

et dans les villes safavides, mais les autres récits du XVII^e siècle font référence à la rencontre de marchands portugais dans les principaux *emporia* de la Perse. C'est encore le cas d'Orta Rebelo et de Fr. Gaspar qui retrouvent quatre commerçants portugais à Lār, en attendant que la route vers Ormuz soit libre et sûre en raison des conflits entre les troupes safavides et les forces du royaume d'Ormuz.⁴⁷ D. Álvaro mentionne avoir manqué de peu un voyageur de sa connaissance, appelé Luís Álvares de Lemos, et qui était parti d'Isfahān porteur probablement de nouvelles concernant la guerre turco-safavide.⁴⁸ Parfois, les voyageurs font explicitement référence à des agents de renseignement travaillant pour la Couronne. D. Álvaro, par exemple, parle d'un certain Simão Jorge, un *casado* qui avait été chargé d'apporter avec lui des lettres d'Ormuz jusqu'à Alep.⁴⁹

Nous concluerons ainsi ce bref survol de la littérature de voyage portugaise en Perse safavide en soulignant l'incontestable continuité existante entre les différents récits que nous avons cités, sachant que l'ouvrage de García de Silva y Figueroa constitue l'héritier indirect mais manifeste de cette production intellectuelle.

⁴⁷ Gaspar de São Bernardino, *Itinerario*, f. 71v; Rebelo, "Relação", p. 102. Voir également Costa, *Tratado*, p. 50.

⁴⁸ Costa, *Tratado*, p. 51.

⁴⁹ Costa, *Tratado*, p. 54.

Travelling in Safavid Persia: Following in the footsteps of Don García de Silva y Figueroa

CAROLINE MAWER *

In 1617-1619, Figueroa journeyed for two years and one week within the Persia of Shah 'Abbās the First.¹ More than five months of his time was spent actually on the road – initially carrying the Spanish "present of great value"² from the Persian Gulf up to Qazvīn; and then moving back south with the Ambassador's travelling "family", to eventually board a ship homewards.³ Following on from this, Figueroa's narrative is an important – yet underused – source of information about Safavid travel and its supporting infrastructure.

Figueroa effectively made several journeys, separated by more-or-less lengthy stays in a number of the larger Safavid cities.⁴ His first journeys – up to Shiraz and then on to Isfahan – are used here to introduce some of the practicalities of Safavid travel. Drawing on fieldwork, there is then a more detailed focus on the route and accommodation between Isfahan and Kashan. The Ambassador's return trip to the coast is briefly considered. Just like Figueroa, there are some pauses along the way: looking first at the speed of travel and the units of distance used in Persia; and then at the litter the Ambassador so often, and so distinctively, travelled in.

Up to Isfahan

This initial section of the paper focuses on the practical details of Safavid travel. It especially considers the formal receptions along the way; the difficulties of procuring beasts of burden; and the fundamental importance of water.

* Independent researcher.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, Shah 'Abbās, 'Abbās' or 'the Shah' refers to Shah 'Abbās the First.

² *Letters received by the East India Company from its servants in the East: Transcribed from the "Original Correspondence" series*, ed. F.C. Danvers & William Foster (6 vols., London, 1896-1902), vol. V, Letter 485, 15 May 1617, p. 250.

³ Unless otherwise stated, 'the Ambassador' refers to Figueroa.

⁴ See *infra*, Map 1 (p. 341) and Map 2 (p. 343).

The Ambassador's first journeys were from the Gulf coast through the *garmsīr*, or "warm zones", to Shiraz (12th October to 24th November 1617); and then, after a four month interval, on up to Isfahan (5th April to 1st May 1618). The stopping places along this part of the route have already been discussed by Gaube and Floor, and will not be detailed systematically here.⁵ Instead, these initial journeys are used as a starting point for an outline of how Figueroa approached a few of the day-to-day challenges of Safavid travel.

As Siroux notes, many of the Safavid-era European travellers have already produced a *luxé*, or perhaps even a surfeit, of details concerning camels and caravans and caravanserais.⁶ The focus here is therefore on the topics that especially concerned Figueroa. Although the Ambassador provides some direct and detailed descriptions – for example of the caravanserais, and the various water systems – much of the practical information discussed throughout this paper is gleaned indirectly – for example, when a rider's horse falls down an abyss⁷ or an aide is drunk on opium,⁸ and this mishap is mentioned because the men involved should have been going on ahead to organise the Ambassadorial lodgings, thereby implying that daily forward-planning was a usual arrangement.

Formal receptions

On initially disembarking near the fort of Comoran, the Ambassador was welcomed by Cacén-Beg, the local governor, accompanied by an honour guard of several officers and some soldiers from the nearby garrison.⁹ Figueroa, then aged 57 – "old for the time" and with a white beard and no teeth¹⁰ – had been supplied with a litter, or palanquin. The governor therefore dismounted, "to receive the Ambassador with much politeness", while the Ambassador could only reciprocate by declining to enter his litter until his host had remounted.¹¹

⁵ Heinz Gaube, "Ein Abschnitt der safavidischen Bandar-e 'Abbas - Siraz - Strasse: Die Strecke von Sayyed Gemal ad-Din nach Lar", *Iran*, 17 (1979), pp. 33-47; and Willem Floor, "The Bandar 'Abbas-Isfahan Route in the Late Safavid Era (1617-1717)", *Iran*, 37 (1999), pp. 67-94.

⁶ Maxime Siroux, *Caravansérails d'Iran et petites constructions routières* (Le Caire, 1949), p. 31.

⁷ García de Silva y Figueroa, *L'Ambassade de D. Garcias de Silva Figueroa en Perse*, trans. Abraham de Wicquefort (Paris, 1667), p. 170.

⁸ *L'Ambassade*, p. 366.

⁹ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰ Niels Steensgaard, *The Asian trade revolution of the seventeenth century: The East India companies and the decline of the caravan trade* (London, 1975), p. 312.

¹¹ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 48-49.

This litter was, if not a source of confusion, then something of a barrier, at least in Figueroa's initial encounters with the horse-mad Safavids. Three days into his onward journey to Shiraz, coming into Cabrestan in his litter, the Ambassador was presented with a horse – a standard Safavid gift¹² – before the mounted governor led him to his lodgings. There, the Ambassador was sent more presents of all sorts of meats and fruits – as well as the original horse again. Although Figueroa "wanted to refuse, [he] was nevertheless obliged to accept, for fear of being impolite, since all the Persians took offense at any refusal of their presents".¹³

Naturally, the Ambassador did not want to "disoblige" his hosts, especially since he knew that all the towns through which he passed had "express orders" about his reception from the Shah and that they dared not even be thought to skimp.¹⁴ At Lara (Lar), the first town of any substance along the way, the governors specifically requested that Figueroa make his Ambassadorial entry at eight or nine in the morning, as "they wanted to receive him with ceremony".¹⁵ He was by now at last mounted on a horse, at least for his entry into the town, and was treated to what was to become a routine. The formulaic nature of the receptions is illustrated by the very similar, and very splendid, description Herbert gives ten years later of Sir Dodmore Cotton's reception in the same town, "Larr". On that occasion, after meeting "men of note gallantly mounted, with great courtesie":

near the City a Persian out of a poetic fury thundered us a speech of welcome, and thereupon the Kettle-drums and other their jingling Instruments strove to deaf us. After this a Venus (like in honesty, though not in beauty) attired in an anticke fashion, presents her self, accompanied with more Sylvens, where they danced Lavoltoes, their arms and legs were adorned with Bels, which with the other music, made a comfort. During this Anticke, Bacchus (a great deity among those people) crept in amongst them: so that the jangling of their discording pipes; the Whoores bells, roaring of the Mules and Asses, with the shouting and clamour of 2000 people all the way before us till we entered Larr, so amated us, that had Vulcan and his Cyclopes beene working there, there noise had been prevented. After we were lodged, they without more ceremony (tired, I suppose, with the former) left us.¹⁶

In Kashan, further along the way, the governors were quite explicit about the promotional element to the receptions: asking the Ambassador to enter their town in the daylight, so that all their preparations and expenditure would be visible.¹⁷ All the

¹² Figueroa was gifted several horses: e.g. *L'Ambassade*, pp. 306 and 369.

¹³ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁴ *L'Ambassade*, p. 208.

¹⁵ *L'Ambassade*, p. 64.

¹⁶ Sir Thomas Herbert, *A relation of some yeares travaile, begvnnne anno 1626: Into Afrique and the greater Asia, especially the territories of the Persian Monarchie* (London, 1634), p. 52.

¹⁷ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 207-208.

way up to Qazvīn, Figueroa was “obliged” to mount a horse for formal entries into towns; even when he had lodged outside for several days and had already met many of the principal inhabitants, as well as having seen – and been seen by – large numbers of the less advantaged.¹⁸

Poor Figueroa – who especially disliked the hot sun, and the dust inevitably raised by huge crowds of people¹⁹ – increasingly complained of how he would prefer to “sleep”²⁰ or “undress and rest”²¹ after the preceding night’s travel. Even after the formal audience and presentation of the Spanish gifts in Qazvīn, the Ambassador could not completely escape the doubtful pleasures of the receptions. In 1619, Figueroa was “expressly directed” by Shah ‘Abbās to take part in the welcome of the Mughal ambassador, Khan ‘Alam, into Isfahan. ‘Abbās even provided elaborately adorned horses from the royal stables for some of the Spanish ambassador’s entourage. Figueroa, heading up a contingent of diverse foreigners, submitted to be led out into the crowds by the *Mehemandar*. With the Shah apparently galloping hither and thither, and always somewhere elusively in front, Figueroa finally lost patience, went home, and got undressed. When he was summoned again; he took some persuading to redress, remount, and attend upon the Shah at a garden feast.²²

Beasts of burden

Although Shah ‘Abbās had ordered that the Ambassador’s party should have all the necessary provisions freely supplied,²³ in practice Figueroa had to grapple with some of the same practical problems which traders from the maritime companies would face from around 1620, when silk started being regularly traded southwards from Isfahan, along the “Cape route”.²⁴

The first of these problems was the obtaining of sufficient pack-animals. At least 400 camels and other beasts of burden were apparently “necessary” for all the personal baggage of Figueroa and his party, and the Friars he had agreed could accom-

¹⁸ For example in Isfahan: *L’Ambassade*, p. 180.

