The account by Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926) of his Persian journey in 1887–8, *A Year Amongst the Persians,* is a remarkable text in the genre of Orientalist travel literature. It is a directly appealing story, witty, informative and erudite, and each chapter builds up sufficient tension to make the reader wish to continue reading.

**Browne's A Year Amongst the Persians**

In the *Year* E.G. Browne relates his trip of slightly more than one year, from late September 1887 to 9 October 1888, from England to Iran and back. The journey brought him from England to Constantinople, then via Trebizond to Tabriz, Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd and Kirman and back again via Yazd, Keshan, Tehran and Russia to England. Despite his evident talent for travelling and writing about it, Browne did not become a traveller but went into a career of scholarship. Browne tells his story, not in an abstract way, but as a long chain of anecdotes, encounters and conversations.

A recurrent theme in the *Year,* and in Browne’s subsequent early writings for that matter, is his fascination with Babism. For Browne the persecuted Babis may have resembled the first generations of Christians in Rome, with all the contrast between them and the cruel and corrupt rulers, both in Rome and in Qajar Iran. The journalist in Browne, because reporting was one of his many talents, may have been attracted by the first-hand stories that he received from his Persian interlocutors.
**Browne’s travel notes**

The *Year* is interesting enough. Browne reproduces his numerous encounters and conversations with Persians in a lively way, often using direct speech. No doubt they are stylised accounts, but they are told in a convincingly authentic way, and the *Diary* shows that the stylisation was often done on the day itself. Browne must have sat almost every day for an hour or so to write, often after a riding journey or an evening of entertainment. In Browne’s account of his stay in Kirman this is also the case, but in this episode his actual experiences exceed his published accounts by far. This becomes clear from the *Diary* and, albeit to a lesser extent, from the other travel notes that Browne used for writing the *Year*. This *Diary*, and the travel notes, have survived and are, together with a few other materials, presently kept in the library of Pembroke College. Browne’s own college, in Cambridge. Browne’s extensive scholarly archive, consisting of manuscripts, and many notes and letters, is kept in Cambridge University Library.

Additional materials were given to the University Library at several stages. Bosworth mentions the ‘original manuscript’ of Browne’s *Year* having been found in the Browne family papers and deposited in the Cambridge University Library. I have not come across it there, though. A preliminary outline listing of these materials is available in the Library. Over the course of a number of years several attempts were made in Cambridge University Library to describe the...

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**Fig. 25.1** Head of a young man with a round felt hat, head of an old, bearded man, seated figure of a young man with a cup in his hand. E.G. Browne, *Diary*, p. 204, three drawings, pencil, paper.

**Fig. 25.2** Opposite left: Head of a young man and standing boy in a round felt hat and slippers. E.G. Browne, *Diary*, p. 205, two drawings, pencil, paper.

**Fig. 25.3** Opposite right: Heads of nine young boys, head of a young man, head of an old, bearded man, head of a Sufi with an axe and a standing mure. E.G. Browne, *Diary*, p. 206, 12 drawings, pencil, paper.

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So, apart from a few lacunae, the Diary seems complete and Browne apparently only started writing upon arrival in Trebizond. Browne's notes in the Pembroke library consist not only of the actual Diary that he kept during his trip but also of several smaller notebooks, containing, among other things, domestic and financial notes, which at some stages of the journey Browne kept in a meticulous way. These are kept in the Pembroke library as LC II, 73 (1, 2 and 4). These notes include daily household expenses, especially, though not exclusively, those for the Kirman episode. They show us in a rather down-to-earth way that the spiritual outbursts in Kirman needed a simple physical basis in order to exist. It is excellent to lead a life with your pantheistic friends on wine, spirits, tobacco and opium, but such a free life needs to be organised as well. Maybe Browne used his detailed household accounting as a means to remain in the world with around him.

While travelling Browne kept his Diary on an almost daily basis. He did so in an extensive way, not just by jotting down notes in telegraphic style, and the result is a nearly publishable text. The accounts in the Year largely correspond with those in the Diary, but there are two significant exceptions. First there is Browne's relatively long stay in Tehran, from 24 November 1887 till 7 February 1888. In his account of Tehran in the Year Browne relinquishes the form of the diary in favour of a summary of his activities and a walk through the town. This makes the chapter on Tehran in the Diary an as yet unknown text. The other important difference between the Diary and the Year concerns the details of the Kirman episode.

