



My last trip to Persia

(Part 7)

By a Canadian tourist

Anyhow, I haven't felt this way since I left Africa. Everything I am experiencing is a shock to my natural senses. Europe was nice but Iran is on a totally different level. Visiting Europe is like visiting your grandparents. It's always nice to go see them but it is a bit boring. Visiting Iran, however, is exciting.

When I arrived at the Syrian Embassy, Ali was already there waiting for me. We rang the doorbell and were eventually told by the security guard that someone would come out shortly to get us. Thirty minutes passed and we were still waiting outside in the blazing sun like fools. I wanted to ring again but I was actually afraid.

We decided to ring anyhow. It was good that we did because five minutes later I was escorted to the lobby of the embassy. Ali decided to wait outside.

After registering with the head of security at the embassy, I was asked to sit down in the waiting room. About 20 minutes later, a staff member told me that the consular official was ready to see me. I walked into the consular's office and there was a man dressed in a sharp suit sitting behind a desk just staring at me.

I said hello to him in Persian to break the ice (even though he wasn't Persian) and shook his hand. He looked at me and asked if I spoke Persian. It seemed like he asked the question knowing full well that I was going to say no. Not liking his game, I told him I didn't speak the local language but that I did speak English, French and Italian. I wanted him to know I wasn't a dumb, he may have thought I was.

He asked me so many questions. My trip made no sense to him. He also explained to me that he never had a Canadian come to the embassy asking for a Syrian visa. I thought this was surprising.

He remained quiet for about a minute and then told me that I would have to wait a week before he gave me an answer. This surprised me as my guide book stated that I could get a Syrian Visa at the embassy in Tehran on the same day I applied for it. I wasn't interested in staying in Tehran for a whole week so I told the official that if this was the case, I didn't want to waste anymore of his time as I couldn't wait a week in Tehran and that I would just skip Syria. He became a bit annoyed with me and raised his voice. He asked "Do you know how long I would have to wait for a visa if I wanted to go to your country?" I didn't answer as I knew he was about to answer his own question and he did. He answered "3 months!"

And yet you don't want to wait one week?" My mistake was that I assumed that he would keep my passport during this week and that I wouldn't be able to travel in Iran because of this.

He said that he would photocopy my whole passport and that I could have the original back immediately.

In that case, I explained that I could wait a week. He finally directed me to leave his office and wait for a staff member to return my passport to me. While waiting for the passport, I realized that I didn't want to backtrack to Tehran while I was in the south of Iran.

I knew I would be there for about two weeks. I wanted to see if I could just come back to the embassy after my tour of the south was over. I didn't want to press my luck but I did anyway. Once the staff member arrived with my passport, I asked him to ask the official if I could just come back in about 10-14 days. He walked down the corridor and into the consular's office. I could hear the staff member repeating my request to a man in charge in English. All of a sudden you heard the consular yelling "I TOLD HIM TO BE HERE ON MONDAY!" I actually yelled back like a scared schoolboy "OK. OK. I was just asking if it was possible. It won't be a problem." But I guess he calmed down as the staff member said that I could just call from wherever I am on Monday and they will inform me of their decision.

When I left the embassy, I found Ali sitting comfortably in the security guard's office chatting with a young man dressed in military fatigues. It was obvious that Ali told the guy all about me as he came over with a big smile and shook my hand and wanted to know all about what happened inside the embassy.

The rest of the afternoon was reserved for sightseeing. We first went to the old US Embassy (referred to as the US den of espionage by the local people).

Anti-US and anti-Israel posters could be found against the wall surrounding the former embassy. I was scared to take photos of these posters as there were cameras everywhere but Ali said it should be ok as there were no signs saying that people weren't allowed to take photos. So I took a few photos.

Our next stop was the Jewel museum which I actually thought was interesting. After that, we went back to my hotel. I said good bye to Ali and thanked him for everything he did for me during my stay in Tehran (as I was leaving tomorrow for Esfahan). He actually made me promise (again) that I would go see him and his family in Tabriz on my way to Turkey. I really didn't want to. I couldn't say no after everything he did for me. He wanted me to promise him that I would stay at his home for two days but I said it would only be one. He agreed to this. I think Ali just wants to show me off in his home town. He will enjoy the attention in Tabriz.

I only stayed at the hostel for 30 minutes. I had to meet Majid (the young man I met at the bazaar yesterday) at the metro station as we were going to go to his friend's English class. Apparently, I was going to be the special guest for the class. I found Majid at the metro at 5 p.m. as we discussed earlier in the day.

(Source: Tourists' personal blog)
(To be Contd.)

