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BY



# FROM TARSUS TO LAKE VAN

By FREYA STARK, C.B.E.

An illustrated lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society on November 9, 1955, Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt, G.B.E., K.C.B., in the chair.

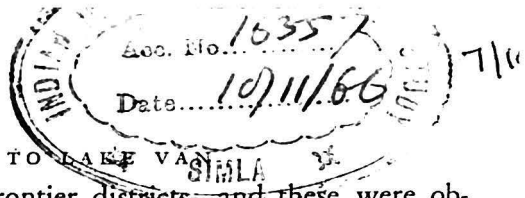
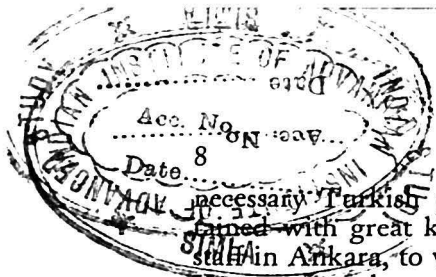
The CHAIRMAN: The particularly large attendance here this afternoon indicates, it is quite obvious, that I have no need to introduce our speaker and that we are all looking forward to hear what she has to say. Of the many distinctions that Freya Stark has achieved, I would mention only that she was awarded the C.B.E. for her work during war-time, and that in 1951 she was the recipient of the Sykes Award, and we are very glad that she is numbered among the winners of that particular Award of our own Society.

I FEEL, when I stand up here, that I am offering you something that corresponds to the Widow's Mite—a poor little thing in itself, but a great effort for me! For lectures are more frightening than most things, and it is many years since I have stood on this platform. But there are two societies—the R.G.S. and this one of ours—to which I would like to show my gratitude whenever I can: they adopt and help us travellers when we begin to think in terms of journeys; they are, if I may say so, almost more like one's family than like a learned body merely; one goes away and comes back, and finds them always there, always helpful, understanding and kind; and I am glad to be able to come here today and to say this.

The journey today was made from Tarsus to Iraq by way of Lake Van—a roundabout way, which could be done now by air within a week, with quite comfortable hotels dotted about here and there if one knows where to find them. It could also be done on horseback—as it was done, about a century ago, by Mr. Ainsworth and by Von Moltke, the commander, later, in the Franco-Prussian war. He came to know this district intimately when attached to the Turkish army as a young man, from 1835 to 1839. His book is still the best I know on all the region round Malatya, and he is, I believe, the only European to have negotiated the Euphrates gorges on a raft in flood-time. I cannot help thinking that a great deal of German prestige in Turkey derives from him, and from the extremely tough group of young Prussian officers who were with him; and I should put the book into the hands of any young man seconded to the East as a model of how to make oneself popular and indispensable.

Mr. Hill and I undertook this journey with no idea of such adventures. It was a touristy trip in a hired Land-Rover, and its interest—apart from the beauty of the country and its history—lay chiefly in the geography of the two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, that come to within a few miles of each other here where the middle stream of the one almost touches the sources of the other. They then separate, to meet at last in the far waters of the Shatt al-Arab to enter the Persian Gulf together.

However simple, this journey requires a lot of negotiation to get the



FROM TARSUS TO LAKE VAN

necessary Turkish permits for the frontier districts—and these were obtained with great kindness and perseverance by our Ambassador and his staff in Arikara, to whom I am very grateful indeed. The district of Lake Van was made more difficult than usual at this time by two British travellers who had been there just before (without any Embassy encouragement), had forgotten their bathing suits when they bathed in the lake, and otherwise outraged local feeling, and had finally insulted the Governor and been expelled: all these things make travel harder for those who come later!

Any Asiatic traveller in this audience will recognize the photograph of a road that climbs towards the plateau: there always seems to be one, leading beyond the mountain rim of the horizon—zigzagging, trodden only by the feet of mules or camels, or built, as it is now, for cars. It still swings its fine, adventurous corners over the hills, whose shoulders grow wider and higher as one reaches the flat expanses, which thin ridges of watersheds divide. This particular road is climbing up the Mediterranean side of Turkey. The lands that drain to Iraq and the Gulf are beyond it, across the horizon, among gentler slopes that sink down to the deserts of Syria.

I had already been travelling for three months in Turkey, and this was a sort of detour on the way home. Mr. Hill and I met at Mersin early in June, and set off, east of Tarsus, across the Cydnus river, now the Tarsus Chay, that might still carry Cleopatra's barge here in flood-time, though it has lost the clear water for which it was renowned. It no longer flows near the city and there are no ancient landmarks in the fertile plain around it—recently drained and rich now with cotton and corn. But a little way beyond it one reaches the historic highroad between East and West—the road of all the armies, from the Cilician to the Syrian gates. One comes on ancient sites like Misis—clinging, with splendid bridge, to the river crossing—and to many castles that have dominated the important highway.

