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Extracts from a Memorandum on the Country of Azerbaijan

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ADDITIONAL NOTICES.

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1.—*Extracts from a Memorandum on the Country of Azerbaijan.* By
KEITH E. ABBOTT, ESQ., H.M. Consul-General in Persia.

[Communicated by the FOREIGN OFFICE.]

THE country known to the Persians as Azerbaijan is divided between them and Russia, the latter Power possessing about five-eighths of the whole, which may be roughly stated to cover an area of about 80,000 square miles, or about the size of Great Britain; 50,000 square miles are therefore about the extent of the division belonging to Russia, and 30,000 of that which remains to Persia. The Russian division is bounded on the north and north-east by the mountains of Caucasus, extending to the vicinity of Bâkou on the Caspian. On the west it has the provinces of Imeritia, Mingrelia, Gooriel, and Ahkhiska (now belonging to Russia); on the east it has the Caspian Sea, and on the south the boundary is marked by the course of the River Arrass (Araxes) to near the 46th parallel of longitude, thence by a conventional line across the plains of Moghan to the district of Tâlish, and by the small stream of Astura which flows to the Caspian through the latter country. In this area are contained the following territorial divisions:—Georgia or Goorjistan, comprising Kakhetty, Kartaliny, Somekhetty, Kasakh; the Mohammedan countries of Eriwan, Nakhshewan, Karabâgh, Ghenja, Shirwan, Shekky, Shamachy, Bâkou, Koobeh, Salian and a portion of Tâlish.

Georgia is traversed by the River Koor (Cyrus), a stream of no commercial importance, since it is not navigable except by boats. After being joined from the north and south by many small tributaries, it unites its waters to those of the Arrass, a few miles above Salian, and flows to the Caspian. The Arrass which forms the principal line of boundary between the Persian and Russian possessions is likewise of no importance commercially, and its waters become very low in autumn.

A fresh-water lake (slightly brackish) of considerable extent, and surrounded by lofty and bleak mountains, is situated in the country of Eriwan. It is known as Lake Ghôkcheh, and abounds with trout of a large size. A small island situated near the western shore possesses an ancient Armenian monastery known as that of Sevënn. The climate of this lake is cold and variable. Winter sets in early, and the road lying along the western shore and carried by the edge of deep precipices is one of great danger to travellers at that season. On the same shore is found a colony of Mallekkans, Russian sectarians who have been persecuted by their Government and are kept here in permanent banishment. I believe that they may be regarded as reformers; they are dissenters from the Russo-Greek church, and one of their principles is the rejection of picture-worship. There is also a colony of Jews there.

Some miles beyond the Lake of Ghôkcheh, on the north, commences the great descent by the Pass of Dilijan through a broad strip of wooded mountain country. Here the sides of the descent are clothed with fir, oak, beech, elm, and other trees. The Pass extends through about 36 miles of descent, at first very abrupt; the road, though not good, affording very charming pictures of greenwood scenery.

Tiflis is the capital of all the Russian possessions south of the Caucasus. The old town is said to date from 469 A.D., and possessed a fort on the heights. The modern or Russian town is already a handsome place and yearly increasing in size; but it possesses no object of especial interest. There are hot springs used for public baths. The summit of the Kazbeg, the second highest peak of the Caucasus, is seen from the streets, and the Koor flows through the place in a deep channel and rapid stream of width varying, probably according to the season, from 100 to 200 yards. The population of Tiflis is credibly estimated at 70,000 or 80,000 souls, a mixed race of Georgian Christians, Russians, Armenians, and Mohammedans. Its climate is oppressively warm in summer, and fevers of a malignant kind are prevalent at that season and in early autumn. In winter it is variable, with cold searching winds. The city has now apparently great chance of rising into importance. An electric telegraph has been established between it and Poti on the Black Sea, and the line is being carried on to the Persian frontier of Azerbaijan. A fine macadamized road, leading for a great distance over very mountainous and difficult country, has been established between the Black Sea and Tiflis, and the scheme of a railway for the same line is under consideration; and English engineers employed for the survey regard it as practicable, though at a great cost. The productions of Georgia Proper appear to be of limited importance, serving only for local consumption; and such indeed is the general poverty of the Russian Trans-Caucasian districts, that they do not produce sufficient for their thinly-scattered population augmented by the presence of the Russian troops. The latter are therefore supplied with food from Astracan.

