



A PILGRIMAGE TO NEJD (ANNOTATED)

LADY ANNE BLUNT

Lady Anne Blunt

A Pilgrimage to Nejd (Annotated)

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Enriched Edition. A Visit to the Court of the Arab Emir and "our Persian Campaign" (Vol. 1&2)

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Introduction

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Travel writing often becomes most compelling when the desire to see a distant world collides with the limits imposed by landscape, politics, and cultural difference.

Lady Anne Blunt's *A Pilgrimage to Nejd* is a nineteenth-century travel narrative recounting a journey into central Arabia. Written by a British traveler and published in the late Victorian period, the book belongs to the long tradition of expeditionary and observational prose that brought regions little known to English readers into print. Its setting ranges across desert routes, encampments, and settlements associated with Nejd, and its importance rests not only in its itinerary but also in the record it offers of movement through a demanding environment under exacting conditions.

The book begins from the premise of an ambitious inland journey undertaken with close attention to practical realities, local intermediaries, and the uncertainties of travel. Rather than presenting a simple sequence of sights, it unfolds as an account of progress through distance, negotiation, and observation. Readers encounter the route as it is experienced day by day, with the pace shaped by weather, terrain, animals, hospitality, and caution. This structure gives the narrative immediacy while remaining spoiler-safe, since the interest lies less in surprise than in the accumulation of detail and perspective.

Blunt's narrative voice is measured, alert, and descriptive, combining endurance and curiosity with a habit of careful

notice. The style is characteristically nineteenth century in its formality, yet it remains readable because it is grounded in concrete scenes: camps, conversations, hardships, and impressions of people and place. Its tone moves between admiration, fatigue, fascination, and restraint. The reading experience is therefore both documentary and atmospheric. One follows not only the route itself but also the author's effort to understand what she sees and to render it intelligible for readers far removed from the Arabian interior.

Several themes give the work its lasting interest. It is, first, a book about travel as dependence rather than mastery, showing how movement through unfamiliar territory relies on guides, hosts, political permission, and local knowledge. It also explores encounter across languages, customs, and expectations, revealing both the possibilities and the limits of understanding. Alongside these concerns runs a sustained attention to the desert as a physical and imaginative space: austere, beautiful, dangerous, and socially organized in ways that challenge outside assumptions. These themes make the narrative richer than a simple record of miles covered.

The book also matters because it can be read as a historical document of perception. Modern readers may value it for the glimpses it offers into Arabian travel, social relations, and regional life as observed by a nineteenth-century visitor, while also remaining attentive to the partiality of any traveler's account. That double awareness is important. *A Pilgrimage to Nejd* invites readers to consider how knowledge about places is produced, framed, and circulated, especially when one culture writes about another for an audience at home. Its interest lies as much in its mode of seeing as in what it claims to describe.

For contemporary readers, then, Blunt's work remains significant not simply as an old journey retold, but as a record of crossing boundaries that are geographical, linguistic, and interpretive. It offers the satisfactions of classic travel literature—distance, hardship, observation, and atmosphere—while prompting reflection on representation, mobility, and the ethics of encounter. Read now, it can be appreciated both for its vivid evocation of a demanding expedition and for the historical perspective it provides on British engagement with Arabia. Its endurance comes from that combination of immediacy and distance, adventure and scrutiny.

Synopsis

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Lady Anne Blunt's *A Pilgrimage to Nejd* is a nineteenth-century travel narrative that recounts a demanding journey across Ottoman Syria and the Arabian interior toward central Arabia. Written from firsthand observation, the book combines route narrative, practical description, and political commentary. Blunt and her companions travel by caravan through desert landscapes that are presented not as empty space but as inhabited, contested, and socially organized terrain. From the outset, the work establishes its main concerns: movement through difficult country, negotiation with local authorities and tribal groups, and a sustained effort to understand Arabian society on its own terms.

As the journey advances from settled districts into steppe and deeper desert, Blunt records the logistics that govern travel: water, animals, guides, weather, and the constant need for caution. The narrative proceeds through encampments, market towns, and halting places, showing how mobility depends on tribal alliances and personal reputation as much as on endurance. These sections give the book its steady narrative rhythm, with progress repeatedly shaped by insecurity and delay. Rather than treating hardship as mere adventure, Blunt presents it as a condition that reveals the material realities of desert life and the fragile networks connecting distant communities.