What building is left to show is chiefly Armenian in most of these castles. The kingdom of the Lesser Armenia had its capital at Sis—now Kozan—not far away, and these hills were held in a turbulent way throughout the Crusades, until A.D. 1375, by Armenian kings. They looked down from their strongholds on the ruins of a more peaceful age in the plains or valleys below. At Anavarza, under the great cliff fortress, the Roman city is laid out in a square, with its streets at right angles and a gate in its southern wall still standing. The Turkish villagers who have inherited all this history are tough and friendly people who gave us our lodging for the night.

From here we crossed the Jihan river, the ancient Pyramus. It has broadened out from its narrow gorges and is served, at Selamiye, by a ferry running on a steel cable—a more modern piece of machinery than some of the Tigris or Euphrates ferries, but not as modern as the tractors which are towed across. These oil tractors are the most typical sight in the Turkish landscape of today.

The reason why we used the old ferry instead of the fine new bridge farther down was that I wished to visit Castabale, where Alexander is said

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to have met Parmenion shortly before the battle of Issus. There is a good deal of uncertainty as to the exact line of his march just here, owing to the fact that the river estuary has changed its bed and the town of Mallus—where he crossed—has disappeared. The fertile lands of Adana and Tarsus were then waste marshes, where, as late as 1818, Captain Beaufort records that he put up some “hunting tigers.” Alexander would naturally use his cavalry to secure the higher ground and the valleys that come down here like the spokes of a fan: from Castabale—now a hamlet called Budrum—one looks across the Jihan down a wide-open passage between the hills towards the Syrian gates; and it is here that Parmenion is said to have “met the king, having been sent ahead to reconnoitre the road through the mountain pass . . . to Issus.”

Budrum is much older than its castle, and one can still see pieces of the more ancient walls. One can still walk through the cornfields down the colonnaded street of the Roman city which Pompey visited, and look out across the river towards the lands of Issus which Alexander must have scanned with a careful eye as he rode along. At any rate, Parmenion must have done so, even if Quintus Curtius is wrong about Alexander.

It was only because I happened to know that the name of Castabale had turned to Budrum that we were able to find it, for the nearest little town, which is Osmaniye, seemed unaware of its existence. One soon discovers that a great deal of time must be allowed for detective work on the spot, even when the actual district of a site has been arrived at. There are castles all over these hills, and one is as good as another to the present inhabitants.

We now drove from Osmaniye on a good and recognized highway, and could indeed have gone by train. Our next halt was Marash, a step up towards the plateau from the hot Cilician plain. All this is very ancient ground, and the lions over the citadel of Marash—removed to Istanbul—have the inscription of a dynasty that goes back about a thousand years B.C. in a language akin to Luvian, which itself has given us examples from the second millennium, and a very famous one—the Phaestōs disc—inscribed with movable types, presumably the earliest forerunner of printing known to be in existence. All the gently undulating country around Marash is dotted with tumuli, in which sherds of obsidian and earthenware are found.

The closer historical interest of this region belongs to the border wars between Muslim and Byzantine. The city itself was rebuilt in the seventh century A.D. by the Caliph Mu'awiyah, and given double walls and a ditch by Harun ar-Rashid. Godefroy de Bouillon took it during the first Crusade and handed it to the kings of Armenia. It was also the birthplace of Nestorius.

It has survived all this history as a charming and prosperous Turkish county town, with good new buildings on the more level ground, and many older streets uphill and down, overgrown with vines or shaded by the overhanging bay windows that make one think of England in an incongruous way. Brightly coloured wooden toys and tools are made here and hang against dark booths in the old bazaars.

The road goes on, and so does the railway, climbing yet another terrace

towards the plateau of Anatolia. The air gets thinner, and snow appeared—in early June—on the mountains that hemmed the Jihan gorges on our left. For the first time in Turkey I saw people loading hay—the sign of a mountain country where cattle must be kept indoors in winter. The flowers were beautiful: long stretches of anchusa, light blue and dark, and slopes of mullein; and clumps of trees sparsely scattered—walnut and oak and willow.

Over a very small and imperceptible rise, we crossed into the Gök Su valley and noticed its waters running towards the east; we were over one of the great watersheds of Asia, and everything now sloped to the Euphrates.

