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**THREE BRITISH TRAVELLERS TO THE MIDDLE EAST AND INDIA IN THE  
 EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

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I

In the last decades of the sixteenth century, the embattled Protestant England of Queen Elizabeth I faced the might of Catholic Europe after Pope Pius V in 1570 excommunicated Elizabeth and ten years later Gregory XIII declared that she might be legitimately, and indeed with approbation, be assassinated. Although the planned Spanish invasion of England by the Armada was in 1588 frustrated by a combination of English seamanship and adverse weather conditions, similar threats continued until the Queen's death in 1603. Scotland was at this time a land poor in resources and had been racked by internal violence. The Stewart James VI did not really begin to rule unimpeded until 1585, and only thereafter did Scotland enjoy a period of comparative internal peace; and despite his half-French ancestry and Catholic parentage, James had firmly espoused Protestantism, a disappointment to Rome.

Accordingly, travel within a continental Europe dominated by Habsburg Spain and Valois France was distinctly risky, if not downright dangerous, for English and Scots, the majority of whom were by now Protestants (either adherents of the established Church of England or Calvinists), although there were at this time many enthusiastic warriors who left Britain to fight in continental armies, and especially in the Low Countries, at this time in revolt against Spain. In 1603, however, James VI of Scotland succeeded his cousin, the Tudor Queen Elizabeth, as King of England also. This Union of Crowns brought an access of political, diplomatic and commercial strength for the two kingdoms making up Great Britain and made this last a European force, with an advanced and sophisticated form of government and society which would, in the middle decades of the seventeenth century, withstand the unprecedented upheavals of the Civil Wars, the execution of King Charles I and the temporary abolition of the monarchy and, indeed, emerge from them strengthened. With James's accession, conditions now became more favourable for travel to Europe and beyond (since in order to reach the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, Britons had to pass through continental Europe). The new King adopted a pacific policy. Peace was made with Spain in 1604; France was now internally peaceful under Henry IV; and England opened formal diplomatic relations with Italian powers like Venice and Savoy. James hoped for a marriage with the Infanta of Spain for his son Prince Charles; this fell through, but Charles did in fact marry Henry IV's daughter Henrietta Maria. All these events led to a general feeling of détente between Britain and the Catholic powers of Europe and the Roman Papacy.

There was thus at this time a remarkable flowering of travel by English and Scots not only within Europe but also to lands far beyond. This was, of course, just part of the spirit of adventurousness and discovery, with an attendant enlargement of intellectual and cultural horizons, which had already during the latter part of Elizabeth's reign been taking Englishmen westwards to the New World in one direction and eastwards to the

Ottoman empire. and further to the Persian and Indian lands, in another. These English and Scottish travellers came from a wide range of the social classes. For sons of the nobility and gentry, travel was usually a means of broadening one's education with a wider experience of life, with France or Italy as favoured destinations. One traveller to Ottoman Turkey and the Holy Land, George Sandys, came from this class, being a younger son of the Archbishop of York, and George Strachan stemmed from the Scottish gentry, but many of them came from comfortable though not luxurious backgrounds, from those of clerics, lesser officials, yeomen farmers or merchants. For those who had the Levant as a goal, a religious motive, the opportunity of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land as part of travels, was also frequently present. Two of our travellers, Thomas Coryate and William Lithgow, made use of social connections when these presented themselves, but did not go out of the way assiduously to cultivate them; and on many occasions they ostentatiously preferred the distinctly un-aristocratic mode of travelling on foot, and likewise alone, if conditions for this were reasonably safe.