¹⁹ For example in Lara: *L’Ambassade*, p. 66 (and in Qazvīn p. 297). See also Olearius (Adam Olearius, *The Voyages & travels of the ambassadors sent by Frederick Duke of Holstein, to the Great Duke of Muscovy, and the King of Persia* [London, 1662], p. 265) who writes, on entering Isfahan, of how the dust was “so thick, that we were to the Gates, before we imagined we could have seen the Citie”.

²⁰ In Kashan: *L’Ambassade*, p. 208.

²¹ In Qom: *L’Ambassade*, p. 219.

²² *L’Ambassade*, pp. 295–297.

²³ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 64–65.

²⁴ Rudolph P. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran: Silk for Silver, 1600–1730* (Cambridge, 1999) p. 47; Edmund M. Herzig, “The Volume of Iranian Raw Silk Exports in the Safavid Period”, *Iranian Studies*, 25, 1–2 (1992), pp. 62, 73.

pany him, plus the many presents for the Shah.²⁵ Since one camel driver was required for each file of eight or ten camels “tied one to the other”,²⁶ this meant around 50 of these “insolent people”²⁷ had to be hired. Horses, in addition, had to be purchased for the servants.²⁸

The Ambassador had written from Hormuz to warn the Governors of Bandel, Lar and Shiraz of his arrival and requirements, and had been advised that the camels and the rest of the equipment were ready; but after Figueroa actually landed, he had to wait seven days “in the inconvenience of the heat”, since all the camels had been sent away to graze elsewhere.²⁹ This was in fact more than reasonable. All beasts of burden and especially camels need significant areas of land to graze.³⁰ Siroux suggests that a large caravan might sometimes require many weeks to organise, so the delay was perhaps not as long as it might have felt to the sweltering Spaniard.³¹

Other delays along the way were less acceptable. Some towns exploited the right they had to insist that camels must be changed when caravans passed through.³² In Shiraz Figueroa explicitly blamed the “finesse and malice” of Alibeg (the powerful Lieutenant of Emām-qolī Khan), when more than 150 loads of pepper (part of the present for the Shah) had to be left behind due to a lack of camels.³³ The East India Company (EIC) agents had similar problems: Edward Pettus spent 17 or 18 days in Mogustan in 1617, “earnestly importunat[ing]” for camels, “sometimes by threats, other sometimes fairly”, whilst the Sultan there “from day to day he fed us with good words”. When the agents had only just enough money left to get to Lar, it was “made known” that they could “procure [their] despatch” with two pieces of cloth, each worth about 13 pounds. Pettus admitted that “Somewhat dearer than ordinary we paid for camelhire, by reason we were strangers and knew not their custom”, and optimistically hoped that “The next year it will be remedied”.³⁴ Any expectation that Figueroa might pay over the odds was surely bolstered by his agents, shortly before

²⁵ *L’Ambassade*, p. 51. In comparison, Sir Dodmore Cotton’s 1628 Embassy was “furnisht with 29 Cammels, and twelve Horse”: Herbert, *A relation of some yeares travaile*, p. 51.

²⁶ Olearius, *The Voyages & travels of the ambassadors*, p. 252. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Les six voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier... qu’il a fait en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes* (2 vols., Paris, 1676), vol. I, p. 109 says that Persian camels always walk in groups of seven.

²⁷ Tavernier, *Les six voyages*, vol. I, p. 108.

²⁸ *L’Ambassade*, p. 52.

²⁹ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 47–48, 49, 51–52.

³⁰ When the Friars travelling with Figueroa were lost in the desert on 14th/15th November 1617, they came upon 30 or 40 camels grazing and gratefully realised they must be somewhere nearby the caravan – but still had to ride “une petite lieue” to get back to the tents. *L’Ambassade*, p. 89.

³¹ Siroux, *Caravansérails*, p. 33.

³² Tavernier, *Les six voyages*, vol. I, p. 674, refers to this with reference to Lar.

³³ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 110, 138–140.

³⁴ *Letters received by the EIC*, vol. V, Letter 497, 2 June 1617, p. 287.

his arrival, reportedly being “enabled with means of money and commission to spend, which they had not so largely before his arrival”.³⁵ By the time of his return journey in 1619, the Ambassador had certainly worked out (at least one of) the scams perpetrated against him in Shiraz. However, even attempting to purchase the help of the governor there was ineffective – since the “cake” was apparently “shared”, and the Ambassador still wasted fifteen days in the town.³⁶

Water

The “commodity of water, which one doesn’t find everywhere” fundamentally regulated the daily stages of the caravans.³⁷ Even when there was water, Tavernier describes how “one of the greatest inconveniences” for a traveller was waiting perhaps two hours for all the many animals in a caravan to be watered, before the people could collect their own supplies.³⁸

Figuerola, as an Ambassador, of course never had to wait for water;³⁹ and instead reported with interest on the various water-related technologies that he saw in the *garmsīr*. There were sweet-water wells at Bandel; but after that, all the way to Shiraz, water was stored in cisterns.⁴⁰ Since the rains that filled these reservoirs were so infrequent,⁴¹ and patrons preferred to build anew rather than repair or clean,⁴² the tanks often contained silt and mud. The “Arabs” had however invented a “very convenient Machine”: a skin, with strings like a “purse”, to draw up clean water from the surface of any reservoir⁴³ – although this didn’t remove any of the Guinea worms, which still needed to be sieved or boiled out.⁴⁴

Not only was the water in the cisterns surprisingly “fresh”,⁴⁵ the structures could also act as refuges against the heat of the day. In Lar, after Figuerola eventually ob-

³⁵ *Letters received by the EIC*, vol. V, Letter 485, 15 May 1617, p. 252.

³⁶ *L’Ambassade*, p. 348.

³⁷ Tavernier, *Les six voyages*, vol. I, p. 109.

³⁸ Tavernier, *Les six voyages*, vol. I, pp. 113–114.

³⁹ Tavernier also avoided this problem on his last voyage: he took along his nine-year old nephew to learn Oriental languages and “to accustom him to the fatigue of the journeys”. Mounted on an alluring donkey, this boy was sent to ask, prettily, if he could jump the queue: Tavernier, *Les six voyages*, vol. I, p. 114.

⁴⁰ *L’Ambassade*, p. 52. Oxen were used to draw water at the brackish wells of Lara: p. 69.

⁴¹ There was “sometimes” no rain for 2 or 3 years at a time in Lara: Tavernier, *Les six voyages*, vol. I, p. 676.

⁴² Floor, “The Bandar ‘Abbas-Isfahan Route”, p. 69: citing Fryer: “they will have the Repute of an entire Founder, or none”.

⁴³ *L’Ambassade*, p. 53.

⁴⁴ Floor, “The Bandar ‘Abbas-Isfahan Route”, p. 69.

⁴⁵ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 60, 70, 77.

tained the necessary camels,⁴⁶ he dined in the central vault of a cruciate cistern while his tents were folded and packed. Each 50 foot (15 metre) arm of the cross was open for public access to the water, so the local poor begged, loudly, for alms while the Ambassador sat on the stone benches inside, evidently with his feet dangling in the shallow water.⁴⁷ Olearius, less publicly, retreated into cool domestic ice-houses in Qazvīn.⁴⁸

As well as the cisterns, there were “canals”;⁴⁹ fed notably at Tangotalan, south of Lar, by an “aqueduct” bringing water from one mountain, and “cut through the bottom” of “another tow’ring hill” – as Herbert described it.⁵⁰ Some servants of Figuerola walked along the large underground passage, which doubled-up as a temperate road through which to seek out provisions from the nearby villages.⁵¹

From Isfahan to Qazvīn

After his arrival in Isfahan, the Ambassador had to wait for the Shah’s order before he could continue northwards to Qazvīn. When this was received, the necessary travel arrangements were apparently smoothed over with the capable help of Totanbeg, the Criminal Judge for Isfahan.⁵² Figuerola then left Isfahan on 28th May 1618, arriving in Kashan on 4th June, and Qazvīn on 14th June.

This part of the paper draws on my fieldwork to especially focus on the route and halting places along the section of the Ambassador’s journey between Isfahan and Kashan.

Kashan, 150 km to the north of the official capital of Isfahan, was not only on the road to the former capital, Qazvīn; but also on one of the routes to Ashraf and Farahabad (effectively the “new capitals”, after their founding in 1611–1613).⁵³ It was well known as a favourite place for Shah ‘Abbās. Gouvea, travelling with ‘Abbās in 1602, writes of how “the king is very fond of this town and she merits it well because it is impossible that the elation with which [the Kashanis] receive him could

⁴⁶ Despite the “continual” representations of Figuerola, his party waited 12 days for camels: *L’Ambassade*, p. 77.