The landscape suddenly grew very wild and desolate. The villages were perched high up, in safety and in the sun, above eroded ravines whose colour depended not on vegetation but on rock: all sorts of tilted strata were tossed about here in confusion, cut through like layers of cake by the melting snow-streams, and overlaid here and there by shapeless grey slopes of clay. The little clumps of walnut or poplar, clinging to some protected corner, looked unnaturally brilliant. The poplar is grown everywhere in these uplands, in watered patches, with the tree stems packed close together to make them straight enough to be laid side by side and bedded down with earth to roof the little one-roomed cottages. As we came to the higher lands we found the huts as Xenophon describes them, half buried in earth against the winter snow.

Malatya is a new and prosperous town, with airfield and railway, and factories where they weave very pretty cottons—its well-being enhanced by its having been the birthplace of Mr. İnönü, the ex-president. It was only founded a century ago, in 1840, when both Ainsworth and von Moltke describe it as the headquarters of the Turkish army of the south; and if it looks old-fashioned in my picture, it is only because the photographer likes to choose things as different as he can from what may be seen at home. This is a point of view always very difficult to explain to anyone in the East, where they hope to see one travelling thousands of miles to photograph factories exactly like those one can find without any trouble in Europe. This is why I take more pictures of women than of men, for they still wear their graceful cotton veils and look different from our peasants, and more feminine, as they work in their fields or bring their bright tinned pans of yaourt to market.

But the old Malatya, the ancient Melitene, was founded by Vespasian on or near a site called Melidea (in an inscription of the eighth century B.C.). It became the headquarters of the Fulminata legion and was always an important strategic point on the eastern road; and it still exists, leading a placid village life in crumbling walls among Seljuk mosques and minarets and tombs.

Beyond it, a few miles away, Euphrates comes curving down with its chief tributary, the Tokhma Su, out of the west. When one sees it, one forgets that other rivers exist. It spreads here among wide and fertile cornlands, and then makes eastward to join its eastern arm, the Murad Su. The two great streams together flow through their narrow opening to the south in what one might think an impossible direction, so solid is the

mountain wall they pierce. The banks, covered with cultivation or easy slopes of yellow mullein flowers, disappear into liver-coloured steep gorges that darken the waters to their own gloomy shade. The new iron bridge crosses here, where a ruined khan shows that the old road ran before it. There is a cuneiform inscription somewhere about seen by von Moltke, and the rapids where he twice risked his life cover some miles of river below, till the stream breaks through the defiles into the sloping cornlands of Syria.

We left all this and continued along the highroad that leads to the plain of Mush, with the Murad Su, the Eastern Euphrates, on our left. A fine railway bridge casts its shadow, like a pattern of history, upon it. And we came out again into wide, easy and fertile country, where El Aziz, with an aerodrome and new streets, is becoming important, while the old city of Harput still makes a home among its ruins for officials who like to live a quiet life up in the cooler air.

On this side of the Euphrates we are back in the atmosphere of the Crusades. The Christian armies used to come raiding, up from the Syrian marches; the fortress of Harput, in A.D. 1122-23, was the prison of Jocelyn of Courtenay and of Baldwin II, king of Jerusalem. It looks out over a rough, uncomfortable landscape of stony, waterless ravines with mountain-cradled plains beyond them, nearly 5,000 feet above sea-level—far, one would think, from any help for a Frankish crusader. But Baldwin escaped, and swam the Euphrates by night on inflated goatskins, and reached his kingdom; and Jocelyn with his company, including 80 ladies—shut up in a safer castle at Palu—found Armenians there ready to help him and seize the fortress. They held it for a time until the Lord of Mosul recaptured it and killed Jocelyn and his knights and threw the 80 ladies from the cliff. The place is on the Murad Su, on the south-western edge of the plain of Mush, and the railway reaches it, almost as surprisingly as the Crusaders. We found it by dint of some enquiry at El Aziz, and climbed over the castle rock, where little is left of the Crusaders or their enemies, but the cuneiform inscriptions of an earlier age remain.

From the rock one can watch the Euphrates feeling its way for many miles in a straight line both east and west along the Taurus rampart. This is one of the most exciting river stretches in the world from a geographical point of view: the steep, unbroken wall holds in the stream until it meets the western Euphrates arm; they then turn both together through their defile; and on the south of the watershed, where this bend occurs, separated only by a narrow ridge, the Tigris is born. Any break in the wall would have let the two rivers meet, and the history of modern Iraq and ancient Babylonia would not have been; for that low land is only preserved by the fact that the floods of the two rivers are not simultaneous. The snows of the far Euphrates' sources melt a few weeks later than those of the Tigris. I looked with awe in the sunset at this accident of geography, following the rivers in my mind through the miles of their courses and the ages of their history to the meeting at last, near the Persian Gulf, by the tree where tradition places their Garden of Eden.

