

The background of the cover is an aerial photograph of a dry, cracked landscape. A road with several arrows pointing to the right is visible in the lower half. The top half shows a cracked, dry landscape. The text is overlaid on this image.

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TEXTOS e mundos em DESLOCAÇÃO

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**IMPRESSÃO**

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## TRAVELLERS

TO PERSIA IN THE  
THIRTIES: MAUD VON  
ROSEN, ROBERT BYRON  
AND MARGRET BOVERI\*

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I would like to analyse here three books about travels to Iran in the thirties, a Golden Age of travel literature: Maud von Rosen's *Insh'Allah!* (1935)<sup>1</sup>, Robert Byron's *The Road to Oxiana* (1937)<sup>2</sup>, Margret Boveri's *Ein Auto, Wüsten, Blaue Perlen* (1939).<sup>3</sup> For different reasons they left Sweden, Britain and Germany to get to know other cultures, far away from their own. They visited and wrote travelogues about the country ruled by the strong hand of Reza Shah Pahlavi: he defended the modernisation of the country. He therefore changed the name: Iran would be the name of the renewed country up to then known as Persia.<sup>4</sup> At the same time Persia/Iran was seen by some Westerners as still having some exoticism.

Travelling in the thirties was impelled by different reasons, the most immediate of which was seeing how the new ideologies and imperialistic situations had an impact in the countries visited. Another reason was "the pursuit of leisure and the desire to escape the repressive constraints of home." (Burdett/Duncan: 4) It was still possible to travel to countries or regions which were still free "from an all-encompassing Western influence" (*ibidem*: 4/5)

Mankind has always travelled for the most varied reasons: to search for food, on pilgrimages, to discover new worlds, to go on adventures, to have fun.<sup>5</sup> In the thirties the world had already been discovered, therefore literary travel writing no longer had the function of informing the reader about the different

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cultures the writer came into contact with. The main goal was to show one's own travel experiences, one's contacts. The traveller's "I" was very much in the centre of the discourse, otherwise there was the danger of simply repeating what others had previously written. These type of texts are related to the diary and, to a lesser degree, to autobiography, since the narrated time usually corresponds to a short period, in the case of the books chosen here not exceeding eleven months. "Travel writing is a representational space, a set of discourses that imagines space in a certain way, often at odds with official representation of space." (Thacker: 24.) We want to see how the three travellers represent the space and how they relate to it.

It is very important for us to know as much as one can about the

*strategic location*, which is a way of describing the author's position in a text [...] and *strategic formation*, which is a way of analysing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large. (Said 1995:20)<sup>6</sup>

We can easily detect different intentions in our authors, which will condition their way of seeing and writing: von Rosen travels as a reporter and adventurer, Byron as an erudite, Boveri as a journalist.

We have to distinguish between the travellers themselves, with their own contexts, with the really experienced moments and the text travellers, who represent the authors, having their own contexts as well, but in a different moment: the one of the writing down based on the travelogues or notebooks, instruments of memory, some during the journey and some home, not travelling any longer through paths but through words. In any case there is a time distance, which can of course be bigger or smaller. The bigger the distance the more the author's imagination and aesthetical discourse capacity may mingle with the author's

memory, and make it easier for an “untruth” to slip into the text. Tim Youngs writes: “accomplished travel writing is no less imaginative or well-crafted than five novels or poems” (Youngs: 55). Writing later means you have the control of the whole scene, so that you can construct your texts according to your own intentions. Literary travel writings are a mixture of represented reality and fiction. But fiction cannot be dominant: a reader of this type of texts expects true rendering of the author’s experiences, the true facts referred to, indeed we could say there exists a sort of “referential pact”. (François Hourmant *apud* Cogeze, p. 22) The reader must have confidence and believe what he reads is right, because he himself is seldom in a position to be able to verify what he is reading, except for the historical and geographical factual information he can check through books and the internet. >>

Travelling means meeting the Other in his or her own context. It is almost impossible for a traveller to enter entirely in that context while travelling, in our case, to the Middle East, unless he lives there for a very long time – but even then he cannot totally free himself from his roots, his ways of seeing, feeling and interpreting will always influence his discourse. This means travellers (and readers) see the Other from the outside: they are constructing a personal bridge among cultures.

The Other for the reader only exists in the writers’ discursive construct. It is their vision of the outside world. Their contexts are important elements in the understanding of both the strategic location and formation. First of all they do not travel with empty “rucksacks”: they carry with them the dominant discourses about the Other and, just as important, what they have read, often quoted in the texts themselves. They carry imagotypes, heterostereotypes, clichés: they will confront these with the reality they apprehend, which will lead them to correct or reaffirm the previous images. As Jean-Marc Moura puts it, the Other is sometimes seen as the exotic, as a reflex and not as an empathy – in this case it can “renvoyer les images

préconçues de l'alterité plutôt que de s'accorder à l'essentielle indétermination de celle-ci" (Moura: 63) This means the less determined our images are, the more open we are towards the Other. The more determined are our images the more they are characterised by the absence of the features of the Other not contained in our images. The constructs of the travel writers can be a mixture of "pre-images" (Vor-Bilder, in German) and own interpretations, or just the reaffirmation or correction of those previous images. There is no such a thing as a *voyageur pur*, one who departs with no knowledge at all, with no readings, according to Ette. (Ette 2001: 64)<sup>7</sup>