⁴⁷ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 77–78.

⁴⁸ Olearius, *The Voyages & travels of the ambassadors*, p. 252.

⁴⁹ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 83 and 171.

⁵⁰ Herbert, *A relation of some yeares travaile*, p. 51 names the place as “Tangee-Dolon”.

⁵¹ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 60–61. Some remnants of this were still visible in 1979: Gaube, “Ein Abschnitt”, p. 43.

⁵² *L’Ambassade*, p. 203.

⁵³ Charles Melville, “From Qars to Qandahar: The itineraries of Shah ‘Abbas I (995–1038/1587–1629)”, in J. Calmard (ed.), *Etudes Safavides* (Paris & Tehran, 1993), p. 213 and reference 65.

come from anything but a very cordial love that these vassals have for their King".⁵⁴ The town was also an important commercial centre in its own right.⁵⁵ Figueroa described the "good humour" of the Kashanis as resulting from their "great riches, which they have amassed in the commerce of all sorts of silks".⁵⁶ The route between Isfahan and Kashan was therefore, and unsurprisingly, richly documented by numerous European travellers.⁵⁷ The journey was also the single most frequent for that most mobile of rulers, Shah 'Abbās – in each of the different phases of his reign.⁵⁸ The first part of the "Solemn Pilgrimage" of Shah 'Abbās from Isfahan to Mashhad in 1601 was up to Kashan;⁵⁹ and my own recent on-the-ground retracing of that pilgrimage⁶⁰ allows me – to some extent – to follow the fieldwork methodology that Gaube used, and Floor commended, in their explorations of the trade route from Bandar-e 'Abbās to Isfahan (the southernmost part of Figueroa's journey).⁶¹ This paper therefore now discusses each halt on the way to Kashan.

Masjid-i Tuqchi and Dolabat

In the evening of Sunday 28th May 1618, the Ambassador left his lodgings in the city of Isfahan and travelled "in the company of the Governors and several other persons of quality" to a "Mosque near the walls of the city". He stayed that night and the following day in "one of the rooms of the houses which adjoined the mosque". Tents were erected nearby for his servants, while the Ambassador waited for enough camels and horses to be assembled for his party and their baggage.⁶²

This mosque is most likely the Masjid-i Tuqchi, now replaced by a large roundabout.⁶³ The nearby Tuqchi Gate was the usual exit or entry point for groups travelling between Isfahan and Kashan.⁶⁴ Shah 'Abbās stayed in or near the Masjid-i-Tuqchi on the walking pilgrimage in 1601;⁶⁵ and even as late as 1717, John Bell of

⁵⁴ António de Gouvea, *Relation des grandes guerres et victoires obtenues par le Roy de Perse Cha Abbas...* (Rouen, 1646), p. 149.

⁵⁵ Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ *L'Ambassade*, p. 216.

⁵⁷ For example: Charles Melville, "Shah 'Abbas and the Pilgrimage to Mashhad", *Pembroke Papers*, 4 (1996), Table 4.

⁵⁸ Melville, "From Qars to Qandahar", Figures 1, 2 and 3.

⁵⁹ Iskandar Munshī, *The history of Shah 'Abbas the Great: Tārīkh-e 'ālamārā-ye 'Abbāsī by Iskander Beg Monshi*, trans. Roger M. Savory (2 vols., Colorado, 1978), p. 800.

⁶⁰ Caroline Mawer, "Shah Abbas: His 1000 km Walk Retraced", Electronic resource: <http://www.carolinemawer.com/shah-abbas>

⁶¹ Gaube, "Ein Abschnitt", pp. 38-47; Floor, "The Bandar 'Abbas-Isfahan Route", p. 67.

⁶² *L'Ambassade*, p. 203.

⁶³ See image at: <http://www.carolinemawer.com/shah-abbas/isfahan-6.php>

⁶⁴ Personal communication, April 2008: *Miras Farhangi* staff in Isfahan.

⁶⁵ Melville, "Shah 'Abbas and the Pilgrimage", p. 199.

Antermony "lodged in a palace, called Tuchtzy, belonging to the Shach [then Soltān-Hosayn]", when he entered Isfahan.⁶⁶

On 29th May, the Ambassador's group travelled to the village he named as Dolabat,⁶⁷ where there was a "little house of the King". This had a single large room, encircled by four galleries and another small cabinet, all painted in an *ancienne* manner, with scenes of hunting, feasting and "women dancing, in the way they dance today in Persia".⁶⁸

As for the previous halt, this site is now a large roundabout with no signs of any old buildings. However, Shah 'Abbās certainly used the location that Eskander Beg calls Dowlatābād for his own⁶⁹ and other dignitaries⁷⁰ ceremonial entries into Isfahan. It was, in addition, a staging place for military expeditions;⁷¹ and the place from where members of the royal court were invited to join 'Abbās on his 1601 walk to Mashhad.⁷² The evening before the latter occasion, Sefer Muratowicz, an Armenian trader sent to Iran by the King of Poland,⁷³ describes a private meeting with Shah 'Abbās which was perhaps in the same royal house that Figueroa visited. Muratowicz was impressed by the décor in the "magnificent" hall⁷⁴ – perhaps he saw the same paintings that Figueroa noticed in 1618.

Two unnamed caravanserais

On 30th May, the Ambassador sent the main *Caravane* off one or two leagues in advance, with the whole party eventually lodging at a half-ruined caravanserai. Since there were tents and Figueroa could sleep in his litter, the fact that the local water was bad was potentially much more significant than any problem with the

⁶⁶ John Bell, *Travels from St. Petersburg in Russia to diverse parts of Asia* (Glasgow, 1763), p. 95.

⁶⁷ *L'Ambassade*, p. 258 has this as *Dolatabad* on his return journey. Bell (*Travels from St. Petersburg*, p. 95) stayed at "Davilettabbatt" in 1717.

⁶⁸ *L'Ambassade*, p. 204.

⁶⁹ For example, in 1589-1590: Iskandar Munshī, *The history of Shah 'Abbas*, p. 602.

⁷⁰ For example, in 1611-1613, when the Uzbek Khan, Vali Mohammad entered Isfahan: Iskandar Munshī, *The history of Shah 'Abbas*, p. 1044.

⁷¹ For example, in 1603 the Shah spent the first night of his campaign to reconquer Azerbaijan and Sirvan at Dowlatābād: Iskandar Munshī, *The history of Shah 'Abbas*, p. 828.

⁷² Melville, "Shah 'Abbas and the Pilgrimage", p. 199.

⁷³ Muratowicz was charged with the purchase of various sabres, tents and other fabrics, and most especially with overseeing the production of some carpets specially woven to include the national emblem of Poland and the Vasa coat of arms. Maria Szuppe, "Un marchand du roi de Pologne en Perse, 1601-1602", *Moyen Orient & Océan Indien*, 3 (1986), p. 82.

⁷⁴ The merchant writes of being accompanied "half a league" (not 3 leagues) to an "orchard" outside Isfahan. Szuppe claims that this meeting was at the Čehel Sotun, but this had not yet been built. Szuppe, "Un marchand du roi", p. 98.

lodgings. Luckily the group had brought plenty of water (and the all-important ice for refreshments) with them from Isfahan, and so were not significantly inconvenienced. The next day, 31st May, the group stopped at a much more comfortable caravanserai. This had a seductively beautiful spring “just at its entrance”, with clear and seemingly fresh water. However, all those who drank were struck down with terrible headaches.⁷⁵

Since the Ambassador gives no distances or place-names here, it is difficult, even drawing on the accounts of other Safavid-era travellers and Siroux’s multiple documented routes out of Isfahan,⁷⁶ to definitively identify these two caravanserais. The first “half-ruined” caravanserai is especially challenging to locate, but might perhaps be della Valle’s “Ric”, which was also half-ruined.⁷⁷ Supporting this idea, Stodart’s “Rige” (in 1628) had “noe goode water but brackish”.⁷⁸ Alternatively, Figueroa’s party might perhaps have stayed in Dombi – as Olearius did (twice) in 1637.⁷⁹ Siroux describes the caravanserai there as having been modified in the reign of Shah ‘Abbās – presumably after Figueroa’s visit in 1618. The water supply at Dombi is now from a *qanāt* (subterranean water canal), replacing a “gutter” carrying the briny local water.⁸⁰

Figueroa’s caravanserai with the noxious spring may well be Sardahan. This would fit with Siroux’s description of the Sardahan caravanserai as being sited on the edge of a large travertine deposit, formed by springs which only dried up in 1958.⁸¹ Della Valle, travelling less than five months before Figueroa in 1618, was impressed by how, although the “Serdehe” caravanserai was completely isolated in the mountain landscape, the “Master [there]... always has with him the necessary provisions for those who pass on this route”.⁸² Ten years later, Stodart (visiting with Sir Dodmore Cotton) was much less positive, although this may have had something to do with the man he saw “stacked [staked i.e. impaled]” there.⁸³ Shah ‘Abbās (in 1601)⁸⁴ and

⁷⁵ *L’Ambassade*, p. 204.

⁷⁶ Maxime Siroux, *Anciennes voies et monuments routiers de la region d’Ispahan* (Le Caire, 1971), pp. 15–25.

⁷⁷ Pietro della Valle, *Les Fameux voyages de Pietro della Valle, gentil-homme romain...* (4 vols., Paris, 1661–1665), vol. III, p. 190.