The next day, having slept in our tents by a wayside *chaykhana*, we left the Euphrates and climbed by a good road across the barrier to the



Göljuk lake out of whose waters the Tigris is born. These high lakes, both Göljuk and Van, have a pale, thin colour, a sort of electric blue that looks as if some mineral had made it rather than any reflection of the sky. Van is, in fact, full of alkaline salts, and was considered particularly good water for fullers and dyers, both by Strabo and in the Middle Ages.

The Tigris oozes out from the low eastern rim of Göljuk, not directly, but seeping through the hillside into a shallow valley, which soon narrows and dips steeply down like a funnel with the railway and the road running above the river far below. There are few villages and very rare fields, but suddenly, at a bend, the smoke of a factory chimney appears—the copper smelting of Maden, mentioned by von Moltke a century ago. A rather grim little mining town clusters about it, and the waste metal pours away over a cliff in sullen red-hot streams.

The valley goes on, opening out and gentler, and the road leaves it to loop down through wide nomad lands that dip with many ridges to Diyarbekr and the great Assyrian plain.

The people change here. We had travelled hitherto among Turks whose westernized clothes have become regrettably like our own; only sherbet-sellers, with their polished trays and flagons crowned with bells, looked a little different. But now we were coming into the Kurdish districts, where flowered, padded shirts and loose white trousers are still worn and the turban has not quite given way to the cap.

Diyarbekr stands in the plain on a bend of the Tigris—the ancient Amida and still important. Its position keeps it so, with the cornlands of Assyria stretching away before it towards the dusty Mesopotamian plains, and the highlands of Asia at its back. A continuous stream of history has left a deposit of all the ages in its walls—old khans for the Baghdad caravans, and columns of every sort, with Corinthian capitals on Byzantine shafts, added to and put together by later Islamic dynasties. The huge black walls tell the same history—the typical Saracen work on Byzantine and earlier foundations. In the eleventh century the city wall was 60 feet high and 30 feet broad, with a tower every 100 yards and an outer wall 30 feet high with a space of 15 yards for suburbs in between; and now one can still walk for miles along the ramparts and recapture the picture of confusion and darkness when, somewhere on the bend where the Tigris sweeps down, the Persians climbed up to a neglected postern by night, and the city was taken in the middle of the fourth century A.D., as Ammianus Marcellinus describes it. Other sieges and massacres, none so vividly recorded, swept over the frontier city and left it triumphantly Muslim down to the present age, when airfield, factories and railway, and a luxury hotel, have broken down a part of the walls and spilt over the flat country around.

Here Ali, our driver, with his Land-Rover left us. We had enticed him with much diplomacy so far from his home, and he now handed us on to a far less reliable colleague while he returned to Mersin by the shorter route of the plain.

We turned east across Tigris, over the beautiful rolling cornlands and grassy, eroded valleys, among old mounds of Assyria covered with white hollyhocks in flower, towards the Kurdish hills. All this country is the

borderland of the Parthian and the Persian wars with Rome. The town of Silvan has been suggested—wrongly, it appears—as the site of Tigranocerta, and the stones in which the Muslim inscriptions are embedded come from older walls. But the stamp of all this country is that of the great Seljuk age, when Baghdad held the riches and civilization of the eastern marches and a merchant could trade and find agents from Cairo to Afghanistan. Silvan was called Miyafarriqin, famous for a mosque built in A.D. 1227, less than thirty years before the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols. Its stone arches surround a central dome with the solidity and dignity of the Seljuk architecture; and the details of its carving seemed to me to be very much in the style of the old mosque in Mosul, now fallen to ruin.

Nothing could have been kinder than the way in which we were allowed to go about and take photographs. The Turks everywhere showed us what they could and helped us; and I would like to thank them for their courtesy and honesty, as so many travellers have done before me.

Another fine Seljuk monument stood on our road—the bridge over the Batman Su, a tributary of the Tigris. A whole series of these bridges must have carried the north-bound caravans in the prosperous days of the Abbassid rule. One is left, half embedded in sand and quite dry, a little north of Bagdad; and traces of those across the Tigris itself have been found, though washed away by floods. This one is intact, with its date—corresponding to A.D. 1147. A new bridge is going up close beside it and will spoil its solitary beauty, impressive in the landscape as it now stands. Soon after crossing it, the road forks and the left-hand turn is taken, towards Bitlis and the hills. The tumbled landscape brought down by these streams drops behind one, and the oak-tree slopes of Kurdistan begin.

There used to be a trade in woollens, tobacco, acorns, gum tragacanth, and in the knotty wood of the walnut trees that grow to a great size here. But now Bitlis seems to have declined and is living on agriculture in a small way, until the road which is being widened, and the traffic through to Lake Van which is to become a centre for this eastern region, sets it up again. At present it lives a small but apparently contented life under the wall of its Armenian castle, with its river tumbling through it under many stone bridges, like the landscape of a willow-pattern plate. The Armenian character of the town is shown by the pointed stone roofs, typical in the eastern provinces. We were to see more of them round Van.

