

Archeologist or Photographer

Jacques de Morgan and the Photograph of his First Scientific Mission in Persia

(2012)

Abstract

A collection of photographs made by the French archaeologist Jacques de Morgan during his first scientific mission in Persia was recently discovered in an antiquarian's shop in Chartres by 'Ata Ayati, an Iranian researcher residing in France. The originality and the cultural and scientific value of this collection were confirmed by several experts, following which, with the assistance of Dr. Ehsan Naraqi, Mrs. Homeira Ayazi (Sellier), a philanthropist residing in Europe, provided the sum needed for its acquisition. After the completion of the transaction, the photographs were inventoried and arranged as four albums before being sent to their land of origin. Today, these albums are preserved in the Album House of the Golestan Palace and may be used as an invaluable guide by scholars doing research on the history, society and people of Iran in the closing years of Nasser-ed-Din Shah's reign. In the present article, 'Ata Ayati briefly examines de Morgan's life, the characteristics of the photographs, and their cultural and scientific aspects.

Jacques Jean Marie de Morgan was born on June 3, 1857 in an aristocratic family of Huisseau-sur-Cosson. He completed his primary and secondary education in his hometown. Youthful exuberance attracted him toward cockfights and collecting antiquities. He went on to Paris to continue his studies, graduating from the École des Mines in 1882. During his studies in this school, he manifested such aptitude in the domain of archaeology that, immediately after obtaining his mining diploma, he was sent on excavation missions in northern Europe. (It is notable that his elder brother, Henri de Morgan, had previously taken part in archaeological research in America.) After the publication of the results of De Morgan's research, the French minister of public education sent him on two excavation missions to India and Malaysia. It was then that his later scientific interest in the orient took shape. Benefiting from his mining knowledge, de Morgan traveled, at his own expense, accompanied by his wife and daughter, to the Caucasus, where he spent two years excavating in view of amassing a substantial capital. During his stay, he was also able to carry out research in various other scientific fields, including ethnology. The publication of these research works prompted the French minister of public education to adjoin him to his ministry.

Thanks to this position, and the support of two eminent figures of the time, the archaeologist Maspero and the anthropologist Dr. Hamy, his first mission to Persia was organized by that ministry. Thus, his first mission in Persia, aimed at identifying the country's archaeological sites and surveying its geographical and geological situation, began in 1889. In his own words: "It was in August 1889 that my real scientific career began with my being sent to Persia. Until then no harmony had existed between my efforts and my scientific activities, each proceeding _in accordance with the conditions of the day.

Following the delivery of his mission orders and the ratification of the budget involved (550,000 Francs, later augmented by another 100,000 Francs), de Morgan embarked at Marseilles, in the company of his first wife, Noémie de Saint Martin, and his servant, Pierre Vaslin, toward Persia.

On his way to Persia, de Morgan landed at Batum, whence he continued toward Baku. Before reaching Persian soil, he stayed for a short while in the Caucasus, where he hired a translator. He then returned to Baku and continued his journey to Persia. He passed through Rasht, Manjil and Qazvin before reaching Tehran, where he was welcomed by the French chargé d'affaires, Paulze d'Ivoy de la Poype (Poupe?). Accompanied by the chargé d'affaires in Tehran, de Morgan paid a visit to the Shah in order to obtain his firman. That was the second time he was seeing the Shah. The first time dated back to a meeting he had had with his brother in England, which coincided with Nasser-ed-Din Shah's first journey there (1873). He had not been favorably impressed by those meetings, going as far as writing in derisive tones about Qajar kings, particularly Nasser-ed-Din Shah.

After spending several weeks in Tehran visiting the historic monuments of the capital, he attempted the ascent of Mt. Damavand, reaching an altitude of 5670 meters. From there he traveled to Mazandaran, visiting Sari, Ashraf (present Behshahr) and Astarabad. In each of these towns he studied its historic relics and geographic situation. Among these, Ashraf particularly attracted his attention, and he described the palace of Shah 'Abbas and the panoramas around the town as the "Versailles of Persia". He also traveled along the Caspian coast, visiting Gilan, Lankaran and Astara and studying the region of Aras River. His arrival in Tabriz coincided with the month of Moharram. He photographed the mourning ceremonies of the city's population. He dwelt in the house of Hassan-'Ali-Khan Garrussi, known as Amir-Nezam-e Garrussi, and became acquainted with M. G. Lampre, the French teacher of

Amir-Nezam's son, Yahya-Khan. He employed Lampre as his secretary in Persia. Thereafter, Lampre accompanied de Morgan in all his expeditions in Persia, which continued until 1912.

Leaving Tabriz, de Morgan toured the region of Lake Orumiyeh before going on to Maragheh. He then traveled to Mian-do-Ab and eventually reached Kordestan-e Mokri (northern Kordestan), where he was welcomed by the region's governor, Safi-ed-Din-Khan-e Sardar. In Sardasht, he came across a former student of the Saint-Cyr Military Academy by the name of Farrokh-Khan.