## II

The Englishman Thomas Coryate was a native of Somerset in southwest England and the son of an Anglican clergyman there. It was probably through local connections that he found a place in the household of Prince Henry, James I's eldest son and heir until his premature death in 1612, and it may have been Prince Henry who gave Coryate money towards the publication of the latter's first set of travels, *Coryat's Crudities. Hastily gobbled up in Five Months Travelles in France, Savoy, Italy, Rhetia commonly called the Grisons country, Helvetia alias Switzerland, some parts of high Germany and the Netherlands* (1611). Coryate had set out on foot from Calais in May 1608 and he did walk extensively, though he also used other modes of transport; thus he was carried across the Mont Cenis Pass into Savoy in a litter, a *chaise à porteurs*. Arrived at Venice, he stayed with the English ambassador there, Sir Henry Wotton, whose house was the cultured and lively focus for British travellers to Italy. He did not go southwards from Lombardy and Venetia, but turned northwards into Switzerland. At Zurich he saw the alleged sword of William Tell and gives what seems to be the first account in English of this probably legendary figure, who by Coryate's time had nevertheless entered the popular Swiss consciousness as a national hero. He crossed from Basle into Germany, getting lost going on foot through the Black Forest but eventually reaching Heidelberg, the capital of the Lower Palatinate. Slightly later, Heidelberg was to be something of a mecca for British visitors because the Elector Frederick IV's son, Frederick V, was in 1613 to marry James I's only daughter Elizabeth, who later, from the couple's brief reign on the throne of Bohemia in 1617-18, was to acquire the sobriquet of „the Winter Queen“. Coryate travelled down the Rhine in various boats, making a small detour to visit Frankfurt, whose celebrated Fair, with so many booksellers' stalls, enchanted him, and he passed through the Electorate of Cologne, whose northern territories were at this time being ravaged by warfare between the Spanish and the Dutch. He reached Flushing on the North Sea coast, which was being held by an English garrison as a pledge for loans made to the Netherlands United Provinces, and arrived back in England after nearly five months' absence.

Coryate's *Crudities* is a highly discursive work which could not by any stretch of the imagination serve as a guide book for other intended voyagers. The 1905 edition runs to 859 pages, but is valuable e.g. for the author's lengthy descriptions of places like Venice and Padua (like so many Britons of his time and of the period after him, Coryate was entranced by Venice, its commercial richness, its architecture and its form of government) and for many curious items of cultural and social information. Thus he noted the Italian fashion of eating with table forks, acquired a fork himself and introduced its use back in England in the hope of popularising it (though most Englishmen continued to use their fingers for another century after this). He enjoyed the Italian delicacy of fried frogs but disliked their custom of sprinkling cheese over so many of their dishes. At a playhouse in Venice he was intrigued to see women acting; in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, that of Shakespeare's time, women's parts were normally taken by boys. He was enchanted by the heavenly music that he heard in Venice, ensembles of treble viols, viole da gamba, theorbos, sackbuts, cornets, etc., and by a wonderful singer whom we would now term a counter-tenor or male alto; Coryate wondered at first whether this man was a eunuch, in which case he would not have considered his voice as so unusual, but found that he was in fact a normal, mature, middle-aged man of forty.

In October 1612 Coryate set out on what was to be his lengthiest and last journey, this time to the Orient. He sailed to Zante and Constantinople, where he enjoyed the hospitality of the then English ambassador, Paul Pindar, and started learning Turkish and Italian; till then, he had relied largely on communicating in Latin (and had observed, when in Italy, that the current English pronunciation of Latin differed in several ways from the more Italianate pronunciation of the continent of Europe). After a few months' stay he left for Syria and Palestine with the aim of making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem during Holy Week of 1614. He stayed in Aleppo with a trader of the Levant Company's factory or commercial agency there who was a fellow-Somerset man, and then travelled on foot from Aleppo in a caravan bound for Jerusalem of mainly Armenian Christian pilgrims, accompanied by an escort of Turkish Janissaries to keep off marauding Arabs. In Jerusalem he stayed at the Franciscan monastery of San Salvatore, the usual residence for Franks visiting the Holy City, whether Catholic or Protestant (although, apart from Coryate himself, Lithgow and Sandys, there were not many of these last, and they often tended to conceal their true faith from their hosts the friars). During Holy Week he visited all the numerous shrines of Jerusalem itself and associated places like Bethlehem, Jericho and the banks of the river Jordan, and then walked back to Aleppo. Intending to compose a second great travel book, Coryate spent four months there writing up his copious notes and left these there; eventually they found their way back to England, and, in a drastically shortened form, were published after Coryate's death by Samuel Purchas in his collection of travellers' narratives, *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625).