We now followed up the river called by some travellers the Bitlis Chay and by others recognized as the eastern arm of the Tigris. I have never been able to discover where the real difference between a main river and a tributary lies when one comes to the little streams that trickle near the source. This eastern arm rises in the swamps of Mush, above Bitlis, and comes into the Tigris below the Batman Su, which is a far more important stream with a better right, as it seems to me, to be counted as a Tigris source. But the naming of rivers is a chancy affair. We are at any rate nearer the mark than the Ancients were, who knew Lake Van as Thospites, Arsene, Artissa or Arethusa, and thought the Tigris rose beyond it and flowed through two lakes—the fish of lake and river not mixing—and



finally, according to Pliny, descended into an underground passage to reappear at a place called *Nymphæum*.

We left this river valley and climbed up to the high land that slopes in a very gentle gradient to Van—a lake blue with the same metallic pallor as *Göljuk* and 93 miles long. Its northern shore rises to grassy slopes of dead volcanoes. *Suphan* was in the north-east, climbed first in 1838; and *Nimrüd Dagh*, a broken cone filled with water, was at the north-western end. The landscape, with very few trees, rolls away from them across the steppes towards *Ararat* and the *Murad Su* out of sight.

On the southern shore the Kurdish mountains shut the lake in as with a high, unbroken wall from the lowlands of Iraq. A wild, steep, nomad country of narrow passes, deep gorges and rare villages lies between. There is a feeling of strange remoteness about this sheet of water. *Xenophon* does not mention Van, though he must have marched close by—a day or two's march away—across the plain of *Mush*. The remoteness seemed even more noticeable because of the cheerful life that went on around the lake shores—the steamer touching at village jetties, the slips for boats and the hotel at *Tatvan*; it was as if one had landed on the moon and found it busy with its own affairs. The hotel, run by the shipping company for tourists, was clean and comfortable, and next day we found a little steamer setting off and spent the better part of the day coasting along the southern shore.

The island of *Ahtamar*, which my companion was anxious to see because of an early Armenian cathedral, was there in sight. Even the cathedral was visible, and the mainland very near; but neither then nor later were we able to hear of any conveyance to take us. The Governor of Van, most courteous and obliging in spite of his poor experience with the two British travellers before us, was yet adamant about this island. "The English who come here," he said, "are interested only in Armenians." I told him that this exclusiveness had gone out with *Mr. Gladstone*, but it was no use; the island remained out of reach, and we had to content ourselves with the monuments of *Urartu*, a more ancient people, who left their tunnelling and inscriptions about the regions of Van during the first millennium B.C.

They built their moles and palaces against the rock that lifts itself like a long ship out of the lakeside meadows, and has the ancient *Urartian* stones on one side and the medieval city on the other, with minarets like half-ruined factory chimneys and Ottoman mosques, all deserted. In the first world war the Russians descended on Van and occupied it for some years, and, when they left, the Armenians had to pay for the temporary friendship; and the city, which was chiefly inhabited by them, became deserted. A new Van is still growing and building in clumps of trees some miles away. The church of *Ahtamar*, which was at one time the rival of *Etchmiadzin*, chief of all the Armenian churches, had been a political centre (so the Governor told me), and the aura of suspicion still hangs about the now innocent ruins and destroys the itinerary of the innocuous tourist. Luckily no such taboo exists for the rock of Van, which is full of interest—a sort of island of history. It has an inscription of *Xerxes* carved high out of reach, first copied by *Schultz* in 1827, who was murdered by

Kurds; and a late fortress spreads its long, rough walls, partly mud built, over the rocky backbone. These late fortresses are depressingly shoddy, though romantic from a distance.

On the south-western face of the rock, half-way down the precipice and reached by steps cut in the sheer face, are the rooms of the ancient kings, hollowed out of the stone, with their doorway and narrow, dizzy ledge covered by the cuneiform script. I am ignorant of the language but have been told that this, too, is Urartian. From this safe but, from a supply point of view, rather difficult retreat the king looked out over the swamp to Van. The lake at that time probably reached the rock where the mole still shows; and perhaps the rock-cut rooms were built so high to be out of the way of the midges. They last for two months in summer, the people said, and though they did not bite, they defeated us by their numbers. In our little hotel by the lakeside we were obliged to put out the lamp and shut all doors and windows; one felt them milling round in soft, woolly waves if one put out an arm in the darkness, and found them stacked dead in heaps nearly a foot high against the door in the morning. The emperor Trajan was forced to give up the siege of Hatra because of "flies," which I now feel certain must have resembled the midges of Van.