A central strand of the book is its portrait of Bedouin society. Blunt pays close attention to customs of hospitality, kinship, leadership, and honor, while also noting the rivalries and

practical calculations that affect relations between tribes. Her account is neither a simple romantic idealization nor a purely hostile colonial survey; instead, it moves between admiration, frustration, and curiosity. Through conversations and observation, she tries to distinguish common assumptions about Arabia from what she sees in camp life and on the road. The resulting picture emphasizes adaptability, social obligation, and the political importance of tribal independence.

The approach to Nejd gives the narrative a stronger political focus. Blunt situates central Arabia within a broader regional landscape shaped by local dynasties, shifting influence, and the legacy of religious reform. Encounters with rulers, intermediaries, and notable households become increasingly important, since travel in the interior depends on protection as well as geographical knowledge. Without reducing the journey to diplomacy alone, the book shows how access to places and information is mediated by authority. These chapters broaden the narrative from private travel experience into an inquiry about governance, legitimacy, and the balance between settled power and tribal autonomy.

Alongside its political observations, the work is also an ethnographic and environmental record. Blunt describes towns, cultivation, dress, animal husbandry, and domestic arrangements, often comparing settled and nomadic ways of life. Her well-known interest in Arabian horses informs parts of the account, but the book's scope is wider than equestrian enthusiasm. It seeks to document a region that many contemporary European readers knew chiefly through hearsay. The cumulative effect is a portrait of everyday structures rather than isolated curiosities, with special attention to how climate, scarcity, and custom shape behavior across different communities.

The middle and later stages of the journey underscore the uncertainty of travel in a region where plans are continually revised. Rumor, illness, terrain, and political caution complicate movement, and the travelers must repeatedly weigh curiosity against safety. This tension gives the book much of its narrative energy: the desire to penetrate farther inland is balanced against the limits imposed by circumstance. Blunt's method remains observational and cumulative, building understanding from successive encounters rather than from a single revelatory episode. In this way, the travel narrative becomes an examination of how knowledge is gained imperfectly, under pressure, and through dependence on others.

In broader terms, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd* endures as an important Victorian account of the Arabian interior, notable for its combination of travel writing, social description, and political witness. Its significance lies not only in the rarity of the journey it records, but also in its attempt to present central Arabia as a complex human world rather than a distant abstraction. Modern readers may also recognize the book as a document shaped by its period, with all the perspectives and limitations that implies. Even so, it remains resonant for its disciplined attention to place, movement, and cross-cultural encounter.

Historical Context

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Lady Anne Blunt's *A Pilgrimage to Nejd* emerged from a journey made in 1878–79 and first published in 1881, when the Arabian Peninsula was still only partly known to most European readers through official reports, trade records, and travel literature. Blunt and her husband, the diplomat and poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, traveled from Ottoman-controlled Syria and Mesopotamia into central Arabia, especially the region known as Nejd. Their account belongs to the nineteenth-century expansion of European travel writing, yet it was shaped less by formal imperial administration than by private travel, linguistic preparation, and close attention to local political and tribal conditions.

The geographical setting was defined by the Ottoman Empire's uneven authority in Arab lands. By the late nineteenth century, the Ottomans directly governed provinces such as Baghdad, Basra, and Syria, while central Arabia remained largely under local rulers and tribal networks. Ottoman influence in eastern Arabia had increased after the reconquest of al-Hasa in 1871, but Nejd itself was not fully controlled from Istanbul. This distinction matters for Blunt's narrative, which repeatedly moves between areas of stronger Ottoman administration and regions where power rested on local alliances, customary obligations, and the ability of rulers to command loyalty across difficult desert terrain.

A crucial political background to the book is the long struggle within central Arabia between the Al Saud and the

Al Rashid. The first Saudi state had been destroyed by Ottoman-Egyptian forces in 1818, but the Al Saud later reestablished power in Riyadh. In 1865, however, the death of Faisal ibn Turki led to succession disputes among his sons, weakening Saudi authority. During the 1870s the Al Rashid emirs of Jabal Shammar, ruling from Ha'il, expanded their influence, and by the time of the Blunts' journey Muhammad ibn Rashid was the dominant political figure in much of inner Arabia. Their travel account is informed by this shifting balance of power.