Dense forest commences at some miles north of Tiflis, and extends to the mountains of Daghistan, and the country west of the city is more or less wooded to the confines of Imeritia, which, with its sister provinces of Mingrelia and Gooriel, is occupied to a great extent with deep jungle.

The population of Russian Azerbaijan consists of mixed races, Mohammedan and Christian, amounting probably to 700,000 or 800,000 souls. Georgia Proper is chiefly occupied by Christians of the Greek Church, but Armenians are scattered among them and over all the Russian possessions south of the Caucasus, being numerous in Nakhshewan, Karâbagh, and Ahkhiska. This estimate of numbers does not include the inhabitants of the mountains of the eastern and western Caucasus, on which subject little is known. The Mohammedans are principally of the Shieh sect, are much divided, as in Persia, into tribes, and have been with some difficulty kept in subjection by the Russians, though there is now little chance of their ever emancipating themselves from the yoke of their present rulers.

Persian Azerbaijan extends southwards to the range of mountains known as the Kâflan Kooh. On the west side it has the Ararat or Byazeed frontier, the pashalik of Van, and the lofty mountains of Koordistan; whilst on the east are Russian and Persian Tâlish, and a range of mountains commencing at about the 39th degree of north latitude, and extending southwards past the 36th degree, where, sweeping to the east, it stretches across Arâk and Khorassan in nearly an unbroken chain, blending with the loftier range of the Hindoo Koosh of Afghanistan, and may thus be said to be continuous with the Himalaya. It will be seen that this range, starting from the point above mentioned, shuts in the low wooded countries of Tâlish, Gheelan, Mazenderan, and Asterabad, lying on the Caspian, from the upland or elevated country of northern and central Persia.

The country included in these boundaries, and perhaps a large part, if not all, of Russian Azerbaijan, is generally recognised as the Medea Atropatena of ancient geography. The principal districts of Persian Azerbaijan are as follows:—Tabreez, Khoee, Oroumieh, Marâgha, Soorek Bonlâgh (to which belong Serdusht and Sayn Kaleh), Ardebul and Mishkeen, Khalkhâl.

The country of Persian Azerbaijan consists of an elevated tract of mountain and plain, the latter being situated at heights varying from 4000 to 5000 English feet above the level of the sea. From this elevated base spring the mountain-ranges, the loftiest point of which attains an elevation of 15,400 feet above the sea.

The city of Tabreez is situated at about 4330 feet above the sea, and some of the mountain-ranges, &c., are as follows:—

	Feet.
Serhund (highest point)	11,200
Passage across it to Marâgha	9,950
Hot springs of Leewan	8,370
Mount Savalan near Ardebul	15,400
Limit of grain-cultivation on that mountain ..	8,200
Hot springs at its foot (31·7 Réaumur) ..	5,530
Lake of Oroumieh	4,200*

The Lake of Oroumieh is the only extensive sheet of water in Persian Azerbaijan. It is about 80 miles in length, and has been computed to be about 300 miles in circumference, though this is probably an exaggerated estimate. The intense saltness of its waters is its most remarkable feature, and so great is its specific gravity, consequent thereupon, that the human body is quite buoyant in it. Its waters are supposed to contain no living creature excepting a kind of polype. Fishes which are carried into it by the rivers perish, yet it is the resort of great flocks of the beautiful flamingo, which, at certain seasons, cover its shores and may be seen wading far into the water, for the lake is very shallow at a distance from land.