He then visited Baneh, Saqqez, Sardar-Abad and Sahneh. He has expressed his admiration for the minus 17 degrees Celsius-cold nights he spent sitting up, under the korsi, among Kurdish families. Reaching Hamadan, he found all the dreams of his youth fulfilled. He also traveled to Kermanshah, Kangavar, Tisfoon (Ctesiphon), Qasr-e Shirin and Sar-e Pol-e Zahab.³ Crossing the passages of Poshtkooh, he traveled across Lorestan visiting Borujerd, Khorram-Abad, Dowlat-Abad, Tuyserkhan, Nahavand and Oshtoran-Kooh and surveying their archaeological and geological features. His long stay in the region and the visits he paid to the different tribes living there gave him an insight into tribal feuds and migratory life.

Early in July 1891, in 33 degree Celsius heat, he traveled from Dezful to Shush (Susa), which became the main site of his subsequent archaeological campaigns. De Morgan's mission came to an end after a three week-long stay in Shush and visits of Khorramshahr and Bushehr. He left for Egypt, eventually reaching Paris on October 1, 1891.⁴

In the course of this mission, de Morgan covered more than 20,000 kilometers in 27 months (700 days). On his return to France, he took with him his chest of antiquities and three maps he had drawn of the areas around the Caspian Sea, Kordestan-e Mokri and Shush. The publication of his voluminous four-volume *Mission Scientifique en Perse* in 1894 illustrated the scientific notes he had taken in Persia.

Jacques de Morgan's photographs of his first mission in Persia

In 1893, after completing his mission in Persia, de Morgan published excerpts of his memories in the bulletin of the Société Géographique in Paris, noting in conclusion that he had made 620 photographs during his travels in Persia.⁶ One year later, in the preface of the first volume of his book, concerning Persian geography, he writes: "I took with myself 750

photographic plates of the gélatino-bromure d'argent type and a portable camera to Persia. All the photographic equipment was supplied by the photographic firm Guilleminot, located at No. 6, Rue Choron, in Paris.”⁷ In 1997, an exhibition was held at the Louvre on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the signature of the agreement concerning the French monopoly of the exploration of antiquities in Persia.⁸ De Morgan's diary was also published at about the same time. A passage of this book reads: “Fortunately, my mission to Persia was completed from beginning to end. I brought back to France important maps, 650 photographs, a multitude of notes and various collections of antiquities.”⁹ As the inventory of the photographs of the acquired photographs shows, the last picture taken in Bushehr bears the number 622. This is in agreement with the figure given by de Morgan in his diary. It is notable that de Morgan's photographs were first printed on cardboard and these prints were later glued to cardboard pages. This type of photographic reproduction was common practice at the time.

Scientific and artistic value of de Morgan's photographs

Jacques de Morgan's name must therefore be mentioned among those of archaeologists who have utilized photography in the course of their explorations. In comparison with others who have relied on this method, his outlook of cultural realities appears wider and more comprehensive. He often annotates his photographs with indications concerning the altitude and geographic orientation at which they were taken, or on what moonlit night. The photographs he has left behind of the historic relics and the peoples living in different regions of Persia are greatly useful and instructive from historic, artistic and ethnological viewpoints. Some of them provide information about a building and its architecture at the time, enabling us to draw its plans anew.

His photographs of the population, of their dwellings and garments, their caravan arrangements, hunting expeditions, snake shows, carpet weaving, mourning ceremonies, bathing, etc., gives playwrights, filmmakers and researchers of social sciences an opportunity to more easily recreate the various aspects of the cultural and social life of the past in their works. The garments worn by Mazandarani, Taleshi, Kurdish and Turkish children, those of the destitute and wealthy classes in Tehran, as well as the dwellings and working conditions in different regions of Persia, are among other information available in these photographs. Such data can prove useful in studying the evolution of certain traditions in our country. Another useful quality of these photographs is their inclusion of some cultural ceremonies,

such as the Mir-e Nowroozi Festival, which has been abandoned in the course of time. (One photograph in de Morgan's collection illustrates this festival.).

In addition, a number of buildings of that period and some important historic monuments which are no longer in existence or have partly fallen into ruin are visible in de Morgan's photographs. These include buildings in Ashraf (Behshahr), part of the citadel of Tabriz, the fortifications of Maragheh, the Bagh-e Shah (King's Garden) in Dezful, and the vaults of the gates of Tehran.

Consequently, one must say that photographs such as those recorded by de Morgan during his first mission in Persia can be of great assistance in learning the social and geographical realities of our country in his time. These photographs in fact also show a kind of cultural continuity between certain regions of Persia, such as Talesh, Kordestan, Khorram-Abad, Tehran, Qazvin and Tabriz, and their neighboring areas, such as Georgia. In those regions, humans and geographic variations cannot be delimited and separated by artificial boundaries.