Another important aspect of meeting the Other is the knowledge of the language: if I cannot speak farsi, I need a translator to be able to talk to the Iranian people I am about to meet. But a translator can be a censor, can adapt to the foreigners context or be interested in conveying a good or bad image of the region or the people. As Cronin writes in an article about language barriers in travel literature, "the use of foreign words and expressions heightens the impression of foreignness and otherness in the reader" (Cronin: 27). One has to take into account travel time as well: some travellers just speed through the regions<sup>8</sup>, others stay for long periods (such as Gertrud Bell, T. E. Lawrence, Isabelle Eberhardt). Time – together with the knowledge of the language – means being more open to the Other, to approach the Other's own context, to diminish the colonial, postcolonial, European "orientalist" way of seeing the Other.<sup>9</sup>

The Middle East has long ago been an important part of European identity and our history and religion have strong links with this region in the past. The Europeans had a representation of those people, they were fascinated not by them, but the images they had about them, which were a sort of projection of desires and fears, specially since the specially since the Renaissance and developed specially during the romantic period, where the Orient was seen as, among other attributes, a source of discursive

hedonism, of exoticism, eroticism, the image of the caliphs and their courts, of the projection of the forbidden at home in the culture of the Other, or better in the cultural construct of the Other. There was too a demonisation of the Oriental, very often in the popular discourse. European renderings — more adaptations than translations in some cases — of *Thousand and one Nights*<sup>10</sup> were important sources of inspiration, as were some Arabian and Persian poets. Let us remember Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721) or Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan* (1819). The many travel writings of the 19th and the 20th century corrected some of those images, but the fascination continues: the "old" poets still attract a wide range of readers, who have been ever since object of publications, interest in archaeology and architecture is great, nomadism has attracted many curious Europeans and the traditional images of castles, sensuality and cruelty are still important, as we can see in our texts.<sup>11</sup>

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But, as we will see, the regard is always a European. It will be interesting to see things from the other viewpoint: Iranians seeing Europeans. Since 1979 many Iranians have fled the Islamic Revolution and established themselves both in Western Europe and in the USA. They have already written many interesting books, allowing us to study their way of seeing us. But that is not the theme of this paper. Here I will deal only with the "orientalist" vision of a Swede, a Briton and a German of a Persia (Iran from 1935 on), whose autocratic leader Shah Pahlavi was very interested in certain type of westernisation, and which was very much coveted of the British, French and Americans because of the oil. At this time the imperialistic eye was a very complex one, the strategic powers were changing. Therefore the traditional stereotyped images still exist, but they hardly stand the confrontation with the images of the new travellers, who question in one form or the other the old images. But there is one common trace that remains: most of them consider the Westerners to be superior. One can detect three very common themes: the position of women, the bureaucracy and the traffic infrastructures.

I will start with the earliest book by the Swedish Countess Ella Clara Lillian Maud von Rosen (1902). Little is known about her, except for what she has written. She was married to a count, who was in the diplomatic service. While he was military attaché in Washington, she went around the USA and wrote a book *Vi titta på Amerika* [*We look at America*] (1933). Two years later she travelled on her own to Persia for some months as a reporter. *Insh'Allah!* was first published in the magazine *Idun* and then in book form. In the thirties some publishing houses were keen on publishing travel books, as they sold well, being a way for readers to escape from their experience of the European crisis. They were lucrative, therefore the publishers paid in advance for these books, so that authors could travel. Maud von Rosen intended to publish *Insh'Allah!* as book, which is one of the reasons she does not use the direct form of a diary, as many travel writers do. Let us briefly analyse the subtitle: "Being the story of a journey through Persia with its experiences and adventures" ["Upplevelser och äventyr under en resa i Persien"]. She centres her attention on the travel subject, and has no specific purpose for her journey. It is not so much the object that matters but the subjective reaction towards that object.

She dedicates the book to the Swedish and Nordic engineers she meets there "to assist the Iranian nation in its work of developing and improving its charming country under the leadership of its powerful ruler" (MR-E: v) ([att få bistå den iranska nationen i dess arbete att utveckla och förbättra sitt vackra land under sin kraftfulle härskares ledning] [MR-S: 7])<sup>12</sup>. The title suggests her enthusiasm for the country and her wish not to present the country from the dominant European viewpoint. In a tea-party Madame Ley Bey says to the narrator: "To visit a land with entirely different habits, with a different type of face, and a mentality so foreign that its understanding is a problem, must be an experience worth having." (MR-E: 23) ([Att komma till ett land med helt andra seder, andra ansikten, så främmande att det är ett problem att försöka förstå och