Numerous islands and rocks are found in the lake, but none of them are inhabited by man. The most interesting, and one of the largest, situated opposite to Shishawan, is the abode of large flocks of the mouflon, or wild sheep, the descendants of a colony placed there, some years ago, by a Persian prince. There are also wild asses and oxen, from tame breeds, and an abundance of partridges. A great deal of rather low wood is found in the island, consisting of the benneh, or wild pistachio, and the sakkiz. A peninsula runs into the lake on its eastern side, in the shape of a huge mountain, known as Shâhee. It forms a Mahâl, or district of the province, and contains six villages. The only vessels found on this lake are three or four large, rudely and singularly-constructed boats, wedge-shaped, and with square sterns and flat bottoms, one mast, and a heavy cumbersome sail.

Tabreez, the capital of the province, and in every respect the most important city of the empire, is, in extent, probably now superior to Ispahan, and it is considerably larger than Teheran. No statistics exist of the population, which, at a rough estimate may be put down at 150,000. It consists of a walled city, in circuit about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, with very extensive suburbs. Its situation is at the south-eastern corner of a vast plain extending about 100 miles east and west, and is picturesque owing to the outline and formation of the mountains in its vicinity and the density of the foliage of groves and gardens; but the town in itself has nothing to boast of. Its bazaars, though extensive and well supplied, are in general narrow and meanly-constructed; its streets, as in all Persian towns, confined, irregular, and abounding in holes and inequalities. Filth of every kind is thrown into them, and those leading immediately along the ramparts present a spectacle at once of ruin and neglect, such as I suppose is not surpassed in any other eastern town. The city is surrounded by a dry ditch, a glacis, and a low wall, and a second or inner wall,

* I am indebted for most of the above observations of heights to the kindness of M. Khanikoff, a Russian gentleman of high scientific attainments.

and towers at about 50 paces back. The city has been frequently injured by earthquakes. I have known nine shocks to occur in one night.

Tabreez has now become the principal seat of commerce in all Persia, and is the mart from which nearly all the northern and midland countries are supplied with the produce and manufactures of Europe, conveyed to it chiefly by land-transport from the Black Sea. These have been estimated at as high a value as 1,750,000*l.* in the year, brought in about 87,000 packages or half mule-loads, the value of the portion from England being probably full three-fourths of the whole. Since the war in America has arisen, however, there has been a great falling off in the trade; English cotton manufactures being so much more difficult to procure and so much more expensive than before. The place contains about 3100 shops of all descriptions, 30 caravanseries occupied by merchants and traders, and about 40 others devoted to the accommodation of muleteers and their cattle. It is divided into 15 mahullehs, or principal wards, besides subdivisions, and possesses 9 city-gates. The population, as in other Persian towns, is for the most part Mohammedan, but about 330 families of Armenians are found there. The place is resorted to by a few Europeans having commercial or other interests there, and the governments of England and Russia have consuls-general established in it. It is also the seat of an Armenian bishopric depending on Etch Miazin.

Within the enclosure called the Ark rises a vast mass of very beautiful brickwork, erected by Aly-Shah, one of the viziers of the Cazan Shah (9th in descent from Chenghis), who flourished about the year 700 A.H., or 1300 A.D. The building was originally a mosque, and had a dome, which has long since fallen in, the consequence of earthquakes, which have sorely tried the strength of this fine structure and rent it in two places. Almost the only remaining object of interest in the place, in the shape of a building, consists in the ruins of a beautiful structure known as the Blue Mosque, situated in one of the suburbs. The founder was Jehan Shah, chief of the tribe of the Black Sheep, and the 3rd sovereign of a small Tartar dynasty which reigned in the North of Persia for a period of 63 years. The building is said by one traveller, M. Tancoigne, to have been destroyed by earthquake in 1559. The ruin consists of the principal arched entrance, of fine proportions, and ornamented in the richest manner with the blue-glazed tile, famous in Persia, which is wrought in devices of white, black, and other colours, in excellent taste, and with Arabic inscriptions in large characters beautifully adjusted. Behind this building are to be seen some of the finest specimens of the Tabreez marble, or alabaster, in enormous slabs.