De Morgan's visit of the region of Sar-e-Pol-e Zahab, and his discovery of oil resources, occurred in February and March 1891. He wrote an elaborate report on the subject for the École des Mines in Paris, which began with the words: "I have accomplished this research solely for the interests of the Persian government." But this report failed to attract the attention of French authorities. It was only in 1901 that William d'Arcy began prospecting and extracting oil in the region.

Beginning in 1892, de Morgan was appointed general director of a 6 year-long mission of exploration for antiquities in Egypt. Then, in 1897, he returned to Persia as the representative of the general director of the French archaeological mission in this country. It was during this trip that, on behalf of the French government, he signed the ignominious agreement granting that country the monopoly of excavations throughout Persia for a period of sixty years with the ailing and indigent Mozaffar-ed-Din Shah.

As to de Morgan's fate, as mentioned in the text, Lampre cooperated with de Morgan's archaeological explorations until 1908, when, in complicity with Louis Watelin, another of de Morgan's collaborators, he began conspiring against de Morgan at the French ministry of public education.

Thus, he spread the rumor, or perhaps divulged, that de Morgan had embezzled part of the funds allocated to archaeological exploration in Persia. This rumor (or disclosure) reached its peak in 1912, with de Morgan retiring, after 15 years of scientific activity, his direction of the archaeological mission in Persia. His retirement brought about his gradual isolation from scientific and scholarly circles, and also his financial indigence, until his death on June 12, 1924. (For further information, see sections 11 to 14 of his diary.)

To date, three exhibitions concerning ancient Persian works of art have been held in Paris: the first, entitled “Relics of Susa”, was organized by de Morgan in the Grand Palais in 1912, lasting two months. It included a statue of Hammurabi excavated in Shush; The second exhibition, entitled “Seven Thousand Years of Persian Art”, was held in the same locale in 1962; And the third, entitled “De Morgan’s Scientific Expedition”, was held in the Louvre in 1997.

In the domain of ethnology in Persia, the first person who utilized photography was Nicholas Khanikoff, the Russian geographer and ethnologist residing in Paris. He began his ethnological studies in Persia in 1848. In the preface of a book he published in this concern, he advocated the use of photography and model casting as a method for “object-oriented ethnology”, which he applied in his study of ethnic groups living in Khorasan. In the field of “object-oriented ethnology”, the drawings and model castings made by the French ethnographer, E. Duhousset, from 1860 to 1862 greatly contributed to the French people’s knowledge of part of Persian culture. (For further information in this concern, see ‘Ata Ayati, ”French Military Missions at the Dar-ol-Fonun”, in *Rahavard Monthly (USA)*, 1998, no. 49, pp. 293-308). Between 1881 and 1886, the Dieulafoy couple was able to make photographs of individuals as well as historic monuments in Persia. Upon their return to Paris, painters were able to make etchings from their photographs (but those photographs are not available today). After them, in 1885, H. Binder was dispatched to Persia by the French ministry of public education with the mission of exploring the ancient monuments in parts of Iran. Before de Morgan, he visited Tabriz, Orumiyeh, Kind-e Shirin, Zahab, Hamadan, Tehran, Qazvin, Gilan and Anzali, taking fine photographs of people from various social groups as well as ancient relics. He reproduced a number of those pictures in his book *Kurdistan, Mesopotamia and Iran*, which he published in 1887.

Quoting one of his friends, Mohammad Qazvini thus writes about Mir-e Nowroozi: “In spring of 1923 AH, I had gone to Bojnurd for a medical cure. I stayed there from the first to the fourteenth of Farvardin. On the tenth of Farvardin, I saw a large group of people passing by, with one of them wearing elegant clothes, riding a magnificent horse, with something perched on his head. And the crowd was flowing before and after him... Several individuals were holding long sticks on top of which animal heads, such as cows and sheep, could be seen.

This was a metaphor signifying that the king has victoriously returned from war, bringing back the heads of slain enemies... Inquiring about the matter, I was told that, come Nowrooz, one person is appointed king, remaining in charge of the town until the thirteenth of Farvardin... On the thirteenth, his rule comes to an end. It said that this position was hereditary in a family.” But, in an interview with the author, Dr. Hossein Fazel (residing in Paris), who is from Khorasan and lived for a time in Bojnurd, he added the following points to Mohammad Qazvini’s account: “In Bojnurd, the Shadloo tribe, of Kordish origins, enjoyed great power. For that reason, Reza Shah exiled them to Esfahan. Following that event, it had become customary for a group to go to the Bab-e Aman, that is the town’s gate. As soon as a stranger reached the city, they captured him and gave him the title of Amir-e Nowroozi. A large crowd gathered at his service... and he was given great prerogatives until the sunset of the thirteenth day. Then (at sunset), the population took the Amir beside a ditch full of rotten water and threw him in it. This tradition was considered “settling an account”, and it also meant that the fate of a powerful ruler or Amir is to be hurled in a ditch.

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