The Great Wall of Gorgan

◆ One of the World's Greatest Frontier Walls

By Dr. Kaveh Farrokh

The Great Wall of China is well known as the largest wall in Asia (or indeed the world). Less known is the Wall of Gorgan in northeastern Iran (specifically the plain of Gorgan) attributed to the Sassanian era (224-651 AD). The structure is yet another testament to Sassanian engineering capabilities.

According to the Science Daily News (February 26, 2008) the Wall of Gorgan is: "...more than 1000 years older than the Great Wall of China, and longer than Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall put together."

The Science Daily report is significant as it was generally believed that the Gorgan Wall and Wall of China had been built around the time of the Parthian dynasty. The Parthian origin hypothesis had been postulated by Dr. Kiani in 1917 (see further below).

The Great Wall of Gorgan is the world's largest defense wall, second only to the famed Wall of China. The Gorgan Wall measures approximately at a length of 155 kilometers and spans a range of 6-10 meters in width. The Gorgan Wall begins from the coast of the Caspian Sea, meandering to the north of Gonbade Kavous. The Gorgan Wall stretches to the northwest and terminates to the rear of mountains of Piskamar.

An Iranian map of the Gorgan wall. The works of Dr. Kiani in 1971 were invaluable in helping lay the basis of mapping the structure. The Gorgan Wall is second only to the Great Wall of China in length.

Before examining the Gorgan Wall, we briefly examine the territory, etymology and settlements of the ancient Iranian province of Gorgan.

The Gorgan Wall is known by numerous names. Some of these include the Dam of Anushirvan, the Dam of Alexander, the Dam of Firuz and Qizil Yilan.

The inhabitants of this region are generally believed to have been the ancient Hyrcanians. Gorgan itself is one of Iran's most ancient regions and is situated just to the Caspian Sea's southeast. Gorgan has been a part of the Median, Achaemenid (559-333 BC), Seleucid, Parthian (247 BC-224 AD) and Sassanian empires in the pre-Islamic era.

The capital of ancient Gorgan was known as Zadrakarta, which later became Astarabad. This city can be traced back to at least the Achaemenid era. Another historical city of importance was ancient Jorjan.

The first serious expedition to the site occurred in 1971 by an archaeological team led by Dr. Kiani. The second thorough analysis of the structure was made by an archaeological survey team in the 1990s. This was part of the activities related to the development of the Golestan Dam. The most recent expedition occurred in early 2008 by an international archaeological team composed of specialists from Iran and England (the Universities of Edinburgh and Durham).



An excavation team at the Gorgan Wall. The most recent expeditions have been conducted by an Iranian-British team in late 2007-early 2008.

The Sassanian dynasty continued to construct, improve and fortify the site. What was unique in the Partho-Sassanian system was the construction of castles along the wall at predetermined distances. The shortest distance between the castles was ten kilometers with the longest being 50 kilometers. It is noteworthy that all of these were supported by an aqueduct and various water channels.

The system of castles was developed by the Sassanians into a system of fluid defense. This meant that the Gorgan Wall was not part of a purely static system of defense. The main emphasis was in a system of fluid defense-attack system. This entailed holding off potential invaders along the line and in the event of a breakthrough, the Sassanian high command would first observe the strength and direction of the invading forces. Then the elite Sassanian cavalry, the Savaran, would be deployed out of the castles closest to the invading force. The invaders would then be trapped behind Iranian lines with the Gorgan Wall to their north and the Savaran attacking at their van and flanks. It was essentially this

system of defense that allowed Sassanian Persia to defeat the menacing Hun-Hephthalite invasions of the 6-7th centuries AD.

As noted previously, the width of the Gorgan wall varies from 6 to 10 meters along its length. The wall's thickness varied due to the varied geographical characteristics (climate, soil, terrain, etc.) of each region traversed by the structure.

There is little doubt that the Partho-Sassanians were endowed with a high level of engineering proficiency. As noted by a report by the Science Daily on February 26, 2008:

New discoveries unearthed at an ancient frontier wall in Iran provide compelling evidence that the Persians matched the Romans for military might and engineering prowess.

The city of Gorgan survived into post-Islamic times. When it acquired a high status in post-Islamic times, especially during the 9th century, but fell into decline and was obliterated by the Mongols by the 13th century. Gorgan had become a major venue for the inroads of Oghuz-Turkic tribes into Iran from the 11th century AD.

The Great Wall of Gorgan has been nominated for UNESCO status.

Eslami Nodooshan: Tireless academic author

By Afshin Majlesi

Mohammad Ali Eslami Nodooshan, is one of the best known celebrated contemporary writers on culture and literature, translator, poet, and literary critic.