utröna vad de tänka, måste vara en upplevelse] [MR-S: 22]). This quotation is from the beginning of the second chapter, so that the reader is well aware of the difficulties and the challenges Maud von Rosen had to face. In order to understand this country, she gives voice not only to her views but to the prejudiced views of other foreigners, and specially of some Iranians, such as the Prince Mosteazan or a bank director, so that her European "orientalist" perspective can be corrected or affirmed by the Persians themselves. One notices very early in the book that Maud von Rosen has a problem to solve: on the one hand she appreciates Reza Shah Pahlavi's efforts to modernize the country, specially by renewing the miserable traffic infrastructures in many parts of the country, but on the other hand she is rightly afraid for the traditions, the Persian way of living, the nomads and their camels, a culture, which could be destroyed by the western machinery of civilisation. That dilemma is clearly shown in the tension between the text and the 91 photographs, most of them taken by the author herself.<sup>13</sup> In a very interesting article, Maria Cronqvist and Agneta Edman analyse the relation between von Rosen's texts and photographs: the author describes in words (her own and those of other characters quoted) the modernisation of Iran, but in the photographs she depicts only the traditional, ethnographic aspects, not a single photo shows the works the Shah was most proud of, except for the photo of a bridge built by the Swedes (Cronqvist/Edman: 254-262). These pictures stand out of the context of the text ([kontextlösa bilder] [*idem*: 246]), meaning that they are not continuations or illustrations of what the text says. Maud von Rosen's two sorts of "languages" speak different things, present her own dichotomous way of seeing the different forces which are present.

Like most travellers von Rosen also made contacts with foreigners in Persia.<sup>14</sup> The first contact was in a hairdressing saloon in Teheran. There she meets some foreigners, specially an English lady who showed a "sovereign ignorance". Later she

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went on to meet another English lady who is "doing the Orient" (MR-E: 222; MR-S: 274) and is disappointed because she does not find the romantic side, the one transmitted by the orientalist, colonialist discourse, which clearly shows that that type of discourse still was much alive and was part of the identity of some social strata, who could afford to travel: "I have found no Oriental splendour anywhere in the East" (MR-E: 223) ([Jag finner för resten igen orientalisk prakt någonstans i Orienten]. [MR-S: 275])<sup>15</sup> Through the voice of this English lady, von Rosen is able to present some ways of appreciate a country which are not in fact her own.

I will not stress the topoi on Iran which she uses like most of the travellers: the bazaars, the dreadful traffic because of the bad roads, a certain insecurity, the opium smokers, the veil and the curious Pahlavi hats, ordered by the Shah for every man to wear. It is interesting to note that she did not want to travel to Persepolis to write about it, since so much had already been written about those ruins, which are UNESCO world heritage, and about which there is no more to be said. Maud von Rosen is interested in numerous aspects of Persian life, including the Persian dancing, a parallel to the delicacy of Persian verse and decoration (MR-E: 109-110 and 58) (MR-S: 124-5 and 63), so that the reader gets a broad picture of the country from a middle and high-class perspective. She is struck by the way Iranians answer all questions very often in the form of proverbs, and by their attitude towards time in this country where there is no haste (MR-E: 196). To understand Iran, one has to understand Islam: therefore she dedicates three chapters to conversations she had with a mullah.

One way of showing the contrast between civilizations is to compare situations, as she does showing how Iranian women are astonished about the way Europeans treat their women, as we can see in this example:

They saw with astonishment how one of the directors helped me politely up on to the best mule. In their view it was not of any importance what beast the woman rode, as long as the men arrived safely and comfortably. (MR-E: 204)

[Med mycken häpnad åsågo de, hur en av direktörerna egenhändigt hjälpte mig upp på den bästa mulan. Vad kvinnan red på var väl inte så viktigt, om bara männen kommo säkert och bekvämt fram]. (MR-S: 251)

They were also very astonished to see a woman travelling around without her husband. One Iranian even wanted to buy her, for 15 tomans (at the time £ 2 10s.), including the clothing! And girls did not choose their husbands — that was a matter discussed among the families. These attitudes towards women were similar in other Arabian countries. >>

The book ends with an ambiguous situation, showing the dilemma von Rosen experienced throughout the whole journey: this time was a procession in honour of Hussein, a shi'a islamic tradition. But she happens to find out later, that this procession she attended to was not a true one, just a fake, put on her, so that she could write about it. But the last lines of the book are in a very positive tone: "Yes, Mullah Mohammed Ali, I shall return with joy to Iran, Insh'Allah." (MR-E: 288) ([Ja, Mullah Mohammed Ali, med glädje skulle jag återvända till Iran. Insh'Allah.] [MR-S: 363]).