Layard, when he was excavating at Nineveh, came up into this country through the mountains, and describes Suphan Dagh, the mountain of Van, and the Kurdish horsemen with their long spears and flowing garments, memories which "bring back in after years indescribable feelings of pleasure and repose." The life has not changed so very much, though the spears and the flowing garments have gone, and motor transport has brought a greater security. The men in my taxi, I noticed when driving back to Diyarbekr, are still searched for firearms before they reach the town; and the ox-cart still rolls through the ruts on its solid wheels, carrying jars of water of a primeval pattern.

Though the men have bowed to modernity, the women look uncompromising enough! They are very different from the Turkish village women who bake their flat loaves of unleavened bread in the plains of Tarsus; or even from the softer type—Arab-Mediterranean—that one finds about the villages of Diyarbekr. There is a sort of Elizabethan magnificence about the Kurdish ladies, with everything bright they can think of plastered upon them, and their flat headdresses set with as many gold coins as their husbands can afford.

A group of them were standing in the Governor's anterooms when we called on him in Van, and, as it seemed my only opportunity, I did something I have never done before and asked if his A.D.C. could order them to let me take a picture. The husbands were approached, and the wives submitted—not too unwillingly. I hope the prints I sent may have reached and pleased them.

Villages grow scarce and farther apart as one leaves the slopes of Van. We drove across nomad-land, high rounded downs of summer pasture, towards the Persian border in the south, and reached Hoshab, the last village. The road winds on beside its river to the frontier hills of the horizon. And the castle is now a ruin, though it was still garrisoned in the last century. It has a gate with barbaric heavy carving, and a keep that

looks fine at a distance, and probably there are very ancient stones in its foundations, for this was the frontier of the highland dynasties from very early times. The bridge over the Hoshab—the Fair Water—is the best bit of building there, though late, done solidly by the Ottomans in black and white stone.

The most interesting monuments left today on the shores of Van belong to a medieval dynasty that flourished in the fifteenth century with its chief city at Akhlat on the northern shore. An English mercenary captain, Russel Bāliol, had been sent in the eleventh century to besiege it; and it was old already when the Saracens took it in the ninth century from the Byzantines. In the thirteenth century it was held by princes of the house of Saladin and stood three sieges; was lost, but returned to them as the dowry of a Georgian princess; and it then flourished, so that its ruins can still be seen, cut into the rocky sides of a ravine and scattered on the lake shore. The Emir Bayindir's tomb there is dated 1471 (by our calendar). Old tombstones in a cemetery, and other of these circular tombs, are scattered over the slopes. They are not very beautiful, except for the delicate stone carving of the conical roofs; but they are characteristic, and the shape with varied detail runs through the eastern Turkish districts, south as far as Nigde in the Taurus—presumably taken on by the Seljuks from Armenia.

There is, in any case, a provincial feeling about the ruins of Akhlat with their careful but unimaginative carving, like a dress from which the Paris touch is absent.

A new centre is now growing east of the ravine, and of the castle and its mosque that lie walled in ruin, mixed up with a small village on the lake shore. The new Akhlat has hopes for the future. A university for these regions was planned, either at Akhlat or Van, and the waters stored in the crater of Nimrud Dagh were to be used for industry, so the mayor of the little place told us, a young Turk full of energy and charm. While he spoke, one felt again the remoteness of Van—as if all these everyday thoughts and plans were being elaborated in a different planet from ours. I think the height, the pale, unusual colour of the water, the wide, treeless space and the dead volcanoes created this atmosphere, for it is quite a get-at-able place, with air service and buses and a railway station not too many hours away. But it has a feeling of great age about it. As we drove back to Tatvan on the western shore I saw a lump of shining black rock by the roadside, which looked like obsidian; and I have since read that the district of Van was visited for this product long before the age of metal.

I had planned to ride down the Tigris into Iraq, but we were now short both of time and money. We pooled our resources to let Mr. Hill continue his quest for Armenian churches, as his need was greater than mine, and I took a passage back in a car by the Bitlis valley through Diyarbekr to the south. I was glad to get an idea of this country of the Persian and Parthian wars with Rome, which I did not know.

Mardin is as beautifully built a city in white stone as Diyarbekr is in black, the stone being soft to cut and hardening afterwards. The tradition has gone on unbroken, so that sometimes only the weathering helps to distinguish the old carving from the new. It is a busy, cheerful town, with



VAN. KURDISH WOMAN



DIYARBEKIR ULU CAMI COURT: DETAIL



DIYARBEKIR S.W. WALL



ABASSID BRIDGE E. OF SILVAN ON BATMAN SU: 1147 A.D.