⁷⁸ Robert Stodart, *The Journal of Robert Stodart: Being an account of his experiences...* (London, 1935), p. 45.

⁷⁹ Olearius, *The Voyages & travels of the ambassadors*, pp. 265 and 383.

⁸⁰ Siroux, *Anciennes voies*, p. 147.

⁸¹ Siroux, *Anciennes voies*, pp. 23 and 167. Travertine is a form of limestone especially associated with geothermal springs – which might account for the noxious quality of the water.

⁸² Della Valle, *Les Fameux voyages*, vol. III, p. 190.

⁸³ Stodart, *The Journal of Robert Stodart*, p. 45. See also: Herbert, *A relation of some yeares travaile*, p. 91.

⁸⁴ Melville, “From Qars to Qandahar”, p. 200.

Olearius (1637)⁸⁵ also both lodged at Sardahan. Although Siroux describes Sardahan as a “name still famous [...] one of the rare places shown on the maps”, I had unusual difficulty in locating it.⁸⁶ Once traced, however, it still looks pleasingly like Siroux’s notion of a lost Italianate palace, even if the “spectacular masterpiece” is now “an irremediable ruin”.⁸⁷

Tajurabat

Figueroa then travelled on 1st June to another caravanserai, in a small village he named as Tajurabat.⁸⁸ Kleiss suggests that this corresponds to the Robat-e-Sang.⁸⁹ Although the caravanserai was “very convenient and habitable”, the Ambassador decided that he would prefer to lodge – for both himself and “his people” – in a nearby and “very beautiful garden of the King”.⁹⁰

This garden had within it a house which, while small, was “one of the most beautiful things which we have ever seen”. It was only 25 paces square, “including the thickness of the walls”, and the principal room was only “8 by 10 feet [2.5 by 3 metres]”.⁹¹ The walls were embellished up to a height of 10 feet [3 m] with paintings – “without comparison, more finished than one usually sees in Persia” – within a golden frieze. Above all this, the arches of the azure and gold ceiling were decorated “with so much éclat” that it bedazzled the viewer’s eye. The central room was surrounded by four even smaller galleries, each with similarly sumptuous decoration. There were multiple doors and glass windows illuminating the space – but the snugly fitting wooden surrounds meant that the rooms were warm even in winter. This stunning building was situated in a very large garden, “planted with all sorts of fruit trees, [with] many planes and alders” providing a most delightful shade. There was some “precocious” fruit, most notably some “admirable” white mulberries; and, here and there, fountains and little ponds were dotted about.⁹²

Pietro della Valle, dining with his wife Ma’ani at “Tagiabad” on their journey to Mazanderan, was much less impressed, writing that the *pavillon* was smaller, less

⁸⁵ Olearius, *The Voyages & travels of the ambassadors*, p. 383.

⁸⁶ Siroux, *Anciennes voies*, pp. 167–168. Sardahan is located off the southbound carriageway of the modern road (on the other side of a large hill than the northbound carriageway).

⁸⁷ Siroux, *Anciennes voies*, p. 168 – and see: <http://carolinemawer.com/shah-abbas/isfahan-12.php>

⁸⁸ *L’Ambassade*, p. 204. On the return journey, Figueroa has this as *Iajuc abad*: p. 257.

⁸⁹ Wolfram Kleiss, “Die Safavidische Palastanlage von Tādjābād”, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, 27 (1994), p. 289; Wolfram Kleiss, *Karawanenbauten in Iran* (6 vols., Berlin, 1996–2001), vol. III, p. 94.

⁹⁰ *L’Ambassade*, p. 204. Della Valle stayed in this caravanserai when returning to Isfahan: Della Valle, *Les Fameux voyages*, vol. III, p. 584.

⁹¹ Kleiss measured the diameter of the central room of the “castle” at 5.25 m. Kleiss, “Die Safavidische Palastanlage von Tādjābād”, pp. 291–292.

⁹² *L’Ambassade*, pp. 204–206.

beautiful and must surely have been much cheaper than that over the entry to the royal palace in Isfahan. Although he may perhaps have seen an incompletely gilded version, della Valle was also critical of the paintings, claiming that "the ignorance of the workmen is such that all they do is only a caprice, and without any design". Della Valle did, however, agree that the gardens, and especially the alleyway "garnished" with cypresses, the "agreeable" pools, and the "sweetly murmuring" cascades of water were extraordinarily beautiful.⁹³

Figuerola was clear that, when he visited, the house had only just been completed and the gardens recently planted.⁹⁴ Although both Eskander Beg⁹⁵ and, much later, Kleiss,⁹⁶ describe the complex as including bath-houses; Figuerola says that the small pools in the gardens had to be used for bathing, since the larger ones had not yet been constructed.⁹⁷ Something, however, certainly existed at what Eskander Beg called the Bag-e Tajabad as early as November 1608. Then, 'Abbās' vizier, Hatem Beg, and a few of the latter's retainers had to forcibly break up a brawl there at the end of "a formal assembly and a serious discussion".⁹⁸

Abasabat and the Emansade

The Ambassador left Tajurabat on 2nd June, a little after sundown. As for the previous two days, the party was travelling along a route which, although mountainous, would easily have taken a carriage if, as Figuerola writes, they had been accustomed to such vehicles in this part of Asia. It was after midnight when the Ambassador arrived at another royal garden, named as Abasabat.⁹⁹

This halt is not mentioned by the other Safavid-era European travellers I have consulted. It is however surely the "Bag-e Abbasabad between Natanz and Kashan" included in Eskander Beg's list of Shah 'Abbās' Public Works¹⁰⁰ and documented by Kleiss as being 28 km north-west of Natanz.¹⁰¹ The location is now perhaps best known for being the nearest village to the infamous local nuclear plant;¹⁰² but in 1986 Kleiss recorded a tri-partite Safavid "castle", a watermill, and two other build-

⁹³ Della Valle, *Les Fameux voyages*, vol. III, pp. 191-192.

⁹⁴ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 205-206.

⁹⁵ "At Natanz, the Bag-e Tajabad, with court buildings, upper chambers, bathhouses" is included in the list of Shah 'Abbās' Public Works: Iskandar Munshī, *The history of Shah 'Abbas*, p. 537.

⁹⁶ Kleiss, "Die Safavidische Palastanlage von Tādjābād", p. 295.

⁹⁷ *L'Ambassade*, p. 205.

⁹⁸ Iskandar Munshī, *The history of Shah 'Abbas*, p. 973.

⁹⁹ *L'Ambassade*, p. 206.

¹⁰⁰ Iskandar Munshī, *The history of Shah 'Abbas*, p. 537.

¹⁰¹ Wolfram Kleiss, "Schlösser und Herrensitze auf dem Lande aus safavidischer und qadjarischer Zeit", *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran*, 20 (1987) p. 345.

¹⁰² See: <http://www.iranwatch.org/privateviews/NCRI/ncri-newsecretnuclearsite-092707.htm>

ings on the site.¹⁰³ Figuerola seems to have arrived before the construction was completed. He describes the gardens as having been planted even more recently than those at Tajurabat, while the single building then extant only afforded shelter for himself, in an "alcove"; which might perhaps be the garden *iwān* that Kleiss describes in such detail.¹⁰⁴ In 2008, 170 million rials were allocated to the renovation of the "palace", most especially its ceiling.¹⁰⁵

After leaving Abasabat, Figuerola moved on through the mountains. Shortly after sunset on 3rd June, members of the Ambassador's party caught sight of a large beast, so fearlessly unmoving on the path in front, that some of the group decided to give chase and, "as usually happens, there are some people who persuade themselves that they have seen what they have not in fact seen". These fellows came back to say the creature was a Lion, or perhaps even a Tiger, whilst others who claimed to have seen it more distinctly were sure that it was simply one of the many wolves known to thrive in the area.¹⁰⁶

In the early hours of 4th June 1618, the party arrived at a third royal garden, this time named as Emansade and so presumably linked to an *emāmzāda*, or Shi'ite shrine. The building there was also not complete and, despite the large canal of good water, there were very few, and very small, trees. Figuerola describes how the whole party was "strangely persecuted" by a tiny white insect, so small as to be almost imperceptible. The neck, face, hands and arms of anyone trying to sleep were attacked, and the sensation – "as if they were on fire" – was so disturbing that any rest was impossible. At first the Ambassador put all this down to "bad air", but a local man showed him "buttons" of insect infestation at the base of the leaves of some of the young mulberry trees.¹⁰⁷

Melville suggested that this halt might be the same "Imamzada" used by Shah 'Abbās on his 1601 walk, and surmised that the latter might be "the shrine of Salih b. Musa al-Kazim, incorrectly positioned".¹⁰⁸ Whether or not this is true for 'Abbās, the latter is surely not where Figuerola stayed. The Ambassador provides much detail about the mountainous nature of the route he took¹⁰⁹ while the shrine Melville referred to is on the modern roadway to the east of the mountains, on the flat edge of

¹⁰³ Kleiss, "Schlösser und Herrensitze", pp. 345-351.

¹⁰⁴ This was 5.9 by 5.5 m, and 8.1 m high. Kleiss, "Schlösser und Herrensitze", pp. 350-351. Abb. 7.

¹⁰⁵ See: <http://www.nitc.co.ir/iran-daily/1387/3178/html/iranica.htm#s320001>

¹⁰⁶ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 206-207.

¹⁰⁷ *L'Ambassade*, p. 207. A similar infestation was noted just south of Saba: pp. 225-226.