Religion also provides essential context. Since the eighteenth century, central Arabian politics had been closely linked to the reformist Islamic movement associated with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and its alliance with the Al Saud. European writers often referred to this movement as "Wahhabism," sometimes inaccurately treating it as wholly separate from Islam rather than as a current within Sunni Islam. Blunt's book reflects nineteenth-century European efforts to understand Arabian religious life through encounters with scholars, rulers, and townspeople. Her observations belong to a period when religion, political legitimacy, and social discipline in Nejd were widely perceived—by both local actors and foreign visitors—as deeply interconnected.

The book was also shaped by older routes of commerce and pilgrimage. Arabia's interior was linked to surrounding regions through caravan traffic connecting Iraq, Syria, the Gulf coast, and the Hijaz. Pilgrimage to Mecca was one of the great organizing institutions of the wider Islamic world, and routes to the holy cities supported trade, diplomacy, and the circulation of news. Although Blunt's title uses the word "pilgrimage" in a broad travel sense rather than for the Muslim hajj, her narrative depends on these established pathways and on the hospitality systems that sustained

movement across the desert. Understanding these networks clarifies both the possibilities and constraints of such a journey.

Another important context is the nineteenth-century European fascination with Arabian horses, genealogy, and desert society. Lady Anne Blunt was a significant horse breeder and co-founder, with Wilfrid Blunt, of the Crabbet Arabian Stud in England. Their travels in the Middle East were partly motivated by the search for Arabian bloodstock and by interest in Bedouin breeding traditions. This background strongly informs *A Pilgrimage to Nejd*, giving unusual prominence to horses, tribal pedigree, and pastoral life. It also ties the book to wider Victorian interests in classification, collection, and ethnographic description, even as Blunt often records practical local knowledge rather than merely repeating inherited European stereotypes.

The narrative belongs to a period when British influence in the Middle East was growing, though not yet expressed in direct control over central Arabia. Britain had strategic interests in the Persian Gulf, India routes, and Ottoman stability, and officials, missionaries, merchants, and travelers all contributed to European knowledge of the region. At the same time, women travel writers were becoming more visible in print culture, sometimes able to observe domestic and social spaces less accessible to male travelers. Blunt wrote within this environment. Her status as an aristocratic Englishwoman and experienced traveler shaped both the authority and the limits of her account, especially in matters of gender, rank, and cross-cultural comparison.

Read historically, *A Pilgrimage to Nejd* reflects and sometimes questions the assumptions of its era. It shares features common to Victorian travel writing: attention to

political character, moral judgment, and comparison between European and non-European societies. Yet it is also valuable for its relatively detailed treatment of Arabian rulers, Bedouin communities, and everyday practices at a moment of regional transition. Because the journey occurred during Rashidi ascendancy and before the twentieth-century Saudi state, the book records a political landscape later transformed by war and state formation. Its historical significance lies in combining firsthand observation with the categories, curiosities, and limitations of late nineteenth-century British travel literature.

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PREFACE BY THE EDITOR.

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READERS of our last year's adventures on the Euphrates will hardly need it to be explained to them why the present journey was undertaken, nor why it stands described upon our title page as a "Pilgrimage." The journey to Nejd forms the natural complement of the journey through Mesopotamia and the Syrian Desert; while Nejd itself, with the romantic interest attached to its name, seems no unworthy object of a religious feeling, such as might prompt the visit to a shrine. Nejd, in the imagination of the Bedouins of the North, is a region of romance, the cradle of their race, and of those ideas of chivalry by which they still live. There Antar performed his labours of Hercules, and Hatim Taï the more historical hero entertained his guests. To the Ánazeh and Shammar, especially, whose northward migrations date only from a few generations back, the tradition of their birth-place is still almost a recollection; and even to the Arabs of the earlier invasions, the townsmen of such places as Bozra, Palmyra, and Deyr, and to the Taï Bedouins, once lords of Jebel Shammar[2], it appeals with a fascination more than equal to that of the Hejaz itself. Nejd is to all of them what Palestine is to the Jews, England to the American and Australian colonists[1q]; but with this difference, that they are cut off from the object of their filial reverence more absolutely in practice than these by an intervening gulf of desert less hospitable than any sea. It is rare to meet anywhere in the North an Arab who has crossed the Great Nefûd.

To us too, imbued as we were with the fancies of the Desert, Nejd had long assumed the romantic colouring of a holy land; and when it was decided that we were to visit

Jebel Shammar, the metropolis of Bedouin life, our expedition presented itself as an almost pious undertaking; so that it is hardly an exaggeration, even now that it is over, and we are once more in Europe, to speak of it as a pilgrimage. Our pilgrimage then it is, though the religion in whose name we travelled was only one of romance.