**Travelling with Browne**

Browne at first did not travel alone. He was accompanied by an old college friend, who having just completed a term of office at the hospital, was desirous to travel. However, irritations between the two travellers soon arose and in Tehran they decided to split up. Browne's companion, Haviland, who in the Year is always referred to as 'H —', departed on 29 December 1887 from Tehran, and Browne stayed on for a while there. In Iran they did not meet again. H — does not play a role of any significance in the Year, but in the Diary the way in which the friends part ways is more dramatic.

In order to ensure himself some privacy Browne took several practical precautions. He could not, of course, have an eye on his Diary at all times. In order to protect his text, and thereby himself, against the possibly indiscreet eyes of his English companion, or his servants, or his Persian friends, or the Persian authorities, or European readers after his return to England he devised several ways of encoding, all quite straightforward in fact. Concrete references to Babi matters, and especially the names of Persian Babis, he wrote in nager script, which he could assume that nobody, except maybe the odd Hindu, who was no party to this matter anyway, would be able to decipher.

More intimate physical details and conversations he concealed by writing down in English, but in Persian script, making them in one stroke illegible for Persians and Europeans alike. Sometimes he would write such passages in Persian language but in Latin script, which produced the same effect. However, writing Persian in Latin script may have had a more innocent reason: the truthful rendering of the spoken language. Occasionally Browne also used the so-called treetrism or cyprescript, the workings of which he explains in the *Year*. Sometimes he recorded
EDWARD GRANVILLE BROWNE AMONGST THE QALANDARS

I never made so fatal a mistake in my life as this and I now begin to suffer the punishment of my selfishness and unkindness. My God, forgive me, and if it be His will grant me another meeting with HaviILand as Isfahan. I have never suffered as I suffer now in mind (I) for I know the suffering to be due to my own wickedness.23

The next day, Sunday, 1 January 1888, he continued in this vein:

Had on the whole a very horrible (!) New Year's Day, hardly seeing a soul and brooding over my fatal mistake. It almost seems to me now that I have ruined my career both as a doctor and at Cambridge, as well as having lost my self-respect, and behaved badly to HaviILand. I deserve to suffer and I have suffered today much.24

A fatal mistake made, a ruined medical career, a loss of self-respect, his Cambridge perspectives gone forever? What does it all mean? They were just staying in Tehran and had a difference of opinion on where to go next, so Browne tells us in the Year. What could have gone on between the two men and since when? Fortunately, there was plenty of distraction in Tehran. Already a week later, on Sunday, 8 January 1888, Browne, still in Tehran but all alone now, wrote:

We walked down to the house of Doctor Muhammad. [...] The entertainment was much like that of the other night, only more so; the wine and raki circulated freely, also the kalyans [hookahs], & the tongues of the staff silent guests were loosened: AKBAR Mirza subsided into English, the others into a mixture of French & Persian for my benefit, I imagine. Towards the end, a wild sort of war dance which we all took part, took place around the small mineral boys, the dance chanting monotonously ‘BAKAR alAllah kuchala – BAKAR alAllah kuchala’ (may God bless the little one) over and over again, & then they sat down, clasping their hands in time.

Besides the mineral boys there were present two other boys both pretty and one, the older, exceedingly so with beautiful arched eyebrows and large black eyes and the faintest trace of a moustache. I do not know if these boys were the sons of our host or pages.

And a bit further on in the Diary Browne, now in Shiraz, relates: ‘We sat & smoked cigarettes, & talked for a while: then the two slept, & the only one awake besides myself was the beautiful boy.

The conversations in Shiraz remained full of liberties that Browne excluded from his Year, and which he kept to himself in his Diary. On Thursday, 11 April 1888, he recorded from one of his companions:

‘He sent me a piece of his pencil and asked me to copy it. He spoke to me in Persian and I could not understand him. He asked me to copy it and I did so. He then asked me to translate it into English. I did so and he was pleased.

He sent me another piece and asked me to copy it. He spoke to me in Persian and I could not understand him. He asked me to copy it and I did so. He then asked me to translate it into English. I did so and he was pleased.