¹⁰⁸ Melville, "Shah 'Abbas and the Pilgrimage", pp. 203-205. Della Valle stopped at this shrine:

Della Valle, *Les Fameux voyages*, vol. III, p. 192.

¹⁰⁹ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 206 and 208.

the desert. In fact, since many followers of Imam Reza died locally,¹¹⁰ there are – confusingly – more than forty *emānzādas* to choose from in the immediate area.¹¹¹

During the day of 5th June, the governors of Caxen (Kashan) sent a messenger – bearing gifts of two *charges* of fruit, one of snow (available year-round from the nearby mountains¹¹²), and various other refreshments more than welcome to Figueroa in the “great heat of the season”. The messenger again asked the Ambassador to make his entry into the town in the daylight.¹¹³

Kashan and up to Qazvīn

After a suitably timed entry into Kashan; Figueroa was lodged comfortably in the town, in a building near the Maidan which was substantial enough to accommodate a large part of his travelling “family” – the others were sent to a nearby, high quality caravanserai.¹¹⁴

The Ambassador then spent two days being entertained. Rams and, the local speciality, huge bulls were set to fight each other. As Figueroa watched from a gallery, crowds of ferociously partisan male spectators battled with each other, and rows of veiled women howled in victory or defeat, as appropriate. A troop of fine-looking women he had seen as part of his initial reception, now loaded down with precious stones, danced for him. There was even a guided tour of – at least part of – the “Serail, or retreat for the [Shah’s] women”.¹¹⁵

After Kashan, there were nine more halts before Qazvīn. With no more royal gardens to lodge in, the Ambassador had to cope with the sulphurous¹¹⁶ and “insupportable”¹¹⁷ heat of June and the “virtually pestilential” local water¹¹⁸ in the caravanse-rais and simple village houses along the way.

There were other challenges too. On 6th June, the “least poor” inhabitants of the badly-off village of Cencem approached Figueroa for help with an epidemic that had already killed thirty of the villagers: the Ambassador declared the “extravagant”

¹¹⁰ A local military engagement around the time of Imam Reza’s martyrdom in 818 claimed the lives of two of the Imam’s brothers (or perhaps cousins). Other followers settled, and died, nearby. Personal communication, November 2008: Deputy Mayor of Badrood.

¹¹¹ Personal communication, November 2008: *Miras Farhangi* staff in Natanz.

¹¹² *L’Ambassade*, p. 216.

¹¹³ *L’Ambassade*, p. 208.

¹¹⁴ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 209–210.

¹¹⁵ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 209–215.

¹¹⁶ *L’Ambassade*, p. 217.

¹¹⁷ *L’Ambassade*, p. 224.

¹¹⁸ *L’Ambassade*, p. 228. See also p. 218.

chatter and black marks on the skin of the affected as signs of a “malign fever”, and sensibly recommended that they request the help of a doctor from Kashan.¹¹⁹

Arriving at Com (Qom), on 8th June, there was a men-only formal entry into the bustling and well-built town. Figueroa laughed at the naïveté – it’s not clear exactly whose naïveté he was referring to – especially since, although he was told by a man that the ladies had stayed away out of respect for the local Saint,¹²⁰ a crowd of women of all ages subsequently clambered through a hole in the garden wall of the house where he was staying, both to “see the Foreigners” and also to benefit from the “good sum of money” that the Ambassador distributed.¹²¹

Figueroa was interested to see the – supposedly “magic” but definitely “smoking” – mountain of Gia Farabat, stopping his litter to inspect this during the moon-lit night of 8th/9th June. He deflated the “unbelievable and fabulous” tales of some Armenians in his employ, even after two of his “most valiant” servants apparently confirmed that the peak could never be climbed, when “the earth disappeared” beneath the hooves of their horses: the always-rational Ambassador simply saw parallels with volcanic phenomena he was already familiar with.¹²²

Four days later, Figueroa arrived in Casbin (Qazvīn) “with the present that he had brought from Spain for the King [‘Abbās]”. By then, he had “so much impatience” to complete his task, that he immediately ordered the bundles unpacked and set in order for the presentation. Given that the Safavid court “used panoply to display its power and [...] measured the importance of visiting embassies by the same criterion”,¹²³ the Ambassador’s wish to minimise the *embaras* on the day of the audience (by sending the presents off immediately) was somewhat surprising. However, despite Figueroa’s eagerness, Persian etiquette triumphed – and, two days later, 600 men paraded all the various gifts in front of the Shah.¹²⁴

There was then a (six week) stay in Qazvīn apparently so unremarkable that no further details are given beyond those concerning the audience with the Shah.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 217–218.

¹²⁰ Figueroa said this was “Lela, grand-daughter of Mahomet, and daughter of Aly and Fatima”. Of course the shrine is actually dedicated to Fātema Ma’suma, the sister of the eighth Shi’ite Imam, ‘Alī Reẓā. *L’Ambassade*, p. 220.

¹²¹ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 218–223.

¹²² *L’Ambassade*, pp. 223–225.

¹²³ Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, p. 98.

¹²⁴ *L’Ambassade*, p. 230–241.

¹²⁵ *L’Ambassade*, p. 141.

Distance and speed of travel

A short digression here considers speed and distances. Figueroa's ten-year embassy has been described as "the most leisurely on record",¹²⁶ and he only occasionally included specific distances in his narrative. However – and especially for the trade that the Ambassador was charged with redirecting towards Spanish merchants¹²⁷ – an understanding of the distances involved, and the speed of any journey, is essential.

The EIC agent, Pettus, in 1618 gave the distance between the coast and Isfahan as 550 or 560 miles (c. 900 km); and reckoned that, including a rest allowance of two or three days, this could be covered by a horse in 30 days – so, at around 30 kilometres daily. An ass would take 40 days and a camel 45 days.¹²⁸ Tavernier agreed that camels, although the cheapest option, were slow – suggesting that horse caravans were twice as fast, while men travelling with no merchandise could travel four times faster.¹²⁹ In 1665, Tavernier's journey from the coast to Isfahan took 40 days,¹³⁰ while Kaempfer, travelling with an EIC caravan in 1685, took 37 days.¹³¹

Ambassadors usually travelled slowly,¹³² and Figueroa – delayed especially by his difficulties in getting pack-animals and permissions – spent 36 days just getting from the coast to Shiraz,¹³³ plus another 14 days travelling from Shiraz to Isfahan.¹³⁴ In 1701, the Dutch Ambassador spent even longer on the road.¹³⁵

Always, speed varied depending on who was trying to do what. Shah 'Abbās himself was a famously "itinerant" ruler¹³⁶ – travelling up to a maximum of 4500 km in 1591–1592.¹³⁷ On each of his thirty-odd annual moves,¹³⁸ he generally covered 34–45

¹²⁶ *Letters received by the EIC*, vol. V, p. xvi.

¹²⁷ Steensgard, *The Asian trade revolution*, p. 312.

¹²⁸ R. W. Ferrier, "An English View of Persian Trade in 1618: Reports from the Merchants Edward Pettus and Thomas Barker", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 19, 2 (1976), p. 195.

¹²⁹ Tavernier, *Les six voyages*, vol I, pp. 107–108.

¹³⁰ Tavernier, *Les six voyages*, vol I, pp. 653–656, 668–673 and 676–681. This included eight days in Shiraz, and four in Lar.

¹³¹ Floor, "The Bandar 'Abbas-Isfahan Route", n. 23. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, p. 52 says that the journey generally took 35 days.

¹³² Floor, "The Bandar 'Abbas-Isfahan Route", p. 70.

¹³³ This included a 12 day wait in Lara; and one rest day.

¹³⁴ With an intervening three month delay in Shiraz. His return was slightly faster: 13 days Isfahan to Shiraz, 28 days Shiraz to the coast – including 7 days waiting in Lar; with an additional 13 days in Shiraz.

¹³⁵ 58 days from the coast to Isfahan, and 53 days returning: Floor, "The Bandar 'Abbas-Isfahan Route", p. 70.

¹³⁶ Melville, "From Qars to Qandahar", p. 222.

¹³⁷ Melville, "From Qars to Qandahar", p. 220.

km/day.¹³⁹ He could, however, travel much faster. Della Valle wrote of how the Shah "often goes alone, travelling with two or three others, travelling rapidly on the fastest horses, with which he often does thirty days journey or more in five or six days".¹⁴⁰ Using Yazdi's astrolabe, 'Abbās was clocked at an impressive 13 km/hr between Shiraz and Yazd: spending 28 hours and 39 minutes in the saddle, "very good going for a party of horsemen", especially since his mare was pregnant.¹⁴¹ Even faster times could be achieved by the Shah's "special messengers".¹⁴²

Assessment of speed is of course dependant on distance measurement. The Safavids generally used the *farsakh* as their distance-unit, and this is explicitly defined at just under 6 km.¹⁴³ For the 1601 pilgrimage, Yazdi used a (*tanab*-length: c. 40 m) measured rope to quantify each daily walk; and this was confirmed as part of my field-work as both exact and surprisingly easy to use. The single stage of the 1601 pilgrimage that can be definitively checked using Google Earth is quite accurate.¹⁴⁴

In practice, however, Houtum-Schindler is clear that the popular *farsakh* may vary with the area (in the plains of Khorasan it is proverbially "as long as the intestines of 'Omar"); the gradient (shorter in hilly areas); whether one is on horseback or not (shorter for pedestrians); and even, for one Kurdish gentleman, the behaviour of his shoelaces (when they needed tying, he had walked one *farsakh*).¹⁴⁵

Corresponding with Melville's idea that European estimates of distances should be treated with "even greater caution" than those from Persians,¹⁴⁶ Figueroa's *lieues* (leagues) seem not always to be a fixed entity: for example, he writes of his journey on 16th November 1617 as being "only four leagues, or five small ones".¹⁴⁷

In contrast, della Valle, as usual keen to "let nothing pass", makes his own "little digression" in his voluminous text to define *lieues* as equivalent to, and "still call[ed]

¹³⁸ Melville, "From Qars to Qandahar", p. 219.