Its circumstances, in spite of certain disappointments which the narrative will reveal, were little less romantic than the idea. Readers who followed our former travels to their close, may remember a certain Mohammed Abdallah, son of the Sheykh of Palmyra, a young man who, after travelling with us by order of the Pasha from Deyr to his native town, had at some risk of official displeasure assisted us in evading the Turkish authorities, and accomplishing our visit to the Ánazeh. It may further be remembered that, in requital of this service and because we had conceived an affection for him (for he appeared a really high-minded young fellow), Mohammed had been given his choice between a round sum of money, and the honour of becoming "the Beg's" brother, a choice which he had chivalrously decided in favour of the brotherhood. We had then promised him that, if all went well with us, we would return to Damascus the following winter, and go in his company to Nejd, where he believed he had relations, and that we would help him there to a wife from among his own people.

The idea and the promise were in strict accordance with Bedouin notions, and greatly delighted both him and his father Abdallah, to whom they were in due course communicated. Arab custom is very little changed on the point of marriage from what it was in the days of Abraham; and it was natural that both father and son should wish for a wife for him of their own blood, and that he should be ready to go far to fetch one. Moreover, the sort of help we proposed giving (for he could hardly have travelled to Nejd

alone) was just such as beseemed our new relationship. Assistance in the choice of a wife ranks in Bedouin eyes with the gift of a mare, or personal aid in war, both brotherly acts conferring high honour on those concerned. Mohammed too had a special reason in the circumstances of his family history to make the proposal doubly welcome. He found himself in an embarrassing position at home with regard to marriage, and was in a manner forced to look elsewhere for a wife. The history of the Ibn Arûks of Tudmur, the family to which he belonged, will explain this, and is so curious, and so typical of Arabia, that it deserves a passing notice here.

It would appear that seven or eight generations ago (probably about the date of the foundation of the Wahhabi empire^[1]) three brothers of the noble family of Arûk, Sheykhs of the Beni Khaled of south-eastern Nejd, quarrelled with their people and left the tribe. The Ibn Arûks were then a very well-known family, exercising suzerain rights over the important towns of Hasa and Katif, and having independent, even sovereign, power in their own district. This lay between the Persian Gulf and Harik, an oasis on the edge of the great southern desert, and they retained it until they and the rest of their fellow Sheykhs in Arabia were reduced to insignificance by Mohammed Ibn Saoud, the first Wahhabi Sultan of Nejd.¹

At the beginning of last century, all Arabia was independent of central authority, each tribe, and to a certain extent each town, maintaining its separate existence as a State. Religion, except in its primitive Bedouin form, had disappeared from the inland districts, and only the Hejaz and Yemen were more than nominally Mahometan. The Bedouin element was then supreme. Each town and village in Arabia was considered the property of one or other of the nomade Sheykhs in its neighbourhood, and paid him tribute in return for his protection. The Sheykh too not unfrequently possessed a house or castle within the city

walls, as a summer residence, besides his tent outside. He in such cases became more than a mere suzerain, and exercised active authority over the townspeople, administering justice at the gate daily, and enrolling young men as his body-guard, even on occasion levying taxes. He then received the title of Emir or Prince. It was in no other way perhaps that the "Shepherd Kings" of Egypt acquired their position and exercised their power; and vestiges of the old system may still be found in many parts of Arabia.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab, the Luther of Mahometanism, preached his religious reform in Nejd, and converted Ibn Saoud, the Anazeh Sheykh of Deriyeh, to his doctrines. By Ibn Abd-el-Wahhab's help Ibn Saoud, from the mere chief of a tribe, and sovereign of one city, became Sultan of all Arabia, and reduced one after another every rival Sheykh to submission. He even ultimately destroyed the system of tribute and protection, the original basis of his power, and having raised a regular army from among the townsmen, made these quite independent of Bedouin rule. Arabia then, for the first time since Mahomet's death, became a united empire with a centralised and regular government. It must have been about the year 1760 that the three Ibn Arûks, disgusted with the new state of things in Nejd, went out to seek their fortunes elsewhere. According to the tradition, partly embodied in an old ballad which is still current in Arabia, they were mounted all three upon a single camel, and had nothing with them but their swords and their high birth to gain them credit among strangers. They travelled northwards and at first halted in Jôf, the northernmost oasis of Central Arabia, where one of them remained. The other two, quarrelling, separated; the younger going, tradition knew not whither, while the elder held on his way still further north, and settled finally at Tudmur (Palmyra), where he married a woman of the place, and where he ultimately

became Sheykh. At that time Tudmur consisted but of a few houses. His name was Ali, and from him our friend Mohammed and his father Abdallah, and his uncle Faris, the real head of the family in Tudmur, are descended.