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He sent me another piece and asked me to copy it. He spoke to me in Persian and I could not understand him. He asked me to copy it and I did so. He then asked me to translate it into English. I did so and he was pleased.'
Browne in Kirman

If Browne had not suddenly been called upon for his medical qualities, the merry-go-round in Shiraz could have lasted for quite a while. However, on 13 April 1888, an urgent telegram arrived and his help was requested for a Mrs Decroix, a European lady who was stuck in Dibhidh, five stages north-east of Shiraz. She was in labour, but had not yet succeeded in delivering the child with the help of a local midwife. The message brought Browne down to earth again; he hastened away from Shiraz and arrived in Dibhidh still in time to be of some use.

That done, Browne decided to go on, first to Yazd, where he stayed from Saturday, 5 May till Friday, 24 May 1888, and from there he proceeded to Kirman, which was to become his furthest destination in Iran, and where he arrived on Tuesday, 4 June 1888. In Kirman Browne evidently had arrived in a small world of his own, together with a Persian in-crowd of only a few regular visitors. He rented a house and a garden outside the town and he lived there with little contact with the townspeople. This freedom, Browne says himself in the Year, made his relatively long stay in Kirman the most unrestrained one. It gave occasion to several wild episodes. For details of these we need to go to the Diary, because the Year at best implies only some of these to a reader who is able to read between the lines.

Amongst the Qalendars

The Qalendars in the Islamic realm have, been compared, not incorrectly, with modern-day hippies. The two chapters in the Year about Kirman tell the reader about Kirman society and about Browne’s life there between 4 June and 20 August 1888, when he enjoyed the freedom of his isolated garden villa. Two of Browne’s companions stand out in the Kirman episode: they are both given pseudonyms by Browne. The first of the two Kirmani protagonists is Usta ‘Askar, a pachet of peas and Browne’s local Babi contact and informant. The other is Sheikh Ibrahim, whose actual name was Shaykh Sulyman. This Sheikh Ibrahim in Browne’s accounts gains almost mythical dimensions: ‘He was, indeed, one of the most extraordinary men whom I ever met, and presented a combination of qualities impossible in any but a Persian Anarchist, antinomian, heretic, and libertine to the very core, he gloried in drunkenness, and so on.’

Not all of the unpublished features of Browne’s Kirman episode are documented in the Diary. There is in fact a hiatus of about two weeks between the last date in volume 3 and the first date in volume 4 of the Diary; this hiatus covers the period between Sunday, 23 June and Sunday, 7 July 1888. In its present state the Diary does not seem to be incomplete, because the pages have consecutive numbering. It is possible that Browne did write about these weeks, but that he lost or destroyed the pages. Browne’s household records of these two weeks are available in the smaller notebook and according to those records nothing extraordinary seems to have happened.

It is evident that Browne was gradually going native. In his Diary he started adopting the Islamic lunar calendar, and, instead of writing in English in Persian script, he started to write his secret passages the other way around, in the Persian language but in Latin script. On Monday, 29 July 1888, Browne recorded a lengthy conversation with Usta ‘Askar about how to meet a dancing boy: ‘He then beckoned me to come out into the garden, & continued.’

Agar murād-i-rā in ast ki úr bi-bitīd, ú barat bi-khwāndān û bas, yek rūz mi-áramān bi-khānī-i-Asad Ullah Khan, amma agar xart-yà in mundah dād, úrki tā mi-áram injā niyā dálam. Farzad xez man mīlān; še dar bi-mī-khwād bi-man bi-gī, hāyat bi-kallāshā nīst, agar ūrba-šī in pisē shudūd tā, agar mi-khwāshū úrki māz kūnd, yā pahūyī bi-mī-khwāshū, yā úr ki bi-kundū, úrki tā únā nējā injā mi-áram shab injā bīshad: du nānāt in-šīrāb bi-āsh bi-dīh tā xawm bi-shāvad, va harchi mi-khwāshū bi-kur.

[If it is your wish to see him, that he sings for you and nothing else, then I will bring him one day to the house of Asadullah Khan, but if you have a wish that goes beyond that, then I will bring him here alone in a chest, but don’t hide anything from me. Whatever you want, tell me, there is no need for dissimulation. If you haven’t fallen in love with that boy, and you wish to kiss him, or to sleep with him, or to do him, then I will bring him here alone so that he can stay here for the night. Give him two or three cups of wine till daybreak and do whatever you want.]