Coryate's intention now was to walk all the way, via Iraq, Persia and Afghanistan, to India. It was a madcap project, but he seems to have been motivated by the desire that the „Odcombe Legstretcher”, as he styled himself after the name of his native village, should be the greatest walker of his age. He doubtless acquired information about the route, its dangers and difficulties, from persons in Aleppo who had connections with the English trading community in India; the English East India Company and its Dutch counterpart the VOC had recently opened factories at Surat on the western coast of India, in the face

of fierce Portuguese opposition. When in Istanbul, Coryate may have heard from Pindar, formerly the English consul in Aleppo, of how two English sailors had staggered into Aleppo, exhausted and destitute, having walked back via Agra, Kandahar, Isfahan and Baghdad, when their ship had been wrecked off Surat and they had discerned no prospect of finding a ship back to Britain; one of these two, Robert Coverte, published in 1612 a brief account of his wanderings, which Coryate could have read.

Coryate was in any case physically tough and used to extremes of cold and heat, poor food, flies and vermin. He set off, probably crossing the Euphrates at Birejik, but had the misfortune at Diyarbakr of being robbed of much of his money by a Turkish *sepahi* or cavalryman and further cheated by some Armenians, which seriously depleted the resources intended for his journey. He travelled through eastern Anatolia, probably along the shores of Lake Van since he apparently saw in the distance Mount Ararat, and arrived in Azerbaijan through a zone racked at this time by warfare between the Ottomans and the Safavids. From Tabriz and Qazvin he reached Shah 'Abbas's capital Isfahan. He spent two months there, and left, in some unknown person's care, the voluminous notes on the journey he had so far accomplished; these were subsequently lost. He joined an enormous caravan which, he says, comprised 2,000 camels, over 3,000 horses, asses and mules, and 6,000 people, travelling from Isfahan to Kandahar, the most westerly point of the Mughal Empire. At some point on the Indo-Persian frontier they met a caravan travelling in the reverse direction. It turned out to include the English adventurer Robert Sherley, returning from the Mughal court to the Persian one in Isfahan and bearing, amongst other things, presents from the Emperor Jahangir to the Shah of two elephants and eight antelopes; to Coryate's delight, Sherley produced from his baggage copies of Coryate's *Crudities* and another minor work of his. He journeyed with a fresh caravan to Multan and Lahore, a place which impressed him as „one of the largest cities of the whole universe”, and thence along the long, straight road connecting Delhi with the capital Agra, staying at the caravanserais which lined it at regular intervals. But on reaching Agra, he found that Jahangir had moved his court two years previously to Ajmer, so had a further ten days' march southeastwards into Rajasthan, arriving safely there in July 1615. Coryate's biographer Michael Strachan has written that he had accomplished a feat which no European had even attempted since the time when Alexander the Great's Macedonian infantry reached the Indus 2,000 years before, but in his case, as a solitary, unarmed individual. Coryate himself boasted that during his ten months' travel from Aleppo to Ajmer he had spent only fifty English shillings, „yet fared reasonably well everie daie; victuals being so cheape in some countries where I travelled, that I often times lived competently for a penny sterling a day”. He computed that he had walked from Jerusalem 2,700 miles, wearing out several pairs of shoes, but this was an under-estimate; the true figure must have been nearer 3,300 miles. Apart from traders, Coryate was only the second Englishman to have set foot in India, the first having been the Jesuit Father Thomas Stevens, who came to the Portuguese settlement of Goa in 1579 and remained there till his death forty years later.

