

# N E R V A L ' s      D I A R Y

## *Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ...*

*Pasargadae, in the heart of the Persis, Iran –  
At the tomb of Kyros, 12 March 1995*

A three-day trip spaced between Id al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan and Purim. Two days on the road, one day 'in town', two nights aloft in the plane. First, I paid homage to Hafiz in Shiraz, eventually I had tea under the 33 arches of the so-called bridge, Pul siho-seh, in the fairy city of Isphahan.

Remember Nerval *No. 4* with the Persian caption by Hafiz?! It alluded to the Iranian connection of the history of medicine in Vienna: 160 years ago, Romeo Seligmann, the first professor of the discipline in Vienna, translated Abu Mansur's 10th-century treatise into Latin. In pursuit of earlier attempts, I came over to stimulate a cooperative effort for a facsimile edition and the completion of a recent German translation. The Institute of Islamic Encyclopedia will serve as a potential partner. A difficult endeavour. For the time being, I have only an elegantly designed 'bas-mala' in my luggage, nicely framed, destined to adorn my office.

*What else?* Historical fervour and old memories. Shiraz I hadn't seen for 20 years, nor Persepolis, Hafiz' tomb and the Apadana. Was the first visit more impressive or the second? Then, on to Pasargadae and Kyros' tomb. *Read up Herodotus* [1]! I hadn't seen it before but longed to for forty-odd years. Three rose buds I placed on its marble base, sat down, in sunshine alternating with flurries of snow, to reflect. Kyros II, the Great, defeated Nabodonius, Assur fell, the Jews were freed from Babylonian bondage (536 BC [2]), the Persians took over.

The epic tales of Daniel, later of Esther (Purim!) flashed through my mind. Achaemenids, Alexander and the Greeks, Seleukids, Sassanids, Arabs, Mongols, Timur, Safavids, Afghans, parade before my eyes. Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta, Rhazes and Avicenna. 25 centuries; some period to reminisce about.

*Contemplate with a broken ankle? Poor you, with your brittle bones!* Eventually, my solar keratoses lost out against 5-FU and sun screens. A smooth skin became the prize for all-too low a level of vitamin D. *A doctor's dilemma.* So what? *Change your phototype! Stop cycling!* Perhaps; but only in the next millennium unless decreed otherwise from above.

*Any more dermatology?* Yes, along the road. A mechanic's hand eczema kept smoldering from aggressive detergents; a consultation after a flat tire. And another, requested in a book stall relating to more private parts of the keeper.

As usual, I bring back a pile of books upon returning from travel. Among those, a reprint of Herman Bricknell's gorgeous edition of Hafiz in 1875. The day of purchase proved to be the 120th anniversary of the author's death. A jewel in my collection.

So let me take my leave, from the cherry blossoms in the Persis and its yet tender green, from the turquoise mosques of Yazd and Isphahan and the book-shops of Teheran heading back to the Blue River's banks.

*Happy Naw Ruz! Happy Pessach! Happy Easter!*

- 1 Herodotus, *Historiae* I:131–216.
- 2 Ezra, I:1–11.

*K.H., Vienna*