He was born in a small village named Nodooshan in the province of Yazd. Although he didn't have enough knowledge about the symbols of nature, like animals, plants and the soil, but he developed an interest for it in early childhood.

The country boy had a golden opportunity to research on ancient Persian history and civilization before he started a new life in urban area.

While in the primary school, Nodooshan was introduced Shahname (The Book of Kings) which is an enormous poetic opus written by the prominent Persian poet Ferdowsi around 1000 AD.

Nodooshan learned many things from the book including the mythical and historical past of Greater Iran, from the creation of the world up until the Islamic conquest of Persia in the 7th century.

Studying the book had such an influence on him that changed his whole life. After high school, Nodooshan left Yazd to study Law at University of Tehran in the capital. Later, his thirst for knowledge forced him to continue the education in France.

Nodooshan, the tireless researcher, received his Ph.D. in Law in 1953 and within two years returned to his beloved home. Afterwards he became the professor of Literature and Law at the University of Tehran.



ESLAMI NODOOSHAN

Dr. Nodooshan is the author of over 45 books on social, cultural, and literary issues. His writings cover a broad spectrum, including the issue of morality in literature. Among his works in Persian are "Lest We Forget Iran", "Human Rights Advocacy in the Developing World", "Life and Death of Heroes in the Shahnameh," which has been used as a textbook for numerous university courses.

He is among the most lucid writers of Persian prose. The recent publication of his memoirs, entitled "Days" has ushered in a novel style and, similarly, his travelogues have energized this genre in Persian. Among these are Safir-e Simorgh, which is an account of his travels to numerous countries and many cities in Iran. "Liberty of the Statute" is an account of his travels in the United States.

Nodooshan has lectured at 40 universities and collages in over 20 countries, including the Iranian Association at the University of Toronto (IAUT). All the lecture texts were published in both English and French. Moreover, he has published his autobiography, which is an unorthodox event in Persian literature.

Earning experience on the global culture Nodooshan has travelled to many countries, including: Denmark, Italy, Switzerland, Russia, United States, England, India, China, Japan, Germany, Canada, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Jordan, Egypt, Poland, Australia and Sweden.

Nodooshan is still active after his retirement from full-time teaching and academic life, he founded the Ferdowsi Cultural Center and another institution named Hasti since 1993.



MASTERPIECES

Guernica



Guernica is a painting by Pablo Picasso, depicting the bombing of Guernica, Basque Country, by German and Italian warplanes at the behest of the Spanish Nationalist forces, on April 26, 1937. The Spanish Republican government commissioned Picasso to create a large mural for the Spanish display at Paris International Exposition in the 1937 World's Fair in Paris. Guernica shows the tragedies of war and the suffering it inflicts upon individuals, particularly innocent civilians. This work has gained a monumental status, becoming a perpetual reminder of the tragedies of war, an anti-war symbol, and an embodiment of peace. On completion Guernica was displayed around the world in a brief tour, becoming famous and widely acclaimed. This tour helped bring the Spanish Civil War to the world's attention.

Picasso (1881- 1973) was working on Guernica at the time of the Nazi German bombing of Guernica, during the Spanish Civil War. He then named the painting after the town. In that air raid an estimated 250 to 1,600 were killed and large number of others were injured. The mural was produced under a commission by the Spanish Republican government to decorate the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris International Exposition. Picasso said as he worked on the mural:

"The Spanish struggle is the fight of reaction against the people, against freedom. My whole life as an artist has been nothing more than a continuous struggle against reaction and the death of art."



HITS

Lawrence of Arabia



Lawrence of Arabia (1962) is the filmic retelling of British man T. E. Lawrence's heroic, autobiographical account of his own Arabian adventure.

It was directed by David Lean and produced by Austrian Sam Spiegel from a script by Robert Bolt and Michael Wilson. The film stars Peter O'Toole in the title role. It is widely considered one of the greatest and most influential films in the history of cinema. The film depicts Lawrence's experiences in Arabia during World War I, in particular his attacks on Aqaba and Damascus and his involvement in the Arab National Council. Its themes include Lawrence's emotional struggles with violence in war, especially the conflicts between Arab tribes and the Turkish army.

The film opens in 1915 with Lawrence (Peter O'Toole) as a civilian gearing up for a ride in his motorcycle at his home Clouds Hill. While riding his motorbike down a narrow English country lane, Lawrence is killed when he tries to avoid a collision with two boys who are cycling on the wrong side of the road.

The film then flashes back to Cairo during World War I, where Lawrence is a misfit British Army lieutenant, notable only for his insolence and knowledge of the Bedouin.

It was a major award-winning film that received ten Academy Award nominations and seven Academy Awards, including Best Director, Best Picture and Best Color Cinematography.