He talked most in the same strain, saying, Agar dūkhār-i-khwādī mi-khwādī, xat yek rā dar āmānī-i-kuhd mi-gīrōm, wa úr ki bi-khānī-i-khād mi-áram; shūmā injā shah mi-ādī, wa hāz hān mi-khwāshū fānī. Agar bīshā mi-khwāshū, yak bīshā-i-bīshār khawgīl ast xū kā gāh gāh bi-dūkān-i-man mi-āyad wa mērā inīmās kuṇād, ‘ki mērā bi-khānī-i-khād bi-xārī amērē xū na-khwāshū.

[If you wish to have a nice girl, that is available. I take one in my name, and bring her to my house. Then you come there at night, and nobody will find out. If you want to have a boy, there is a very nice boy that from time to time comes to my shop and begs me: “Please, bring me to your house,” but I did not want him.]


[...] himself, and my body started to tremble because of the forceful temptation. I answered Usta ‘Askar: ‘May God prevent that I commit such a sin. I love this boy, and I know him just for his true beauty. How can I transform a Holy Place into a brothel of sodomy?’ He answered: ‘You want to kiss the Holy Place?’ I said: ‘Yes.’ He said: ‘Very well, it is just as you want it. If you want to do him, do him, if not, then don’t?’]

But it was becoming increasingly clear that Browne’s time in Kirman was almost up. He had to report back in Cambridge at the beginning of the new term, as the telegrams that he received reminded him. On 3 August 1888, he wrote:
Ferdowsi, the Mongols and the History of Iran

& I determined to go into town & see Usia 'Askar, wh. I did... 3 1/2 hrs before sunrise. He was not in his shop, & I went to his home, & found him out of sorts & depressed. Had taken a kalyan... Ådhlér bi-i gharan, k 'l kâu bi årvân-chah-bača-bađ dîd: bi har trairi k shuma mâyânât na-danîd. In gau, šâh-šâh là dîrast mi-kumán. Ya shuma-rà mi-bâram dar khaních-i-Muhammad-i-Tirýâl-mâl. Ya bača-bađ k 'l ì inà mi-trâm yakh-râ, ìwârî kî-kañwânàh, 'ishî mi-kunîd.

[Finally I said to him:] I absolutely have to see that derwish boy: by all means that you do not even think decent.' He said: 'I make his things in order. Either I bring you to the house of Muhammad the opium rubber, or I bring the boy together with him here for one night, so that he can sing, and you can make love.'"

On Thursday, 16 August 1888, after several delays, Browne finally fixed a date to leave Kirman.

In the days before his departure his mind was very much occupied by thoughts of the derwish boy, and his last day in Kirman was by all standards a chaotic one. On Sunday, 10 Dhu'l-Hijja (1309) 19 August 1888, the day before his actual departure from Kirman, Browne recorded a large part of the day in his Diary:


[Finally Usâa went away, and he came back, laughing and in a good mood. He said: I have seen the boy, and I have said to him here:] "The Sahib has fallen in love with you. He has come during the hot days to the town, and has been walking around looking for you till his eyes went sore, and then he wanted to kill himself for love. Now he has to go away and he wants to see you one more time. You have shown no mercy upon him, and on the day that you promised to come, you have not come, and if I tell this to your father he will hit you in your face."

The boy said: "It is not my fault. It is Muhammad's fault. I cannot come alone, because otherwise people will talk about me behind my back. If my father had been there, I would have come to the Sahib every day.""

[... Then, finally, the sun disappeared and Usâa said: In the name of God, let us go.] I asked for one more song, that line of Hatîn: 'May you sacrifice, both your heart and soul.' They reluctantly rose to go.

Usâa bi-'akhîr gûfî, 'Pishrîlah-i-sâhîb-rà na-khûmrâr-èk: Baché gûfî, 'Shûyêdî kî sâhîb ânàr làznà dûshî bûxûdâr, wa èlgar agar ânàr bi-khûmrâh az berîfi shuma mâyânât-hûla, za az berîfi khûshâm.' Man gûfûm, 'Agar sîr mi-khûlîd, àkîn sar: wa agar pishbî mi-khûmrâ, àkîn pishbîl.' Gufrûndî, 'Kheyvî, namûnîkîhîm; mi-khûmrâh iš¬îh-šuma-rà tâpirî-èk mi-kunîm.' Ådhlér yàk tûmâs ba-bača-da râîshî dîdâm, wa rafîm, wa tà dû dûdî dûxîhî àkîn ngàk kûrâmî, wa Muhammad mi-àsàd ùllâh wa darîshî bâchââ dîrastîndî, àkîn ngàk kûrâmî.'