The vineyards in Azerbaijan consist of vast walled enclosures as large as English fields; the area within is cut up into deep trenches with corresponding banks, facing north and south, three or four feet in height. On the northern side of these banks the vines are planted, and when sufficiently grown are trained over to the southern side, where the fruit becomes more fully exposed to the sun whilst the roots are kept cool in the shade. About five years are required before any return is reckoned on from a newly-planted vineyard. The vine seems to thrive even in the poorest and sandiest soils; the great requisite being a sufficient supply of water. Long and straight lines of walk, cutting each other at right angles, divide the vineyards into so many quarters or sections, and fruit-trees and vines as standards are planted along them. Beyond the rich clustering of the grapes of many beautiful kinds and the profuse bearing of the fruit-trees, however, there is not much that is attractive in a Persian vineyard. This kind of cultivation is yearly extending itself, and the quantity of fruit produced in the orchards, vineyards, and fields is sufficient to provide the poorest of the population with a delicious adjunct to their meals, such as is unknown in most parts of Europe, and some of the fruits are preserved through the greater part of the winter. A great deal of

wine, of a very good quality when properly prepared, is made at Tabreez by the Christians and drunk by them and the Mohammedans. It is exceedingly cheap, costing about 4*d.* or 5*d.* a bottle. At some of the villages great quantities of dried fruits are prepared for Russia and other parts.

Undoubtedly the city of Tabreez has greatly increased in extent and population during the past thirty years, but it is thought that this has been very much at the expense of the surrounding districts, the population of which has to some degree been attracted to the city merely by the greater freedom from oppression enjoyed where a large community of men is found. In its commerce Tabreez has made great advances since 1830, a traffic having sprung up with Europe which had attained in 1860 to an amount eight times greater than in the former year, and though, in my opinion, it probably then reached the highest figure it is capable of, I think that in some other respects the prospects of the province are more encouraging than ever. In 1859 an electric telegraph was established between Tabreez and Teheran, which as a speculation has answered exceedingly well, and is understood to have repayed the outlay within the first year; though from its having been very carelessly constructed it is frequently rendered unserviceable. I have already alluded to the telegraph carried from the Black Sea to Tiflis and thence towards the Persian frontier of Azerbaijan, which is probably ere this completed, and the Persian Government has undertaken to connect the two lines by extending the former through the short distance which now separates them, so that, when completed, direct intelligence may be transmitted from Europe, *viâ* St. Petersburg, to Tabreez and Teheran by one uninterrupted line of electric communication. This must tell favourably on the commerce of the country, by giving increased rapidity and activity to affairs, and the various improvements which are going forward in the communications through the Russian Trans-Caucasian possessions must also act advantageously on the condition and prospects of Northern Persia. The country possesses every requisite for prosperity, excepting good government; a fine, healthy, and, during part of the year, bracing climate; varied agricultural productions, raised with comparatively little labour or expense in a genial and fertilizing temperature; mountains rich in metallic productions and coal, which have hitherto been little attended to, but which a more direct communication with Europe will some day bring into notice; and, finally, a hardy and intelligent race for its inhabitants, capable of being turned to any good account.

2. *The Western Shore of the Dead Sea, from Jebel Usdum to Ain Jidy.*

[Extracts from a Paper by Rev. GEORGE CLOWES, R.A., F.R.G.S., announced to be read at the Evening Meeting, 22nd February, 1864.]

THIS journey was performed early in the month of April, 1863, in company with four friends, under the guidance of Abu Dahûk, Sheikh of the Jehâlîm tribe of Arabs. The party reached the shores of the Dead Sea through the Wady ez-Zuweirah. A broad plain here stretches towards the water, across which they rode; Jebel Usdum, a narrow, saddle-backed ridge, lying in front, separated from the hills on the west. Whilst crossing the plain they observed dead trees standing in the water at some distance from the shore. With regard to these Mr. Clowes remarks, "I find from Mr. Grove's valuable article on the Dead Sea, in Dr. Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible,' that Mr. Poole, in October, 1855, remarked the same thing. As this was at the time of the year when the water was at its lowest, it seems more than probable that a permanent rise in the level of the sea has taken place of late years." Arriving at the north-east angle of Jebel Usdum, the party reached the point where the mountain approaches within