Mohammed then had some reason, as far as his male ancestry were concerned, to boast of his birth, and look high in making a "matrimonial alliance;" but *par les femmes* he was of less distinguished blood; and, as purity of descent on both sides is considered a *sine quâ non* among the Arabs, the Ibn Arûks of Tudmur had not been recognized for several generations as *asil*, or noble. They had married where they could among the townspeople of no birth at all, or as in the case of Mohammed's father, among the Moáli, a tribe of mixed origin. The Ánazeh, in spite of the name of Arûk, would not give their daughters to them to wife. This was Mohammed's secret grief, as it had been his father's, and it was as much as anything else to wipe out the stain in their pedigree, that the son so readily agreed to our proposal.

The plan of our journey was necessarily vague, as it included the search after two families of relations of whom nothing had been heard for nearly a hundred years. The last sign of life shewn by the Ibn Arûks of Jôf had been on the occasion of Abdallah's father's death by violence, when suddenly a member of the Jôf family had appeared at Tudmur as avenger in the blood feud. This relation had not, however, stayed longer there than duty required of him, and having slain his man had as suddenly disappeared. Of the second family nothing at all was known; and, indeed, to the Ibn Arûks as to the other inhabitants of Tudmur, Nejd itself was now little more than a name, a country known by ancient tradition to exist, but unvisited by any one then living connected with the town.

These singular circumstances were, as I have said, the key-note of our expedition, and will, I hope, lend an interest beyond that of our own personal adventures to the present

volumes. To Mohammed and the Arabs with whom we travelled, as well as to most of those we met upon our journey, his family history formed a perpetual romance, and the *kasid* or ballad of Ibn Arûk came in on every occasion, seasonable and unseasonable, as a chorus to all that happened. But for it, I doubt whether the journey could ever have been accomplished; and on more than one occasion we found ourselves borne easily on by the strength of it over difficulties which, under ordinary conditions, might have sufficed to stop us. By extreme good luck, as will be seen in the sequel, we lit upon both branches of the family we set out in search of, the one citizens of the Jôf oasis, the other Bedouins in Nejd, while the further we got the better was the Arûk name known, and relations poured in on us on all sides, eager to shew us hospitality and assistance. We were thus passed on from kinsman to kinsman, and were everywhere received as friends; nor is it too much to say that while in Arabia we enjoyed the singular advantage of being accepted as members of an Arabian family. This gave us an unique occasion of seeing, and of understanding what we saw; and we have only ourselves to blame if we did not turn it to very important profit.

So much then for the romance. The profit of our expedition may be briefly summarised.

First as to geography. Though not the only Europeans who have visited Jebel Shammar, we are the only ones who have done so openly and at our leisure, provided with compass and barometer and free to take note of all we saw. Our predecessors, three in number, Wallin, Guarmani, and Palgrave, travelled in disguise, and under circumstances unfavourable for geographical observation. The first, a Finnish professor, proceeded in 1848, as a Mussulman divine, from the coast of the Red Sea to Hail and thence to the Euphrates. The account of his journey, given in the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, is

unfortunately meagre, and I understand that, though one more detailed was published in his own language, he did not live long enough to record the whole body of his information. The second, Guarmani, a Levantine of Italian origin, penetrated in disguise to Jebel Shammar, commissioned by the French Government to procure them horses from Nejd; and he communicated a lively and most interesting account of his adventures to the "Société de Géographie" in 1865. He too went as a Turkish mussulman, and, being rather an Oriental than a European, collected a mass of valuable information relating chiefly to the Desert Tribes through which he passed. It is difficult, however, to understand the route maps with which his account is illustrated, and, though he crossed the Nefûd at more than one point, he is silent as to its singular physical features. Guarmani started from Jerusalem in 1863 and visited Teyma, Kheybar, Áneyzeh, Bereydah, and Hail, returning thence to Syria by Jôf and the Wady Sirhán. Mr. Palgrave's journey is better known. A Jesuit missionary and an accomplished Arabic scholar, he was entrusted with a secret political mission by Napoleon III. and executed it with the permission of his superiors. He entered Nejd, disguised as a Syrian merchant, from Maan, and passing through Hail in 1864 reached Riad, the capital of the Wahhabi kingdom, and eventually the Persian Gulf at Katif. His account of Central Arabia is by far the most complete and life-like that has been published, and in all matters of town life and manners may be depended upon as accurate. But his faculty of observation seems chiefly adapted to a study of society, and the nature he describes is human nature only. He is too little in sympathy with the desert to take accurate note of its details, and the circumstances of his journey precluded him from observing it geographically. He travelled in the heat of summer and mostly by night, and was besides in no position, owing to his assumed character and the doubtful company in which he was often compelled to travel, to