Usâa said to the boy: 'Didn't you want to have the pistol of the Sahib?' The boy said: 'Maybe the Sahib is in need of it himself. And if I want to have it, then it is because of you, not because of myself.' I said: 'If you want to have my head, here it is. And if you want to have the pistol, here it is.' The Sahib said: 'No, we do not want it. We tested your love.' Finally, I gave the derwish boy one Oman, and then I went away. And till very far away I kept looking back, and Muhammad, Ausâdîlî and the derwish boy stood there and they looked at me.
FERDOWSI, THE MONGOLS AND THE HISTORY OF IRAN

27 Isæ, pp. 501–1.
28 Diary, vol. 3 ends with p. 439; Diary, vol. 4 begins with p. 432. The page numbers were possibly only added after Browne had returned to England.
30 A reference to the same title, Shemsh and His Companions, by the German author Friedrich de la More Fouquié (1777–1843), which in its English translation became immensely popular in Victorian England.
31 The Diary has, if I remember well, unedited, but that does not make sense.
32 The entire text is in Diary, pp. 456–7. Here only a few fragments are given.
33 Diary, p. 461.
34 The last day in Kirman is also in Isæ, pp. 500–1.
35 Diary, pp. 470–2. See, p. 592. This passage in the Diary is much longer than I reproduce here.
36 Browne papers, loan from Pembroke College to Cambridge University Library, box 1, packet 12 in particular. Other similar materials can be found elsewhere in the Browne papers.

STUDIES ON PERSIAN LITERATURE
Ferdowsi, the Mongols and the History of Iran

ART, LITERATURE AND CULTURE FROM EARLY ISLAM TO QAJAR PERSIA

Studies in Honour of Charles Melville

Edited by
Robert Hillenbrand, A.C.S. Peacock
and Fируза Abdullaeva

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Firuza Abdullaeva, University of Cambridge
Thomas T. Allen, College of New Jersey
Reuven Amitai, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Ali M. Ansari, University of St Andrews
Sussan Babaie, Courtauld Institute of Art
Gabrielle van den Berg, Leiden University
Michele Bernardini, University of Naples
Edmund Bosworth, University of Exeter
Barbara Brend, independent scholar
Sheila Canby, Metropolitan Museum of Art
Farhad Daftary, Institute of Ismaili Studies
Touraj Daryaee, University of California at Irvine
Olga Davidson, Boston University
Layla S. Diba, independent scholar
David Durand-Guédy, French Institute of Iranian Studies (IFRI)
Beatrice Forbes Manz, Tufts University
Christiane Gruber, University of Michigan
Carole Hillenbrand, University of Edinburgh
Robert Hillenbrand, University of Edinburgh
Peter Jackson, Keele University
Jan Just Wirkam, Leiden University
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31.8 Detail of spandrels of entrance of Qas minbar. Photograph: Bernard O'Kane.

31.9 Comparison of detail of Fig.32.2 with actual side of Qas minbar. Photograph: Bernard O'Kane.

31.10 Details of sides and back of Qas minbar showing 5-, 7-, 8-, 9-, 11- and 14-pointed stars. Photograph: Bernard O'Kane.

31.6 Detail of hexagon on side of Qas minbar. Photograph: Bernard O'Kane.

31.7 Minbar made for the shrine at Asqalun (684/1091-2), now in the Mas'ud Ibranos, Hebron. Photograph: Bernard O'Kane.

31.8 Detail of top of the minbar of the Jami' Nuri at Hama (559/1163-4). Photograph: Bernard O'Kane.

31.9 Detail of panel with cormocapsa on side of Qas minbar. Photograph: Bernard O'Kane.

31.10 Detail of inscription on backrest of Qas minbar. Photograph: Bernard O'Kane.

32.1 Binding (outer side of the back cover). Iran, Isfahan, c.1200/1178-6, NLR, PNS 383.

38.1 Benete (back and front). glazed ceramic. H. x 19 cm, W. 20 cm. Museum of Cairo University (no accession number), Cairo. Photographs courtesy of the Museum of Cairo University.

40.1 Amir Sami, Restore 2 - The Benete, Siyamak Filtadeh (Iran, b. 1974), 2009. Digital print on photo paper. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by the Karl Loring Trust and Art of the Middle East: Contemporary (M.2011.45.1) © Siyamak Filtadeh.