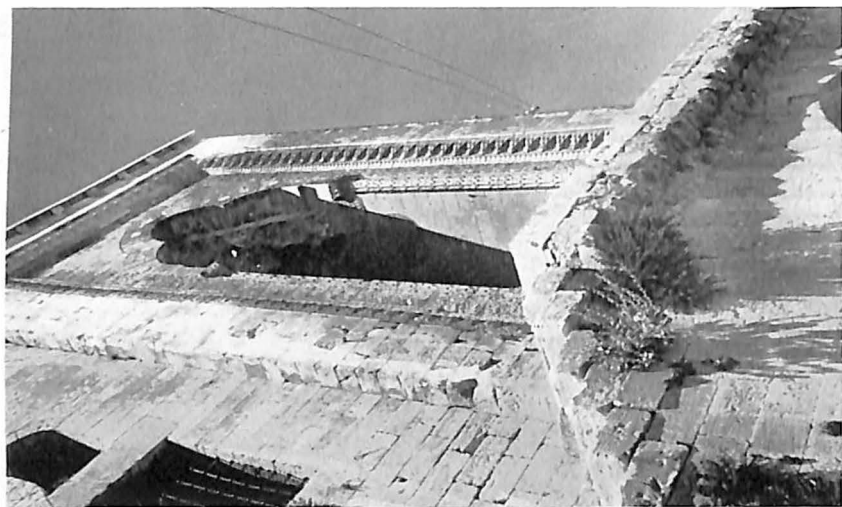


HOSHAB CASTLE, AND BRIDGE

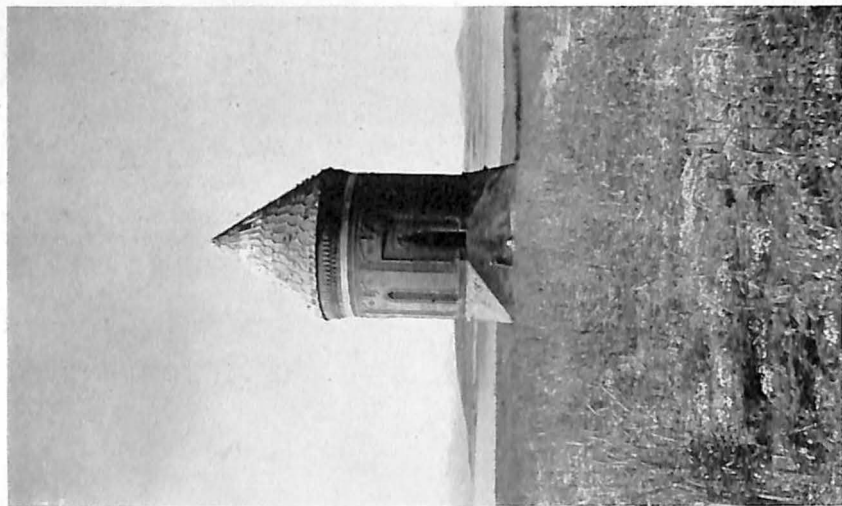


BITLIS CASTLE





MARDIN GATE OF SELJUK MADRASEH



LAKE VAN: AHLAT; TOMB

a high, flat citadel behind it; and the plain slopes away from it to the pink, dusty haze of Assyria and the desert beyond out of sight. In the hotel was a coat of mail just found on the citadel in the ground; it was finely hammered out with three rings held in each loop together to make it stronger, but a great triangular tear showed where the enemy spear or mace came through.

There are some American missionaries in Mardin, but they were away. The only Christian I saw was the Chaldæan pastor, living with his family in the middle of the town beside his church, behind a good stout door that could be closed in time of trouble. All was very peaceful, however, though the Chaldæans of Mardin have diminished. They have a strong tradition, for the Jacobite rite originated here, and their church is very old, though the present building is too much restored to show it. A stone with the date upon it was stolen, the pastor told me, by the Germans when they were hospitably lodged there during the first world war. The finest monument of the city is the Kasimiriye madresseh of the late fourteenth century, with its mosque and court and hospital and splendid doorway. It has the fluted domes characteristic of its period, and one finds them also in other buildings about here, such as the tomb now used as a petrol station at the edge of the town.

I was rather carefully looked after by the Mardin police, who found me wandering about happily with a camera. They explained that I must be accompanied to be saved from harm, and we visited the madrassah together. I was pleased by this time to have accumulated enough Turkish to explain so much Seljuk history to my policeman that he was delighted to get rid of me at the end. He politely allowed me to photograph the stucco carving of the hall where the police station garages its cars—an interesting bit of Byzantine-Arab transition.