¹³⁹ In 1607: Melville, "From Qars to Qandahar", p. 208; with 40 km/day in 1611, p. 213; and 37 km/day between Ashraf and Isfahan, p. 214.

¹⁴⁰ Della Valle, quoted in Melville, "From Qars to Qandahar", p. 198.

¹⁴¹ Melville, "From Qars to Qandahar", pp. 205–206.

¹⁴² Melville, "From Qars to Qandahar", p. 208.

¹⁴³ M. Ismail Marcinkowski, *Measures and weights in the Islamic world: An English translation of Walther Hinz's handbook* (Kuala Lumpur, 2003) p. 91.

¹⁴⁴ Caroline Mawer, "Measuring with a rope: Trialling the *tanab*", Electronic resource: <http://www.carolinemawer.com/shah-abbas/measuring-with-a-rope.php>

¹⁴⁵ A. Houtum-Schindler, "On the Length of the Persian Farsakh", *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 10, 9 (1888), p. 586.

¹⁴⁶ Melville, "From Qars to Qandahar", p. 199.

¹⁴⁷ *L'Ambassade*, p. 91. Then on 13th November 1617, Figueroa expected to travel "six grandes lieues" (p. 80); whilst on 16th November 1617, the accompanying Monks were lost, until they saw the camels "une petite lieue" away from the camp (p. 85).

by the ancient term, *Parasanga* [...] that they name today *Ferseng*".¹⁴⁸ Supporting this definition, Figueroa reports Daulatabad as being three leagues north of Isfahan;¹⁴⁹ while Iskander Beg has it three *farsakhs* away.¹⁵⁰ Della Valle confesses in his text that he has not "made any progress in idiomatic Persian" and so more often uses Turkish "which they equally speak in this country". The Italian notes that, in Turkish, a league is called *Agag* (or tree) and also "want[s] to say that 4 *milles* of Italy make one league in these quarters here".¹⁵¹ In imitation of the European "*guides des chemins*", della Valle aimed "to make an exact and assured journal" of his trips – and so therefore usually recorded the distances for each day's travel.¹⁵² Using my own fieldwork results and Google Earth, at least one of della Valle's measures can be confirmed as accurate.

From Qazvīn to Isfahan

Returning to Figueroa's progress across Persia; after the presentation and royal audience, the Ambassador headed back south – leaving Qazvīn on 27th July 1618 and arriving in Isfahan on 13th August. The Preface of Figueroa's narrative says that he used "the same route by which he had come".¹⁵³ Whether or not this is so, he certainly utilised some different lodgings – and this section focuses especially on these choices.

First, however, a little about how the southwards caravan functioned. Figueroa no longer had to worry about transporting and keeping safe all the presents for the Shah; and, after all the time he had spent earlier, resolutely sitting in his litter (unless the road was precipitously dangerous or for formal entries into towns), he now "want[ed] to ride into Isfahan".¹⁵⁴ There was a great press of other travellers on the road: as well as Figueroa's own numerous "family" and that of Hilao Chan, *Seigneur* of the mountain-dwelling Kurds, there were also some Georgians, being sent as prisoners by the Shah to Isfahan, and several merchants. The majority of the travellers had brought along their wives and children and there was an especial issue with the large number of women being transported in litters, "or to speak more accurately, *cages*". Figueroa described the "very ancient" custom forbidding any man from approaching these *cages* and how even "the first people in the Kingdom" would

¹⁴⁸ Della Valle, *Les Fameux voyages*, vol. III, p. 184.

¹⁴⁹ *L'Ambassade*, p. 296.

¹⁵⁰ Iskandar Munshī, *The history of Shah 'Abbas*, p. 800.

¹⁵¹ Della Valle, *Les Fameux voyages*, vol. III, pp. 184–185. Pettus and Herbert have one league as 3 English miles.

¹⁵² Della Valle, *Les Fameux voyages*, vol. III, p. 190.

¹⁵³ *L'Ambassade*, Preface (un-numbered pages).

¹⁵⁴ *L'Ambassade*, p. 139 (on how he had to leave 150 loads of pepper behind); pp. 171–172 (on the rain on the presents); p. 246 (on how he wanted to ride)

retire respectfully, while the less important could be made to lie face-down "with great blows from sticks". When he wanted to overtake, the Ambassador was "often forbidden", by the eunuch guards, to pass nearby.¹⁵⁵

In this part of his text, Figueroa explicitly describes the daily routine of his journey. The whole party would have supper an hour before sunset. Some then departed, with the baggage; while Figueroa left a little later, accompanied by his suite of personal staff, and on horseback. The Ambassador marched thus until midnight; after which he would ascend into his litter, and perhaps dine on a little cold meat, or fruit preserves, carried expressly on another horse, or drink "fresh water" from his leather flask. He then slept in the litter, until he arrived at the new halting place, where he would find his room prepared, and his bed made, ready for him to sleep until 9 or 10 in the morning. Then he could rest, dine, or otherwise divert himself for the rest of the day.¹⁵⁶

Although this account is very similar to the recorded travel habits of Pietro della Valle, it probably does not reflect many of Figueroa's other journeys. The narrative makes it clear that Figueroa sometimes set out jointly with the main party, and often started off in his litter – only descending from it when the route was precipitously mountainous.¹⁵⁷ The timing of each day's journey was also varied depending on the heat of the season, or to allow a daytime view of especially challenging terrain.¹⁵⁸

The Ambassador's account is not explicit, but after Qazvīn it gradually becomes clear that Figueroa and his "family" have been placed in a slow caravan – essentially composed of prisoners and women – under the nominal direction of Cassen Beg, one of the "so imperious & so insolent" *Corchis* or "Guards of the King".¹⁵⁹ The courteous King of the Kurds, who Figueroa had – repeatedly – offered the use of his litter ("because it was empty"), and for whom he had slowed his progress – taking two extra rest days – was actually, *de facto*, a prisoner of Shah 'Abbās.¹⁶⁰

Figueroa, in the text and perhaps on the journey too, ignored this potential humiliation when, on 7th August, and to avoid the tormenting insects at *Emansade* and the "maltreatment" of the guardians there, his party travelled an additional four leagues to stay in yet another garden of the Shah.¹⁶¹ Here, and over the next few days in Natanz, the Ambassador and his travelling "family" relaxed and enjoyed themselves with some quintessentially Safavid pleasures.

¹⁵⁵ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 242–245.

¹⁵⁶ *L'Ambassade*, p. 258.

¹⁵⁷ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 52, 54, 57, 62–63 and 78.

¹⁵⁸ Della Valle, *Les Fameux voyages*, vol. III, pp. 185–188.

¹⁵⁹ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 252, 256.

¹⁶⁰ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 246–248.

¹⁶¹ *L'Ambassade*, p. 248.

At the first of these halts, in the royal garden, there was no building extant, just the crumbling remains of an old caravanserai. Figueroa therefore – just like any Safavid nobleman would – had a tent erected under the trees and near a fountain. A canal fed by this fountain passed through the tent, making one area for his bed, and another for his “sideboard” and chairs. While his servants picked fruit, and his tent was being erected, the Ambassador reclined on cushions near the water. Two foxes were flushed out of the vines which, loaded down with grapes, almost covered the whole garden. The valets and the other servants then engaged in that favourite pursuit of Shah ‘Abbās himself – hunting. Eventually one of the foxes took cover just where Figueroa was sleeping. Obviously not quite yet a proper Safavid gentleman, he insisted that it should be spared, giving as a pretext the understandable complaints of the “master” of the garden about the state of his grapes. “To the contentment of all”, the “family” then settled down in what is described as a “very comfortable and agreeable lodging”; constructing little two-man “cabins” from the shady vines, and eating “the best grapes, the best melons, and the best figs” they had ever seen in Persia.¹⁶²

On 8th August, the party set out for Natanz. Unfortunately, the men who should have pre-organised the Ambassadorial lodging only arrived after the town governor had gone to bed. Figueroa therefore again slept in his litter. This was placed under a plane tree and next to large canals “making such an agreeable murmuring” that, when he saw the beauty of the place in the morning, he refused to enter the town; instead having a tent erected under another, smaller, plane tree and beside two streams. Some of the “family” scrambled through a hole in a “high and strong wall” surrounding more shady trees; the rest, including the camel-drivers, camped under “the great plane-tree, under which have lodged from time immemorial all the caravans from Shiraz and Isfahan to Qazvīn and Tabrīz”.¹⁶³

This tree must be the “Pay-i Chinar Natanz”, where Shah ‘Abbās stayed on the fifth stage of his 1601 pilgrimage.¹⁶⁴ In Natanz for my fieldwork, I observed very many plane trees. The plane tree immediately in front of the local shrine of Shaikh ‘Abd-al-Samad is both the largest in town and obviously ancient – reputedly it is the shade from this tree that has kept the Ilkhanid tile façade in such good condition.¹⁶⁵ However, this cannot be the same tree that Figueroa saw. Figueroa’s text states that the Ambassador stayed “200 paces” from the town’s famous mosque: “because it is there [200 paces away] that is the stopping place of all the caravans, what with the convenience of this beautiful and huge plane-tree, which is so admirable and of such

¹⁶² *L’Ambassade*, pp. 248–249

¹⁶³ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 249–250

¹⁶⁴ Melville, “Shah ‘Abbas and the Pilgrimage”, Table 3.

