our journey, apart from a lorry belonging to the company responsible for constructing the new road, we only passed one bus travelling bravely but very slowly towards Shiraz. Our sympathies went out to the passengers.

After Tang-i-Brin we were in country like a Scottish Park, though on a very grand scale. We were in the oak-dotted plain belonging to Malik Mansur Khan Bashti, the head of the Babui tribe. Malik Mansur's modernized castle was visible as we passed through Basht. Though his fabled European bathrooms and sumptuous hospitality tempted us, we eschewed calling upon him. Instead we kept on over a number of saddles through the rolling valley, closed on its northern side by a wall of nearly sheer up-tilted rock strata, which continues in an almost straight line towards the Agha Jari Oilfield further west. Eventually, 360 kilometres and 11 hours driving away from Shiraz, we reached Do Gunbadan, coming out on the airfield serving the oil company's installations at Gach Saran. Here the track joined the oil company's bitumen road at a spot where, in 1951, I had looked eastwards towards Basht and Shiraz and vowed some day to travel that way. My wish had been fulfilled in reverse. The journey had lasted 11 hours as against the 10 days taken by the caravans of former times, travelling from Shiraz to Zenjan, Dasht-i-Arjan, Mian Kotal, Kazarun, Shapur, Galian, Fahlian, Kupan, Ememzadeh J'afar (near Basht) and Do Gunbadan. At present, the only practical vehicle for this route is the Landrover, though this will be changed in the next two years when the new road is completed. The importance of this new road cannot be overestimated. Not only will it once again provide an easy route through the ancient heartland of Iran but it will also link Shiraz and the fruit-growing region of Fars with the industrial province of Khuzistan, with its oil fields and the refinery at Abadan as well as the port of Khorramshahr. In a few months time the remote and long untouched area we motored through on the way from Shiraz to Ahwaz and Abadan will have become noisy with road construction works and part of the changing face of the Middle East.

REFERENCES

- ¹ For a discussion of this problem, see W. B. Fisher's *The Middle East*, pp. 113-20.
- ² E. G. Palmer's translation (World's Classics), p. 232.
- ³ de Goeje's edition, p. 457.
- ⁴ *Nameh-ye-Daneshvaran*, Vol. 7, p. 14. The letter's authenticity must of course be considered doubtful.
- ⁵ *M'ujam ul Buldan*, Wustenfeld's edition, Vol. 1, p. 751; and *Ibn Hauqal*, Kramer's edition, Vol. 1, p. 269.
- ⁶ Sir Aurel Stein, *Old Routes of Western Iran*, pp. 39-43.
- ⁷ For further details, see *Nadir Shah*, L. Lockhart, pp. 75-9.