This whole area, of the Turkish-Syrian-Mesopotamian border, must be of the greatest importance to anyone who is interested in this transition of architecture, and the neighbourhood of Mardin, which was visited and described by Gertrude Bell, is not yet thoroughly well known.

In it, some 6 kilometres east of the Nusaibin road, in the hills, is Deir Zafirán, a good model of Justinian Byzantine, still kept in repair and used by the Chaldæans, who keep alive a school. An older church, Mar Ja'kub, is visible here against the skyline cliffs above. I was too short of money to spend another night upon the way and get up to it, and had by this time decided to return to this country so that I did not mind so much. The lower monastery was good enough.

Its outer moulding is curved into arches typical of the Byzantine in north Syria. What interested me particularly was the external band of rich carving which runs all round the top of the square church. This fashion for external decoration must have begun, one would imagine, in a country where the winters are short and the weathering not too bad. There is nothing even as slight as a Greek pediment to protect it. The church has a flat roof, like a cube; but its interior is domed and cruciform, with rich Byzantine moulding running round it, carved with all sorts of fancies and the extraneous basket ornaments they loved.

I was sorry to leave it so soon. In fact, I was sorry now to leave every

place I came to except Nusaibin, where the inn was so squalid that no amount of history could make up for it. There *is* history enough in the ancient frontier city of Rome that begged to be allowed to defend itself with its own resources when they handed it over to Persia. Nothing is left of all its power except five marble columns where the storks build their nests, and the church where St. Jacob lies in his crypt below. An old woman came to open it, the only Christian left, they told me, in Nusaibin. The building here, too, is a cube outside, with an internal dome. It has a double nave—the second added later to the first one—and arches of the Mesopotamian type that begin to show a pointed apex. A Byzantine moulding ran round in darkness too great for my camera to deal with. The outside moulding was as rich though not so deep. Bits of old stone capitals or slices of columns are scattered here and there at doorposts or under windows in the mean streets of Nusaibin. It was a relief to photograph the Bekchi in his garden, where his plants were all well cared for and still alive—the only place in Nusaibin that did not remind one of decay.

It was cheerful again to drive across easy sloping wheatlands to Dara. Here the ruins are scattered, with only a hamlet at one end of them to interfere with what they have to say. The walls were badly built and in great haste, after Amida had fallen. They were intended to hold the Byzantine border against the south, and the clerics and all the people helped in their building. When Justinian devoted himself to the fortification of the empire, he reinforced them, and made Dara one of the vital frontier fortresses, though one would think it poorly placed strategically, with the higher land all round it at the back. It did, however, withstand a Persian siege.

Not much of the masonry is left entire, except the tombs of the necropolis cut solid in rock, and Justinian's great reservoirs for water. All round the old frontier fortress the stony lands slope to the south, rich with corn. I took the train at Nusaibin and saw the corn sacks of a record year stacked at the Syrian stations as I passed: they were sometimes heaped up as far as the sight could carry. Here were the riches of Assyria, and Parthia, and Baghdad.

Already there was a desert touch in the lands of Nusaibin and Dara. The women were walking in the sunset from their flat-roofed villages to the wells—square stop-holes in the ground, closed and padlocked with a metal trap-door. They wore rich clothes—maroon or magenta silk trousers and purple velvet sleeves, and the Kurdish or Mosul striped silk for their turbans. Already Arabic was understood and spoken, as it generally is south of Diyarbekr. It was pleasant to come back to the beautiful desert speech.

"May Allah make it pleasant to you. May He give you health and rest. May Allah keep you in all your journeys. May you reach their end in safety and peace," they said as they handed the pitcher to drink from.

This journey was at an end. The Taurus express, caught at Nusaibin, grew less and less like an express as it moved farther and farther from the Taurus. The restaurant car was taken from it; the beer came to an end; the ice was melted; the water nearly gone.

Next day I met the Tigris again in Baghdad, a familiar stream—very

different from its mountain waters as they tumble out of the hillsides west of Van.

The CHAIRMAN: I regret that time does not permit our putting the questions which I feel sure many of us would like to put. But I would say that we have spent a wonderful hour listening to the address we have been given by Freya Stark and seeing the delightful slides which illustrated it. On your behalf I thank her very much for all the trouble she has taken in preparing her address and in coming here to talk to us. (Applause.)

#### IMPORTANT

The Annual General Meeting of the Society will take place on Wednesday, June 13, at the Rooms of the Royal Society, Burlington House, at 4.15 p.m., followed by tea and a lecture.

The Annual Dinner will take place on Wednesday, July 11, at 7.30 at Claridges. Further details will be announced later.