Robert Byron (1905-1941) was an English travel writer, well known for *The Road to Oxiana*<sup>16</sup>, but not for the other books he wrote, which some see as rather dull. He was of upper class origins, a true humanist, taking a stand against fascism and every anti-humanist attitude from politics to religions. Unlike Maud von Rosen, he had a particular aim in his travels: mainly to study the local architecture, in this case specially the Seljuk (11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Timureid (1387-1502) and the Safavid (1502-1737) periods.<sup>17</sup> Bruce Chatwin, another paradigmatic

English traveller, wrote in the introduction to the 1981 Picador edition that he raised the book "to the status of "sacred text", and thus beyond criticism". (RB: 9) Some, such as for instance the writer William Dalrymple, see Byron as an aesthete among the travel writers. <sup>18</sup>

He prepares his journey by reading Percy Sikes' *Ten Thousand Miles Across Persia*, Upham Pope's *Persian Survey* among other books. Some believe he had links to the British Secret Service, just as T.E.Lawrence, the famous Lawrence of Arabia did (s. Ramade: 65-66). He is very critical towards some fellow travellers:

One knows these modern travellers, these overgrown prefects and pseudoscientific bores despatched by congregations of extinguished officials to see if sand-dunes sing and snow is cold. [...] and beyond ascertaining that sand dunes do sing and snow is cold, what do they observe to enlarge the human mind? / Nothing. (RB: 233)

Byron travelled for about ten months with a friend, Christopher Sykes, a British diplomat who was also very interested in architecture. He is sometimes referred to and is sometimes a character of the "narrative", but, as often happens in this type of text, the travel companion has a very secondary role and we know very little about him.<sup>19</sup> He writes his book after the journey (in England and later in China), "though the journal style and the impression that it was written at speed on the journey, were retained." (Booth: 166)

The book in the form of a diary starts in Venice on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1933, with the correspondent entries about time and place. They travel by ship to Cyprus and Palestine, then to Syria and Iraq before reaching Persia. This part takes about 30 pages. They continue to Persia for about 126 pages and to Afghanistan for about 90 pages. The return trip through India and the voyage by sea takes only four pages. In Persia they first travel in the Northern part of the country, then to Afghanistan, specially to

visit the wonderful town of Herat, where Byron stays for about 23 pages. Afterwards they come back to Persia, this time travelling the South, which he likes much more because of the architectural richness he discovers.

He is very critical of the "orientalist" approach of many travellers to this part of the world, specially the British, whom he meets here and there in towns and at parties. "Here, with Byron, it is, however, taken to witty extremes and used pointedly to deflate the Western discourses of Orientalism" (Pfister: 484.) He is very critical of the Shah, who is always ironically called Marjoribanks: "We seem to be approaching a medieval tyranny of modern sensibilities" (RB: 39). Even if Byron understands the need for modernisation, the tyrannical way of achieving it cannot meet Byron's approval. One example is the hats every man has to use: "Why does the Shah make them wear those hats?". (RB: 51; see 85 too)

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We could say this diary deals mainly with two things: on the one hand with the travel conditions (the difficulty in getting around, specially when it rains, because the rivers flood and the roads blocked by stone falls) and, on the other, with the architectural descriptions, linked with the history of the buildings being described. The description of the journey is easy reading, because it is so well written and very vividly, while they travel by taxi, a hired or his own car (very old, bought there), lorries, buses and horses, allowing them to meet on those public transport people and the authorities with their very complicated bureaucratic practices. Byron very often quotes dialogues, usually very amusing parts. To be as realistic as possible he refers to the makes of the cars and lorries: Reo, Chevrolet, Austin, Bedford and the Rolls-Royce of his friends, who he meets during the journey (helping to define them socially!). An ironic situation is the Charcoal-Burner cars, a technique the British were developing and proved of no success in this journey! The description of the buildings, specially mosques, palaces and monuments is very nice too, but

sometimes are so lengthy and detailed that it is off-putting for some readers.

*The Road to Oxiana* is "a surprisingly political book", as Pfister puts it: "This new emphasis on global or local political contexts shifts the modern travelogue towards journalism and reportage, and this generic shift has far-reaching consequences for the representation of the Other: the timeless fantasies of the Orient and of the Oriental give way to, or at least counterbalanced by, an awareness of historically specific and concretely manifest relations of power." (Pfister: 472/3) It is easy for a reader to follow the political situation in the region through Byron's book, even if the facts in Iran and Afghanistan are just mentioned.

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He understands that the Persians are not particularly keen on the British: the Shah got to power with the help of Great Britain, but soon started to think for himself and started to have problems, specially because of the colonial interests in oil.<sup>20</sup> "Byron's aim was to question the dominance and univocal deployment of Western and colonialist narratives. [...] Byron does not reach a position wholly beyond the prejudices and imbalances of his time." (Booth: 163/4, 170) The Iranians were not particularly pleased either with the fact that the British, German and American archaeologists came and took so many valuable Persian artefacts to their countries. (RB: 164)

A few pages are dedicated to landscape and to beautiful gardens of wealthy and powerful Persians (for instance RB: 145). He was enthusiastic about the steppes of Gumbad-i-Kabus:

Our spirits had risen when we left the plateau. Now they effervesced. We shouted for joy, stopping the car lest the minutes that were robbing us of the unrepeatable first vision should go faster. Even the larks in this paradise had lost their ordinary aloofness. (RB: 197)

Later he refers to his description in the following terms:

Superlatives applied by travellers to objects which they have seen, but most people have not, are generally suspect; I know it, having been guilty of them. But re-reading this diary two years later, in as different an environment as possible (Pekin [sic]), I still hold the opinion I formed before going to Persia, and confirmed that evening on the steppe: that the Gumbad-i-Kabus ranks with the great buildings of the world. (RB: 199)

Irony is always present, specially where he observes from a distance the parties, his contacts with Persians and foreigners, but even with art, when it is not to his liking. A good example is his description of rock carvings in Naksh-i-Rustam: >>

A Sasanian<sup>21</sup> group. The king, wearing muslin cowboy trousers, squared-toe shoes fluttering long ribbons, and a hair-balloon, confronts an allegorical figure whose municipal crown, piled with sausage curls, might have been designed by Bernard Partridge.<sup>22</sup> (RB: 160)

When Byron is not particularly interested in the subject, he passes fast, leaving behind perhaps an ironical comment, which characterizes himself more than the object. For instance, he is not interested in old Persian literature, even if it is contemporary to the buildings he is so keen on describing. About Firdausi (935-1020)<sup>23</sup>, the author of the Persian national epic, *Shahnama*, he writes the following:

[N]ext year will see the thousandth anniversary of Firdaussi's birth. Foreigners have heard of Firdaussi. They esteem him as only a poet can be esteemed whom no one has ever read. And it is expected, therefore, that their tributes will flatter not his work so much as his nationality. Such at least is the Persian hope. (RB: 85)

The most famous Persian poets Hafiz (c. 1320-1389) and Saadi (d. 1292) are only referred to because Byron visited the gardens where they are buried. Not another word!

Another interesting note for the modern reader us today is his appreciation of the giant Buddha figures, recently destroyed by the Taliban: he thinks they are ugly.

But if he likes things he writes a good deal about them. For instance about Isfahan, a town which delighted him: "One could explore for months without coming to the end of them.[...] I have never encountered splendour of this kind before." (RB: 172 and 175)

Byron's journey truly deserves its fame and inspired other writers such as Ella Maillart, William Dalrymple, Nicole Bouvier. His language is very lively, ironic, plastic, and succeeds in capturing his vision of Persia and Afghanistan, even if he is not particularly interested in ethnography.

Margret Boveri (1900-1975) was a German journalist, daughter of a German biologist and an American, who was also a biologist.<sup>24</sup> She studied history and politics and finished her studies with a dissertation on "Sir Edward Grey und das Foreign Office" (1933). Her interest in foreign affairs was one of her permanent characteristic. From 1934 on, she worked on the newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt*, in the department of foreign news. In the first years of National-Socialism, control over the papers was not yet complete, so that it was still possible to write things which did not coincide wholly with the party policy. But it was necessary to take care, not to attack those in power: all leading articles had to be submitted to the Ministry of Propaganda, so you had to play the game if you wanted a job. All journalists had to be members of the *Reichsverband der deutschen Presse*. Boveri wrote on questions concerning the Middle East, Egypt, South East Europe. In 1936 she was invited to travel to Egypt, but her articles were not published in the newspaper because the Egyptians did not agree to it. She published them the same year in a book entitled *Das Weltgeschehen am Mittelmeer. Ein Buch über Inseln und Küsten, Politik und Strategie, Völker und Imperien*. Although she managed not to become too involved in party



politics, she was influenced by German ideology and often defended German positions against the British and the French.

In 1937, her position in the paper was in danger, so she had to secure a living elsewhere. She worked for the Swiss publishing house Atlantis, although she did not particularly enjoy it because it was not journalistic work. Her aim was to work for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which she in fact did until 1943, when the paper was closed by the nazis. She was their correspondent in Stockholm, New York and Lisbon.<sup>25</sup> But in order to get the job, she was advised to take a big trip abroad and write about it. So she planned a trip to Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Iran. Both the German newspaper and the Swiss publisher agreed to support her, giving her money in advance. She made thorough preparations: she knew the writings of Gertrud Bell, but also read accounts of Lord Curzon, Freya Stark, Percy Sykes (mentioned in the book on pages 157, 186 and 192 respectively). As a companion she chose her Austrian friend Doris Heider, who only travelled as far as Tripoli, from where she had to return because of illness. Boveri left Berlin on the 27th February, 1938 in her old Buick, which was called "Bungo", one of the heroes of the narrative, as we can deduct from the title: "A car. Deserts. Blue pearls" – this should bring luck both to the narrator and the Bungo.<sup>26</sup>

In Boveri's book we also read about the bad conditions of travel, and of the complicated bureaucracies. But travelling by car allows you to travel off the beaten tracks, which she did on occasions. This trip was allowed by the German authorities: indeed, they were interested in knowing about the new countries, how they dealt with modernisation, new situations, nationalism. They "followed" her progress very closely: throughout the journey she met German authorities in the Embassies and consulates, who gave her advice about what to do and arranged meetings with the people she should meet! And as she was the daughter of academics and had studied history, it comes as no surprise to the reader that she meets many

scholars, academics, museum directors she meets and refers to many scientific publications. (Fell: 59) This is one of the reasons why we do not see much of her in her book, neither in the text, nor in the photographs which illustrate the book.