examine at leisure what he saw. Mr. Palgrave's account of the physical features of the Nefûd, and of Jebel Shammar, the only one hitherto published, bears very little resemblance to the reality; and our own observations, taken quietly in the clear atmosphere of an Arabian winter, are therefore the first of the kind which have reached Europe. By taking continuous note of the variations of the barometer while we travelled, we have been able to prove that the plateau of Hail is nearly twice the height supposed for it above the sea, while the granite range of Jebel Shammar exceeds this plateau by about 2000 feet. Again, the great pilgrim-road from the Euphrates, though well-known by report to geographers, had never before been travelled by an European, and on this, as on other parts of our route, we have corrected previous maps. The map of Northern Arabia appended to the first volume of our work may be now depended upon as within its limits substantially accurate.

In geology, though possessing a superficial knowledge only of our subject, we have, I believe, been able to correct a few mistakes, and to clear up a doubt, much argued by Professor Wetzstein, as to the rock formation of Jebel Aja; while a short memoir I have appended, on the physical conformation of the great sand desert, will contain original—possibly valuable—matter. The sketches, above all, which illustrate these volumes, may be relied on as conscientious representations of the chief physical features of Central Arabia.

Botanists and zoologists will be disappointed in the meagre accounts of plants and animals I am able to give. But the existence now proved of the white antelope (*Oryx Beatrix*) in Nejd is, I believe, a fact new to science, as may be that of the *Webber*, a small climbing quadruped allied to the marmots.

A more important contribution to knowledge will, I hope, be recognised in a description of the political system to

which I have just alluded under the name of Shepherd rule, and which is now once more found in Central Arabia. I do not know that it has ever previously been noticed by writers on Arabia. Neither Niebuhr nor Burckhardt seem to have come across it in its pure form, and Mr. Palgrave misunderstood it altogether in his contempt of Bedouin as contrasted with town life. Yet it is probably the oldest form of government existing in Arabia, and the one best suited for the country's needs. In connection with this matter too, the recent history of Nejd, with an account of the downfall of the Ibn Saouds, for which I am mainly indebted to Colonel Ross, British Resident at Bushire, and the decay of Wahhabism in Arabia, will prove of interest, as may in a lesser degree the imperfect picture given in the second volume of the extreme results produced in Persia by despotic rule, and the iniquitous annexation of Hasa by the Turks. The value, however, of these "discoveries" I leave to our readers to determine, premising only that they are here pointed out less on account of their own importance, than as an excuse in matter for the manner of the narrative.

With regard to the sequel of our Arabian journey, the further journey from Bagdad to Bushire, I should not intrude it on the notice of the public, but that it serves as an additional proof, if such be wanting, of the folly of those schemes which, under the name of "Euphrates Valley" and "Indo-Mediterranean" railway companies, have from time to time been dangled before the eyes of speculators. A country more absolutely unsuited for railway enterprise than that between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, has probably never been selected for such operations; and, if the recital of our passage through the uninhabited tracts, which form nine tenths of the whole region, shall deter my countrymen from embarking their capital in an enterprise financially absurd, I feel that its publication will not have been in vain.

55 A Bedouin sheykh of the Ibn Arûk family, a branch connected by kinship to other Arab tribal groups mentioned in the chapter. He is presented here as the chief of the Ketherin tribe.

56 A riding dromedary, especially a camel trained for fast travel and use as a saddle animal. The word is used repeatedly in the chapter for camels ridden by Bedouin and pilgrims.

57 A well-known London horse market and auction house. Lady Anne Blunt uses it as a comparison point for judging the appearance and value of Arabian horses.

