Edmonds C. J.,
East and West of Zagros. Travel, War and Politics in Persia and Iraq 1913-1921.
ed. with intro. by Yann Richard.

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This book by the late C.J. Edmonds, a former British civil servant, about his years of service in Iran and Iraq is a great and important addition to our knowledge of this area and period. Most of the events described or referred to are known, of course, but the very personal discussion by the author of these events, who provides background, on-the-ground perceptions, and *couleur locale*, gives them an unexpected depth and nuance that is missing from the dry, factual political contemporary reports that were mostly available until now. Edmonds, who was trained in Arabic, Persian and Turkish at Cambridge, relates his vicissitudes in 25 chapters that are organized in four sections (The Persian Gulf, Lower Mesopotamia, South-West Persia, and North-West Persia), which refer to the areas where he was stationed and worked.

In the first section, Edmonds explains that he was supposed to have begun his career in the Levant Consular Service in 1912, but the presence of another Edmonds at the British embassy in Istanbul meant possible confusion so that on arrival he was told he was not needed. After a wait he was transferred to Bushehr in 1913, of which he gives a very lively description: about the town itself, life at the British Residency and among the small European community as well as a view of the daily routine of a British consular officer. He also details his first mission in the field visiting the various Sheikhs in the hinterland of Bushehr, providing interesting information about the people he met. The last chapter in this section deals with the 'prelude to the Zimmermann telegram,' an interesting footnote to a very important event. When the text of this telegram was decoded, which was made possible because the British when they arrested the German consul in Bushehr in 1914 obtained a copy of his code book, its contents led to the US decision to join the Great War in 1917 against Germany.

In the second section, Edmonds relates his experience as a Political Officer (PO) in Iraq, where it was his task to gather intelligence and be liaison between the military and the local population with a view to keep both sides happy, if possible. In 1915, the author went to Basra, which the British has just captured. Initially, he was engaged in administrative work (coding and decoding telegrams, typing confidential letters) of which he provides some interesting examples. After the capture of Amara the author was moved to the Tigris front, right in the region of the Marsh Arabs. Edmonds provides some intimate descriptions of his companions such as mark Sykes MP as well as of the country that they travelled through, which brings to life many persons whom one only knows by name or from political reports. When Edmonds replaced Lorimer in Amara he focuses mainly on his contacts with the Bani Lam, and provides, e.g., information on its Sheikhly family, the Al Nusayri (incl. family tree) as well as on the way of life of these tribesmen. The latter he does in the form of extract of his diary for 12 days in the spring of 1916. This is followed by a vivid description of the marsh land, and how people lived there, based on his crossing of this region, which, as the editor rightly remarks, is reminiscent of Wilfred Thesiger's description. The last chapter of this section deals with the author's transfer to Suq al-Shuyukh, a thickly populated area on both sides of the Euphrates. Here the British had some problems with the Sheikh of the Bani Malik confederation, which was not resolved during the war despite Edmonds endeavors, some of which he relates. Edmonds regretted that he could not visit the Sabeans in his area, because after a long bout with malaria he was evacuated to Bombay for three months and then sent to Iran.

In the third section, Edmonds provides background for his new posting, Shushtar. Khuzestan and Lurestan were important because of military operations in the region of Kermanshah and Hamadan. He traveled to Dizful, of which he provides an interesting description as well as of the just, but tough manner of governing the city by his colleague Soane. Arrived in Shustar, which like N. Khuzestan had been without effective Iranian administration, he set out to bolster the rule of the local governor, and to reduce the tribal Khans to size. Edmonds describes the city, its leading families, and the manner of life in general. He started to impose law and order on the city proper, and deported a Bakhtiyari Khan who did not heed his warnings to stop exacting illegal taxes. Interestingly, much of his intelligence about what was wrong and who did what came from the mother of the Mostawfi family, who through the harem grapevine knew exactly what was happening in the city and what the various Khans were doing. These decisive measures had a galvanizing effect and people came forward with their problems, which enabled Edmonds to settle them and thus install a sense of security and reliability in the city. It also meant an increased demand on his time and thus the governor established a court of law, headed by the *Imam Jum'a*. The presence of Edmonds Luri *sowar*s and the establishment of a local police force went