I will concentrate on Chapter VI, "Ohne Führer durch das Land Iran" [Without a guide in the country Iran]. In the previous ones she narrates her "adventures" through the different Islamic countries of the region and Lebanon. In order to make the descriptions easier for the reader she frequently makes comparisons with European places, such as for instance "wie das Rot in Berliner Tennisplätze" (MB:187) [like the red in tennis courts in Berlin], "wie in Engadin" (*idem*) (as in Engadin [in Switzerland]), "wie in Umbrien" (MB: 190) [as in Umbria], "wie St.Moritz" (MB:199) [as in St. Moritz]. It is interesting to notice that the importance of landscape will increase during the journey. She describes for the reader a feast in Kermanshah to celebrate the engagement of the crown prince to an Egyptian princess; "the green towns in the red land" (MB: 190); Teheran; a journey to Isfahan with Ly (Aderholt, the wife of the representative of the DNB, a German news agency), passing through Kum with its wonderful mosque with a golden roof:

Das Goldene ist die Kuppel der Moschee von Kum, 20 Kilometer weit sichtbar, so weit wie von München nach Starnberg. Sie ist sehr groß und ganz und gar mit geißendem Gold überzogen, so gold wie ein goldener Ring, über und über. [...] Es ist phantastisch. (MB: 197)

[The gold belongs to the cupola of the mosque in Kum, visible from 20 km., so far as from Munich to Starnberg. It is very big and wholly covered with gold, as golden as a gold ring, over and over. [...] It is fantastic.]

Fantastic, but only worth a few lines, like almost everything else in this book.

As she sees the world through her German eyes, there are things which we see in her book and not so much in the others.

One example is her view in Isfahan: she even calls the subchapter "Die beiden Isfahan" (MB: 203- 206) [Both sides of Isfahan]. She is enthusiastic about a museum below a mosque:

Da sehen wir die Wandlung Irans zum modernen Staat vielleicht stärker als in der technisierten Ausstellung in Teheran. Hier ist zu sehen, daß die Vergangenheit [...] bewußt als Geschichte, als Überwundenes angesehen wird, daß sie sich vom wirkenden Bestandteil des Volkslebens zum Museumobjekt gewandelt hat. (MB: 197-8)

[There we are able to see more clearly than in the technical exhibition in Teheran the transformation of Iran into a modern state. Here we see that the past [...] is seen consciously as history, as something which has been overcome, that has transformed itself from a part of the lives of the people into a museum object.]

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Another thing she is very pleased about is how they managed to link modernisation and tradition: Isfahan is divided by a river – on the one side we have houses, palaces, mosques, on the other we have factories, but there are lots of gardens between them and their chimneys look like minarets (MB: 205). In the old town she is amazed, it is as if she had left the modern state of Iran to the old kingdom of Persia, "wie wir es uns als Märchenwelt vorgestellt haben" (MB: 199) (as we had imagined it as a world of legends), referring to the old discourse about the Middle East.

This episode, so Streim, shows how this type of "contrastive-objective form of travel report is mixed up with the aesthetic (and ideology) of the 'organic modernisation'" (Streim: 359, my translation): new and old grow organically together. This was being tried in Germany and Boveri, even if unconsciously, reproduces this way of thinking through her way of describing certain things.

In Isfahan she meets "the poetical Mister Schünemann" (MB: 200, in English in the original), a German who aided Waßmuß, another German who helped the people of the

mountains to survive and to resist the British colonial power. Percy Sykes had written a book on him and called him the "German Lawrence".

On their way back to Teheran they visit the bazaar at Kaschan and she briefly describes how some things are produced there in the traditional way: a few quick lines are enough! She does not go into detail, we get a sketchy picture of the things and that is all. Except for Bungo and travel adventures! We know all the technical problems the car has had and so on. The Shah is almost totally absent: it was not in German interest to say anything bad about him, since the Iranians were trying hard to be friends with the Germans, in order to get rid of the British. However the book is lively and still worth reading today and it has indeed been republished in 2005!

We have been dealing with three different discourses about being abroad in a region with few cultural similarities and on the Others the travellers have met. One question that comes to mind is if they really met the Other or an image they had of the Other. As our identity is made of discourses, it implies that there are "national" or "regional" and "supernational" discourses on others, which we have interiorised. To meet the Other means to meet their own discourses in their contexts. The meeting of the Other does not mean a radical change in one's identity, but can contribute to it, as has been the case of, for instance, the Swiss Isabelle Eberhardt in the Islamic Northern Africa.

In the three books we notice the use of maps, as very often in such type of books: they allow the reader to follow the journey "physically". Maps are "supplementary forms of textuality". (Thacker: 11) Maps reflect not only geographical aspects of a certain area, but the power relations too. They present a certain spatial syntax – which accompanies our travels as readers. But, as Thacker points it, "travel writing provides a textual map of some geographical zone; but it is also a map of the psychic journey

undergone by the traveller." (Thacker: 20) Indeed the reader follows the fixed points (towns etc.), but the movements too and can project the mental and psychic situations described in the text into the maps. The maps used by Byron are the official maps with the roads, towns, frontiers, not presenting his own routes; von Rosen uses only one map, a personal one, for the whole trip, showing the whole country, pointing out lines showing "min resa" [my journey], "vägar" [roads] and "järnvägar" [railways]<sup>27</sup>, meaning it is *her* map she is showing, with the items which interest her and the limited scope of the country she has seen, only the western part. Boveri's book has only one map, a "personal" one, but using certain illustrations of people, monuments and the means of transport: she indicates lines showing her travels by car and another by train or boat.