¹⁶⁵ Personal communication, November 2008: *Miras Farhangi* staff in Natanz.

a monstrous size”.¹⁶⁶ Supporting this, Natanz traditionally extends “*az čenār ta menār* [from the plane tree to the minaret]”, implying that the tree which sheltered caravans is not immediately adjacent to the shrine.¹⁶⁷

Miras Farhangi staff in Natanz showed me the faltering remains – now only just alive – of another famously old plane tree, on the edge of the traditional market-place, and in close proximity to what is now a canalised water-course. This fits well with the rest of Figueroa’s description: a stream entered from one side to cross the base of the tree (thereby making the lodging at the foot of the tree very agreeable, even in the heat of summer); and there was a small “house” nearby, where travellers could buy barley and straw, and other provisions. The tree was so large that even at midday, with the sun directly overhead, a whole caravan could be encompassed by its shade: Figueroa reported seeing more than 200 camels, horses and other beasts of burden comfortably shielded.¹⁶⁸

The Ambassador’s idyllic interlude was interrupted by a message from Cassen Beg, asking him to wait, because one of the Georgian prisoners had apparently escaped.¹⁶⁹ Figueroa lost his temper and sent an aide to say that “he would go when he pleased; that he was not a prisoner; that he was nothing to do with the large caravan; that there was nothing which could prevent him from leaving when he chose to”; and more in this serenely diplomatic vein. Cassen Beg drew his dagger, to kill the aide; and the latter in turn grabbed his own sword. Luckily the town governor and the other Persians present were less drunk than Cassen Beg, and not only stopped the fight, but also later successfully mollified the furious Ambassador.¹⁷⁰

Figueroa then promptly exited from Natanz, pausing only to admire the local gardens, streams, and water quality, before heading back to Isfahan.¹⁷¹ In the garden sections here, the Ambassador noticeably shifts his focus from practical or technological to more aesthetic or even sensuous details; for example, returning to the subject of the “monstrous tree” merely to eulogize the greenery underneath it.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ *L’Ambassade*, p. 251.

¹⁶⁷ Personal communication, November 2008: *Miras Farhangi* staff in Natanz.

¹⁶⁸ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 250–252.

¹⁶⁹ As it turned out, this Georgian had not, in fact, escaped – his horse was merely lagging behind as it was “too tired”. *L’Ambassade*, p. 255.

¹⁷⁰ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 254–255.

¹⁷¹ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 256–257.

¹⁷² *L’Ambassade*, p. 257.

Figueroa's litter

Before briefly reviewing Figueroa's last journey homewards across the *garmsīr*, another pause, this time to consider litters. Even though, as suggested above, the Ambassador's use of his litter seems to have declined somewhat over the time when he was in Persia: his "Palanquin, or litter"¹⁷³ is what marks Figueroa out from other European travellers. Unfortunately, he does not give any explicit description of what his litter was like – mentioning only how he slept in it when other accommodation was poor;¹⁷⁴ and how his leather water flask was suspended from the bars of the litter to maximise its coolness.¹⁷⁵

He did however describe the *cages* used by women and sick people in some detail. These were wooden boxes, around 1.0 by 0.6 m, up to a total height of 1.2 m, with an arched roof covered in "felt or wool or cotton or silk" depending on the rank of the passenger. Two boxes were suspended, one on each side of a camel, with the lady (or patient) facing either backwards or forwards as she chose, but always "sitting on her feet".¹⁷⁶

This seems to be the same device as used by Olearius, who recounts how, when ill, he was transported in a "chest", or Ketzaweha:

The Physician and myself were set upon the same Camel, whereby we were put to two great inconveniences; one proceeding from the violent Motion caused by the going of that great beast; and the other from the insupportable stink of the Camels.

The German goes on to describe his unfortunate, if hilarious, entry to Qazvīn:

As we passed through the Meidan [...] the people came also thither in great numbers, some of them having put it into their heads, that there were in the Ketzawehas, some great Beauties, whom we carried as Presents to the King; but when they saw sick persons with great beards coming out of them, they hung down their heads, and made all the haste they could away.¹⁷⁷

It seems unlikely that this type of litter is what Figueroa used. It would have been, at the least, uncomfortable to sleep in something with these dimensions. Even more importantly, the Ambassador was clearly not enamoured of the system, describing it

¹⁷³ *L'Ambassade*, p. 49.

¹⁷⁴ For example, *L'Ambassade*, pp. 64 and 164.

¹⁷⁵ *L'Ambassade*, p. 258.

¹⁷⁶ *L'Ambassade*, p. 244.

¹⁷⁷ Olearius, *The Voyages & travels of the ambassadors*, pp. 252–253.

as suitable for the women in Persia, since they "possess no dignity, because they are almost all Slaves".¹⁷⁸

The Ambassadorial party used another sort of litter for the large mastiff, Roldan, brought as one of the presents for the Shah. This dog "had tired his feet" on the long journey, and the Ambassador had him carried in a "Palanquin, or Indian litter" by men he hired expressly for this (in Lar).¹⁷⁹ Perhaps this was like the special palanquin used by Lady Ouseley, the heavily pregnant wife of the English ambassador: in 1811 this was "taken on board at Bombay with twenty stalwart Indian bearers who took turns, in relays of four, to carry the memsahib".¹⁸⁰ Again, the Ambassador's litter was surely different from this. Not only was it given a dissimilar name, Figueroa also makes much of it when his litter was twice – and so, clearly as an exception – carried "*à force des bras* [by the strength of men's arms]".¹⁸¹

Another option might be the *takht-i-ravan*, or "moving throne". These, at least in the nineteenth century, were carried by two mules – one fore, one aft – and looked like a sedan chair, although they were actually "no more than a flat board on which you squatted slung between two shafts, with sides to hide you from prying male eyes".¹⁸² Again, this does not sound very dignified or comfortable for the Ambassador.

The only other – indirect – information about the Ambassador's litter is when he dismounted from it, on his return to the coast, because "the camels carrying it fell" and he feared injury.¹⁸³ With more than one camel involved, perhaps Figueroa had something like the very splendid litter that Pietro della Valle had constructed for his beloved wife, Ma'ani. Nothing like this contrivance had apparently previously been produced by the Persian carpenters Pietro consulted, so he had to make a card model to explain that he wanted something large enough "that two camels carried it, and so spacious that four people could sit there, not on elevated chairs, as with us, but [on a] good silk mattress; and if you wanted to sleep, two or three people could do this easily, with the freedom to stretch out entirely". Maani had pretty cushions; four little windows, each with a cover "to hide oneself when one wants"; and two doors, which could be lowered or raised at will. The whole confection was multi-coloured, and "one could distinguish it perfectly from afar". It only required one man to lead it, since the two camels could be ordered to kneel down in unison. When the route was narrow, or if another traveller was encountered coming in the opposite direction

¹⁷⁸ *L'Ambassade*, p. 245. Some pilgrims and merchants also used these.

¹⁷⁹ *L'Ambassade*, p. 174. See also p. 232.

¹⁸⁰ Denis Wright, "Memsahibs in Persia", *Asian Affairs*, 14, 1 (1983), p. 6.

¹⁸¹ *L'Ambassade*, pp. 337 and 364.

¹⁸² Wright, "Memsahibs in Persia", p. 6.

¹⁸³ *L'Ambassade*, p. 346.

there might be a problem – though really there was “scarcely any difficulty to surmount in the end, with a little precaution and patience”.¹⁸⁴

Back through the *garmsīr*

The last Persian journey of the Ambassador (25th August to 18th October 1619) took him back southwards through an area which had been suffering from a drought for the whole of the intervening two years: many merchants had stopped trading altogether due to lack of water along the way; and a large part of the population had moved elsewhere.¹⁸⁵

Figuerola was affected with an acute attack of gout just before leaving Isfahan; and often had to use his litter. In some especially mountainous areas he was even carried in a chair.¹⁸⁶ With the drought, he took special care of his “family”; ordering every man to carry – besides his arquebus – a leather bag capable of containing 10 or 12 pints of water.¹⁸⁷ Every horse and mule had several small water containers suspended a handsbreadth away from the animal’s skin, and “kept fresh, by their continual movement”. The Ambassador was especially attentive when crossing the desert north of Lar: sending all of the valets on ahead when the fear of not finding water “made the thirst unbearable”.¹⁸⁸

He enjoyed staying in many of the same houses and with many of his previous hosts: meeting again, for example, the finest arrow-maker in Persia and then, in the next village, the man who had made archery bows for Shah ‘Abbās.¹⁸⁹ He wanted to sleep again in the tomb he had found so comfortable on his first trip (even though he was told two fresh bodies had only been interred there some three months previously).¹⁹⁰ He met new people too – most notably Gul Cana, the female governor in Dianin: seventy years old, courageous and capable, a true *femme de coeur* – and he saw how many roads had been cleared or repaired by Emām-qolī Khan.¹⁹¹ Travel was made easier, too, in rocky areas, or when the moon offered no or little illumination, by the use of *flambeaux* (flaming torches of resin).¹⁹² Despite the general preference for

¹⁸⁴ Della Valle, *Les Fameux voyages*, pp. 182–183.