At Ajmer, Coryate was cordially welcomed by the small group of East India Company traders there and by their head, Sir Thomas Roe, whom Coryate had met back in England and who was the first English ambassador to the Great Mughal's court (it was the Company which paid for Roe's salary and upkeep, thereby saving the English government money; hence he had a dual role of diplomat and facilitator of Indian trade).

Coryate now perfected his knowledge of Persian, adding this language to his existing ones of Arabic and Turkish, and started to learn the local vernacular, Hindustani. His aim was to deliver an oration before Jahangir, and this he did, in Persian, around August 1616, being rewarded with a gift of a hundred silver rupees, very welcome to him since financially he was in very straitened circumstances. He had a special desire to ride on an elephant, and the title page of a pamphlet made out of four of his Indian letters and published in London in 1616 depicts him riding on the back of one of these beasts. He accompanied Sir Thomas Roe's party when the Mughal court moved back to Agra, and from there he sent a lengthy letter to his mother in Somerset, dated September 1616, the last one of his extant, outlining his future plans: to see the mighty Ganges river and then to return home via the Levant, with the hope of being back in England within two and a half years.

This intention was never to be fulfilled. He spent another year or so travelling around northern India, up to the Himalayan foothills and southwards with the Mughal court to the ruined city of Mandu in Malwa. By now in poor health, he decided to make for the East India Company's factory at Surat, but died there of dysentery in December 1617. Exactly where he was buried is not clear, but an imposing tomb, in the domed Islamic style, was subsequently erected on the coast near Surat, and this is shown on British Admiralty charts as „Tom Coryat's Tomb". His great oriental travel book was never written, but in this way at least, the fame with posterity that Coryate had always sought was to some extent achieved.

### III

The Scotsman William Lithgow, from Lanark in central Scotland and of modest burgher stock, was, like Coryate, an indefatigable traveller, in whom the *Wanderlust* developed early. Already by 1609, when he was still in his twenties, he had travelled in Germany, Bohemia, Switzerland and the Low Countries, ending up at Paris, and it was from that in March 1609 he set out on the first of three journeys which, over the next thirteen years, took him to the Levant, the Holy Land and Egypt, to North Africa as far as Morocco and then through Central Europe to the Baltic lands. He proclaimed the goal of his third journey, which took him through Ireland to Western Spain and Portugal and then came to an abrupt stop at Malaga, to be the land of the famed Emperor Prester John, i.e. Ethiopia, he having met Ethiopian pilgrims and residents in Jerusalem on his first journey. In 1632 he published at London a complete account of his travels, *The Totall Discourse of the Rare Adventures, and painefull Peregrinations of long nineteene Years Travayls, from Scotland to the most famous Kingdomes in Europe, Asia, and Affrica*. In this he claimed that his „paynefull feet traced over (beside my passages of Seas and Rivers) thirty-six thousand and odde miles, which draweth neare to twice the circumference of the whole Earth".

Whether everything that Lithgow wrote can be taken at face value is somewhat doubtful. As Sandys had done, he drew much on previous authorities, from classical writers onwards, for his descriptions of places like Italy, Greece, Palestine, including Jerusalem, and Cairo, but unlike Sandys, who was much more of a scholar, rarely acknowledged his sources; what he relates as his own first-hand experience may have been embroidered in the light of what he had previously read or was subsequently to read.

His style is especially vigorous and trenchant, above all when he is denouncing what he regarded as the superstitious practices of the Papists, such as those he observed at the Loretto shrine, and he delighted in relating stories of monks and friars executed or burnt in Italy for debauching nuns or sodomising boys. His book, whose narrative culminates in his arrest at Malaga in 1620 as a spy by the local Spanish governor, his tortures on the rack there and his being handed over to the local Inquisition for burning as a heretic, before he was providentially saved by the intervention of the English ambassador in Madrid, was intended, in part at least, to be an exposé of Roman Catholic fanaticism and superstition, and this helps to account for its popularity in Protestant Northern Europe. There was speedily a Dutch translation and frequent new editions in Britain, including in the form of chap books (i.e. popular tales in pamphlet form sold by itinerant hawkers) in Scotland, till well into the nineteenth century. Lithgow emerges from his works as a hardy and tough character, who attracted adventures like iron filings to a magnet, so that his *Total Discourse* makes very entertaining reading today.