The discourse of the three travellers is clearly well embedded in a broad West European discourse on Persia and the Middle East. Travelling as these people did means wanting to experience the Other in their own territory, not as armchair travellers, and means moreover communicating it to others through writing, representing for us the places which were experienced by the traveller, before the translation in discourse, which being a language construction is a mixture of report, memory, phantasy and aesthetics. It is not their intention to substitute travel guide books, with a lot of objective local information: they want to write about their journey, where factual information is just a necessary part. Boveri, as a journalist, is very short on facts, Byron writes at length on architectural descriptions, not on other things, von Rosen goes a bit further than Boveri on information, because she finds new things which interest her very much. But the three of them, and many more we could have analysed here, coincide in one thing, they centre their attention specially on their personal experiences: the difficult travel conditions, the tremendous bureaucracy, the different human and geographical landscapes, the contact with the Islam religion and civilization, the

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difference of mentalities. Common to the three, and many others, is that the right civilisation is the Western – their own – and not the Arabian or Iranian.

I would like to quote Streim here once more:

In travel writings, which centre again and again the attention on the use of the car and the conditions of the roads, the car journey appears as a literary allegory of native modernisation [bodenständige Modernisierung]. (Streim: 34,8)

138>139 I think one can read these books as literary allegories, even if they were not written as such. And, indeed, the three accounts stress very strongly the aspect of the journey within territories which were in a process of modernisation through the efforts of a tyrant. It is interesting to note the different positions towards the Shah, which we can easily link to the positions of the three authors: von Rosen, the free reporter, appreciates his efforts to modernise the country, praises him, even if she is able to see that his methods are not always the best; Byron, the erudite, cannot agree with the Shah's autocratic way of leading the country; and Boveri, the German journalist, avoids mentioning him for political and professional reasons.

The way of looking at things depends always on both the individual and the collective identity, on the contexts one comes from, and which form a part of our identity. Indeed, part of it depends on our contexts, our cultural background. The way the three authors saw Persia depended not only on the authors themselves and their strategic formation, but on the discourses about Persia too, both the dominant one and the discourses they had read before departing. Through their respective languages they also transmit other discourses than their own. Language is an instrument to understand life, the world, politics and power! The reader is submitted to a dual discourse: that of the traveller, and that of the other transported by their respective "language". Travelling means a possibility of changing or denying the imagotypes, the clichés, opening up discourse to other

dimensions. In my view, the one who changes less is Boveri's text, probably because of the political conditions and restrictions of her journey.

But the three of them are still worth reading, and Byron's and Boveri's texts were source of "archeological search of tracks", quoting an expression by Manfred Pfister: Peter Scholl-Latour followed Boveri's tracks, Dalrymple and many others Byron's.

To read these three books, and similar ones, is still an enjoyable way of travelling through geography, history and personal experiences by means of words. <<

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## NOTAS

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[1] I will use both the Swedish text and the English translation: *Persian Pilgrimage*. Under MR-E I will present first the page of the English translation and under MR-S the page of the original Swedish version.

[2] The book will be referred to as RB.

[3] The book has been republished under the name *Wüsten, Minarette und Moscheen. Im Auto durch den alten Orient*. The book will be referred to in this text as MB.

[4] The information about Persian history and art periods is taken from "Iransaga" in [www.art-arena.com](http://www.art-arena.com). and from Monika Gronke's book.

[5] As Michael Cronin has pointed out in the discussion of this paper, we can see a line of texts on the Orient since Herodotus up to now contributing to the image we have on that part of the world. Indeed, this image has been constructed ever since, in the West specially since Marco Polo (1254-1324) and the Renaissance. Marco Polo left Venice as a 17 years old boy. His meeting of the Orient was therefore a thrilling experience, which he "translated" his journey later in prison into a travel book, *Il Milione*, which has been translated into some languages in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. His joyful rendering of some aspects of the Middle East must have participated in the construction of the image of the oriental Other.

[6] We could complete Said's position with Charles Forsdick's, following Moura's ideas: "when exploring exoticism and travel writing [there is an awareness] to balance its two elements: *litterarité* (its textual nature) and *culturalité* (its links with dominant contemporary ideologies and intellectual movements)." (Forsdick: 32).

[7] See Moura: "C'est que l'appréhension de la réalité étrangère par un écrivain (ou un lecteur) n'est pas directe, mais médiatisée par les représentations imaginaires du groupe ou de la société auxquels il appartient." (Moura: 45)

[8] An example is the Swiss Annemarie Schwarzenbach, an author I have already written about and will at times refer to in this paper.