58 The ruler of the House of Saud in central Arabia in the late 19th century. In this period he controlled parts of Nejd and was associated with the seizure or requisition of valuable mares.

59 A named strain of Arabian horse, treated here as a highly prized mare line. The author says it was said to be extremely rare in Nejd at the time.

60 The city now commonly called Najaf in Iraq, one of the holiest cities in Shi'a Islam because of the shrine of 'Ali. Pilgrims were arriving there at the end of the journey described in this chapter.

61 A town in present-day Bulgaria that was the site of a major siege during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. Its surrender marked an important turning point in the war.

62 A Latin quotation attributed here to Plautus. It means roughly "Shall I follow him? Into Persia," and sets a humorous tone for the journey eastward.

63 A hill station in British India, now Shimla in India. In the 19th century it served as a summer retreat from the heat of the plains.

64 This refers to Verney Lovett Cameron, a British explorer known for travel in Africa. He is mentioned here in connection with a proposed survey for a railway route.

65 A local place-name explained by the author as meaning “streams.” The district lay where several watercourses joined the Tigris east of Kut.

66 A title used for a man believed to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Seyd Abbas says that in the region they are entering his status as a seyyid would not be respected.

67 A tribal guest-house or reception room used by Arab hosts to receive visitors. The travelers are welcomed in Dakher’s mudí, though the hospitality soon proves uneasy.

68 An abba is a loose outer cloak or robe worn in the Middle East. Here it is part of the payment demanded by Ghafil, and Lady Anne notes that the one given was a special silk garment.

69 This is the title of Edmund Spenser’s sixteenth-century English epic poem, commonly spelled today as “The Faerie Queene.” Lady Anne Blunt quotes a stanza from it at the start of the chapter.

70 A Persian term meaning a prince or royal offspring, from the Shah’s family. In the text, Sirdal Khan is described as a “Shahzade” to indicate his princely status despite exile.

71 An Arabic term for the afternoon prayer time; here it is used as a rough marker for late afternoon. The governor

sends soldiers at that time to disperse the crowd.

72 A title for people regarded as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, often treated with religious respect in Muslim societies. In the passage, they are described as wearing green clothes.

73 An interpreter or language guide, especially in the Ottoman and Middle Eastern world. Hajji Mohammed serves this role for the travelers, though Lady Anne says he is not very fluent.

74 This Latin quotation is from Tacitus, the Roman historian. It means “they make a desert and call it peace,” a criticism of violent conquest or occupation.

75 A narghileh is a water pipe, also called a hookah or shisha. In this passage it is listed among the weapons carried by the escort, showing the mixed and improvised character of their equipment.

76 A ferraz-bashi was a local official or deputy governor in Persian usage. Here he is the person expected to provide additional protection for the travelers on the next stage of the journey.

77 A kran was a Persian silver coin and a standard unit of money in 19th-century Iran. The text uses it both for payments and for the tribute demanded by local men guiding the party.

78 This refers to a series of 19th-century agreements under British protection that curtailed maritime raiding along the southern Persian Gulf coast. In this context, it explains why the author says piracy there had “disappeared.”

79 A Bedouin term for the hard, stony desert plain that dominates much of northern Arabia. Lady Anne Blunt uses it to distinguish this gravelly upland from the sand dunes of the Nefûd.

80 A historic pilgrimage route associated with Zubayda bint Ja'far, wife of the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid. According to the text, wells, reservoirs, and caravanserais were built along it in the 9th century for pilgrims.

81 Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817–1911) was a prominent British botanist and explorer. The text says he examined the expedition's plant collection, reflecting his authority in nineteenth-century botany.

82 A religious reform movement founded in central Arabia by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century. Its followers sought to return to what they regarded as the original practices of Islam and opposed many local customs.

83 A hereditary ruler of Mecca from the Prophet Muhammad's lineage, often also a political authority in the Hejaz. In this chapter, the title refers to the local ruler Ghalib.

84 The office of the caliph, regarded in Sunni Islam as the successor to the Prophet Muhammad as leader of the Muslim community. The text discusses Ottoman claims to this authority.

85 The Suez route was the sea passage between Europe and India via the Suez Canal, opened in 1869. In this passage it is contrasted with a proposed overland railway as the existing route for moving troops and mail.

86 Benjamin of Tudela was a 12th-century Jewish traveler from Spain known for his itinerary through parts of Europe