¹⁸⁵ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 339 and 367.

¹⁸⁶ *L’Ambassade*, p. 343.

¹⁸⁷ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 339–340.

¹⁸⁸ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 355–359.

¹⁸⁹ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 336–338.

¹⁹⁰ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 362–363.

¹⁹¹ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 343 and 377.

¹⁹² *L’Ambassade*, pp. 341, 343–344, 364.

rebuilding, several structures had been substantially renovated since his first journeys.¹⁹³

All along the way, he continued to have many of the same sorts of problems as had dogged him previously. The issue with beasts of burden never went away. As for the receptions, on the way back through Lar, the governor there wanted to honour the Ambassador again – or perhaps merely “show that he had a cannon” – by firing a great salvo, which then had the cannon-balls whistling so close by that the whole party was “deafened”.¹⁹⁴

Some concluding remarks

This review of the Ambassador’s journeys gives a snapshot of Persian travel infrastructure in 1617–1619. Like Pettus’ and Barker’s letters concerning trade; Figuerola offers a unique view of Persian infrastructure at a key moment – “before it could be changed or even influenced by the operations of European trading companies [and] before the freeing of the navigation of the Persian Gulf from Portuguese control [in 1622]”.¹⁹⁵

As a royal guest, Figuerola’s narrative includes exceptionally valuable accounts of the many royal houses and gardens to be found in the area between Natanz and Kashan. Despite della Valle’s assertion that the Shah had “houses furnished with provisions and attendants for all his needs at all the principal places”; little detailed evidence is provided for this.¹⁹⁶ Melville has bemoaned the “lack of any satisfactory description” of the important, and commonly used, routes between Isfahan and Kashan.¹⁹⁷ Figuerola helps fill both of these gaps, especially when his narrative is combined with the results of field work.

Looking at the routes – the Ambassador’s contribution tells us that there was, unsurprisingly, more than one path to Kashan. Della Valle used the road on the flat edge of the *kavīr* (desert area) when he travelled up to Farahabad. Shah ‘Abbās also walked this way in 1601.¹⁹⁸ In contrast, Figuerola travelled across the small mountains, further to the west. This hilly area had legendarily good hunting: there is even

¹⁹³ *L’Ambassade*, pp. 350 and 371.

¹⁹⁴ *L’Ambassade*, p. 364.

¹⁹⁵ Ferrier, “An English View of Persian Trade”, p. 196.

¹⁹⁶ Della Valle, quoted in Melville, “From Qars to Qandahar”, p. 198.

¹⁹⁷ Charles Melville, “Shah ‘Abbas and the Pilgrimage”, p. 200.

¹⁹⁸ See map at: <http://www.carolinemawer.com/shah-abbas/isfahan-9.php>. This also shows, further east, the royal highway to Mazandaran.

an unusual Safavid tower still extant here, the octagonal *Gonbad-i Bāz* – which Kleiss describes as a hunting pavilion, although it is more usually considered as a monument to an especially faithful hawk belonging to Shah ‘Abbās.¹⁹⁹ The Shah’s well-documented love for hunting may help to explain the numerous royal houses and gardens that Figueroa found in this area. The incomplete nature of these in 1618 might be explained by the timing of the construction of the new Mazanderani “capitals”. Perhaps Figueroa’s route even represents another *königsweg*, or “royal road” up to one of ‘Abbās’ favourite towns.

Figueroa was not a merchant, but his many observations of the commercial infrastructure could usefully be explored in much more detail than has been possible here. How, for example, did the Spanish (or the Dutch or the English East Indian Companies) expect to bring all of the Iranian silk harvest across an area with such an unreliable water supply? And where are the 999 caravanserais so often cited as having been built by Shah ‘Abbās; when Isfahan and Kashan were the only towns where Figueroa noticed caravanserais constructed by ‘Abbās?

There is another area in which the travel sections, especially, of Figueroa’s work may be considered as significant. In considering the historical value of the accounts of European travellers, much can be made of their stereotyped nature. While this is undoubtedly important, Figueroa’s narrative affords an opportunity to reflect on and avoid another sort of stereotyping – that considering a Western traveller as taking a fixed viewpoint.

Figueroa can be thought of as an old man: he excused himself at midnight as “weary and fatigued” from the big reception (in Qazvīn) that he had travelled four years for; and was teased by Shah ‘Abbās for not being interested in the parade of available women. However, the travel sections of his narrative give an appealing idea of him as an individual and dynamic person. He was clearly interested in “ordinary” people – impressed by the active young governors in small towns like Cabrestan; and pleased to encounter again village families who had previously hosted him. He particularly “orders” that mention must be made in his Relation of Gul Cana, the magnificent female governor of Diacuri, “who merits, no doubt, une *meilleure fortune*”.²⁰⁰ He was always especially keen to look after his travelling “family” – the parasols he insisted on each of them carrying in the *garmsīr* on the way home were an especially nice touch. Alongside this, he was a keen observer – of new technologies, of antiquities and of natural phenomena. Based on his own observations, he was a debunker of “fabulous tales” – whether they were about the limited likelihood of dying of cold in Lar; or an “enchanted mountain”; or his own use of a sepulchre

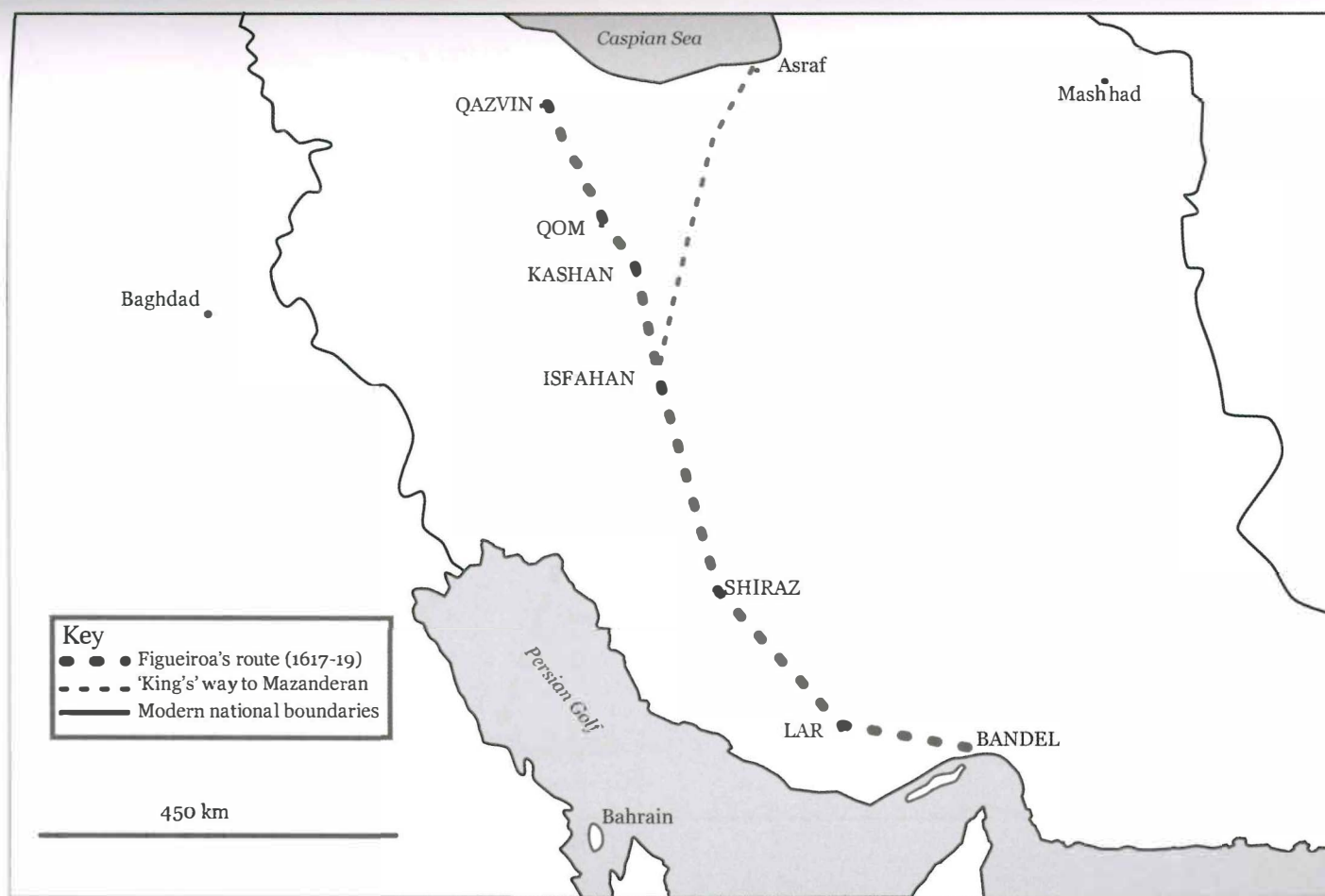
as a pragmatically comfortable place to sleep in when there was no better available accommodation.

Importantly, though, Figueroa also seems to change and develop significantly during the course of his journeys. He started out by sitting in his litter, and ended with a very distinct overlay of Safavid sensibilities – on horseback; and appreciative of shade, and trees, and good running water.

¹⁹⁹ Caroline Mawer, *The Valiant Hawk*, 10 June 2010. Electronic resource at <http://www.carolinemawer.com/blog/?p=389>

²⁰⁰ *L'Ambassade*, p. 364.

Map 1



Map 2