[9] See John MacKenzie's book on Orientalism, specially chapters I and II, where he presents the criticism towards Said's positions on the subject. He stresses the interpenetration of imperial and indigenous cultural and the way the colonial and the colonised intersect.

[10] The first European translation appeared in France between 1704, and 1717.

[11] See for instance John Ure's *In search of Nomads. An English obsession from Hester Stanhope to Bruce Chatwin* (2004), London, Robinson.

[12] Sweden had been cooperating with Persia both in the construction of road and railway infrastructures and the preparation of police forces. Per Nyström wrote a book on the five years he lived in the country as a military: *Fem år i Persien som*



gendarmofficer (1910). The Swedish press praised the activities of the Swedish policemen, showing again the superiority of Swedes compared to the Persians. But others saw in that presence a support to a dictatorship and pointed out that the policemen killed many "bandits", as the regime called many of its opponents (see Catoremis: 24).

[13] The English translation publishes only 32 photographs in separate plates, not in the same pages of the text, as in the Swedish original edition. The photo of the Shah is not published in the translation. Following Marie Cronqvist and Agneta Edman the author did not want that photograph printed, but the editor did it all the same, following some editorial practice at those times in books on Persia. (Cronqvist/Edman: 255)

[14] One of the foreigners she met was Annemarie Schwarzenbach, who she does not mention in her book. Schwarzenbach wrote the short story "Eine Frau allein", where the main character is based upon Maud von Rosen. In this text she is an extravagant Danish baroness called Katrin Hartmann (Von Rosens mother was in fact Danish), travelling alone to write a book on Persia. The happenings in the story do not coincide with von Rosen's text. Schwarzenbach admired her, but had to conceal her in her story. But there are quite a few parallels to von Rosen's expedition: her acquaintance with the Prince Mosteazan, here Karagöl; she lives in the hotel Naderi in Teheran; she admires the poet Fidursi; she loves horses; she too does not desire to travel to Persepolis, because so many had already written about it. There is a photograph where they are seen together at the Swiss Literature Archive in Berne (A.S., Bei diesem Regen, ed. Roger Perret, Basel, Lenos, 1989, Text: pages 177-209; photograph page 235). In a letter to Klaus Mann, Schwarzenbach wrote: "[...] zu lange Bar-Nächte mit der Gräfin Rosen, die zwischen Maria und Greta Garbo die Mitte haltend, schön wie ein Erzengel die Gemüter verwirrt – zuviel für mich jedenfalls." in Annemarie Schwarzenbach, *Wir werden es schon zuwege bringen, das Leben. Annemarie Schwarzenbach an Erika und Klaus Mann. Briefe 1930-1942*, ed. Uta Fleischmann (1993), Pfaffenweiler, Centaurus, p.120.

[15] The English lady, as a matter of fact, gives voice to the way popular culture saw the Orient, based on stereotypes, such as the mystic, exotic and erotic aspects, showing the proud men of the mountains and the deserts. It stressed the pre-modern way of life, aspects which were absent from western civilizations. It was an utopian view, a discourse. (see Magnus Berg: 57)

[16] The Picador edition has no photographs, but there are many photographs taken by him and in the text he speaks often of taking pictures.

[17] His friend Christopher Sykes wrote, Byron's journey was "a quest for the origins of islamic art" (*apud* Booth: 167).

[18] William Dalrymple is a travel writer, who is very interested in history, who focuses on India. A very well known book is *In Xanadu. A quest*, the description of a long journey from Syria to China, which the author made as a young man, together with two girls. See Tim Youngs (2005).

[19] An example of the contrary is Ella Maillart's account of her journey to Afghanistan with Annemarie Schwarzenbach 1939. In her book *The Cruel Way* Annemarie is called Christina.

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[20] Buruma and Margalit say that Reza Pahlavi attacked the Persian traditions, the way of dressing, including that of the mullahs. For these writers the Islamic revolutionary movement would never have existed without the rigorous secularism of the Persian ruler and the failed socialist attempts in Egypt, Syria and Algeria (Buruma/Margalit: 119 and 146).

[21] The Sassanians ruled Persia from 224 to 633 and constituted the last Iranian empire before the Moslem conquest.

[22] Bernard Partridge (1861-1945) was a conservative cartoonist from Punch.

[23] Byron spells the name of the poet with two 's'.

[24] All the biographical information is taken from Heike Görtemaker's book *Ein deutsches Leben. Die Geschichte der Margret Boveri*.

[25] In Lisbon she first met Annemarie Schwarzenbach, although she knew some of her writings. It was curious that some time before somebody had recommended the Swiss author as a companion to Boveri in her journey to the Middle East. (Görtemaker: 170) But they were indeed too different, Schwarzenbach was very much introspective, even during her multiple journeys.

[26] As a result of this trip in 1938 she published *Vom Minarett zum Bohrturm. Eine politische Biographie Vorderasiens*. The title shows both sides of the country: the old and the new. The same dichotomy is shown in our book, but in a different way, in a more journalistic way.

[27] The English translation does not include the map.

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