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far to achieve his objectives. Edmonds also refers to the beginning of the operations of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) and its staff. With the British victory over the Turks in Iraq, Edmonds was recalled in March 1917 and with some regret he left Shustar to go to Dizful to replace Soane. Dizful was a larger and more commercial city and one with an interesting social organization, which Edmonds describes. Moreover, Soane had made quite an impression; an act that was difficult to equal. Edmonds, therefore, decided not to change too much. He describes his staff and the manner of their operation. Outside the city, law and order was maintained via a system of subsidies to tribal chiefs, in which the 600 Lur troops that Edmonds had at his disposal played a vital role. He describes how this system of indirect control worked, and he admits that many Bakhtiyari chiefs and Sheikh Khaz`al did not like it and discusses their sentiments. Edmonds used the repair of the Dizful bridge, enabled by help from APOC engineers, to bolster good relations with the city population. Being in Dizful also meant involvement in Lur affairs. Edmonds provides a description of the province, its history, its local system of government, its people and customs, and their relations with Dizful. In a separate chapter he introduces the reader to the Dirakvand tribal group through his travelogue about his excursion among them. He also traveled to Burujird describing "en route" that he saw (Khurramabad) and experienced. These trips were aimed at intelligence gathering as well as inducing the Lurs to do their shopping at Dizful and to take political guidance from there. At Burujird, Edmonds described the strained relations between the local population and the Russian troops, and likewise at Nihavand. Via Kangavar he went to Kermanshah, where he noticed the low morale of the Russian troops, after the October Revolution, about which he provides further details. Edmonds returned to Khurramabad to adjudicate a matter of a robbed caravan; "en route" he met the Vali of Pish-e Kuh, whose habits and behavior he details. The author then continued his journey traveling though Luristan to Kermanshah, where he learns the latest news, having been *incommunicado* for 3.5 months. He then marched through Iraq down to Shustar, where shortly thereafter he was told to relieve Noel at Ahvaz, and to successfully negotiate with the Bakhtiyari chiefs to ensure safety in the oil fields. Edmonds fell ill with typhoid, was sent home to the UK, where on arrival he was declared to be healthy, only to fall ill with the Spanish flue. It was only in May 1919 that he was back in Baghdad and was told in August to take up duties as PO with Norperforce in Qazvin.

The last section details Edmonds work in N.W. Iran. With the collapse of the Russian troops, the British decided to maintain a military force (Norperforce) in Iran to fill the vacuum in Transcaucasia and NW Iran and train the local population to defend themselves against the Turkish advance. For Edmonds this was a happy period, he describes the most notable people, both British and Iranian, that he worked with as well as his posting, Qazvin. He further gives a detailed account of the performance of a passion play (*ta'ziya*) in that city. One chapter deals with the Jangali movement, where he describes both Gilan province and Mirza Kuchek Khan's aims and activities; further his visit to the small province of Khamsa and its old feudal lord, the Afshar chief. The latter was fond of falconry, reason why Edmonds provides the reader with much detail about this sport and its raptor hunters. From there the author made a brief visit to Transcaucasia to gather information about the fluid and changing political situation there, of which he provides the main points, and, as always, about the personalities he meets. From Baku, Edmonds returns to Qazvin and takes up life as PO. The Qazvin governor often asked Edmonds to accompany him on inspection tours, because he had a car, and he details whom he met during those tours and what issues the governor needed to resolve. He further details how matters in Gilan developed as well as describes the developments in Tabriz, where the Tajaddud group took over the city in April 1920. He went to Tabriz and spoke with Sheikh Muhammad Khiyabani and the local European diplomats and left satisfied with the situation he had found. Edmonds was for a short time in Tehran when he was summoned to Qazvin, from where he flew to Anzali to assist in dealing with a Bolshevik fleet that had bombarded this port. Later this fleet was reinforced by a force that marched over land from Astara. The British, therefore, decided to withdraw their troops to Manjil. Edmonds completes this chapter by describing further developments of the Khiyabani and Jangali movements. From Qazvin the British tried to induce the Iranians to take the lead against the Bolshevik invasion in Gilan. An attack by a Bolshevik force at Manjil was repulsed and the Cossack Brigade took advantage of this to retake Rasht. This led to the fall of the Jangali movement, and likewise the government imposed its will on Khiyabani and retook control over Tabriz, which was welcomed by the populace. The last chapter of this book deals with the coup d'etat of 1921. Unfortunately, Edmonds does not revolve the issue whether the British were behind it or not, because his diary for that period is lost. His personal recollections suggests otherwise, which may be true, as he knew all the actors in this play very well, amongst which Sayyid Ziya al-Din, whom he befriended and to whom

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he ascribes a larger role in the coup than is the case in the official Pahlavi version of events.

Yann Richard has provided a useful introduction to Edmunds' Travelogue cum Memoires, putting them into historical context, among others rightly pointing out that Edmonds' view, however sympathetic toward Iranians and Iraqis, was colored by his background and function as a British civil servant. But this makes no difference to the importance of this book, which I found most enjoyable to read; it is filled with all kinds of useful social and personal information that provides atmosphere to the telling, like a good seasoning to an excellent meal. I hope more of such similar writings by former civil servants and soldiers are found and published, because they often provide much of the meat to the skeleton constituted by official political reports and documents. Yann Richard deserves our compliments and thanks for having lifted Edmonds' book out of oblivion.

Willem Floor
Bethesda, MD

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