When on his way to the Levant, Lithgow halted in Venice. At that date, the Republic of St. Mark was at odds with the Papacy and had expelled the Jesuits, very much to Lithgow's approbation; he further praised the requirement at both Rome and Venice that the Jews had to wear red coats and yellow-coloured hats, for Jews were hardly less obnoxious to Lithgow than Papists. Taking ship down the Adriatic coast via Ragusa to the Ionian islands and the Greek mainland, he mourned, as did most contemporary travellers, the degeneracy of the modern Greeks compared with their classical forebears and deplored the influence there of the Orthodox Church, only one degree less superstitious and priest-ridden than the Roman one, and passed to a consideration of the Ottoman Turks, their history and the military might of their empire; neither Lithgow nor any others of his contemporaries were to know that Ottoman expansionism had by his time almost reached its zenith and was, by the end of the seventeenth century, to show clear signs of regression. In fact, Popery and the Greek Church were so much *bêtes noires* for Lithgow that he was disposed to see a certain amount of good in Islam and the Muslims, rapacious and violent though he found them in the course of his travels; thus he was concerned to demonstrate what he asserted was the untruth of some of the Greeks' complaints of Ottoman tyranny. Like Coryate, he enjoyed the hospitality of the English ambassador Sir Thomas Glover in Istanbul, a person who looms large in the accounts of travellers at this time. He was the son of a London merchant who had married a local wife, hence Lithgow describes him as speaking perfectly „the Slavonian tongue”, i.e. Polish. He was also fluent in Turkish and the other local languages (probably meaning Greek and Italian), so that he did not have to rely upon scheming local dragomans but could deal directly with Ottoman viziers; his pugnacity and refusal to be overawed by Turkish officialdom gained him especial respect from the Ottomans. He also acted as a purchasing agent for English connoisseurs collecting Greek antiquities, despatching statuary and other items back to Britain for them.

Lithgow observed that Islam prohibited alcohol and observed that the Turks drank coffee: „... a Cup of Coffa, made of a seed called Coava, and of a blackish colour; which they drink so hote as possible they can, and is good to expell the crudity of raw meates, and hearbes, so much by them frequented”. This is an early Western mention of the practice, though not the first; Sandys had noted it and it was apparently first recorded by the Bavarian physician and botanist Leonhard Rauwolff some forty years previously.

Lithgow deplored the slave trade which he found so flourishing in the Ottoman capital; he purchased the freedom of a Dalmatian widow for sixty ducats and found her a job in a Greek tavern. Such things led him to reflect that, though Istanbul was outwardly fair, it was inwardly corrupt:

*A painted Whoore, the maske of deadly sin,  
Sweet fair without, and stinking foule within.*

In the winter of 1611-12 he resolved to set off for the Orient, with the aim of travelling from Aleppo to Baghdad and Babylon, but missed the Baghdad caravan at Birejik, hence turned back for the Holy Land, with the aim of being in Jerusalem for Holy Week. The trip to Jerusalem from Aleppo via Damascus followed the same pattern as that of pilgrims at this time, but Lithgow prefixed to this an exploration of Mount Lebanon, made in the company of three Venetian merchants. He enjoyed much hospitality from the local Maronites, including from their Patriarch, praised by Lithgow as „the homely and simple man (not puft with ambition, greed, and glorious apparell, like to our proud Prelats of Christendom).” Lithgow does not name him, but this must have been Yuhanna Makhluḥ, the first graduate of the *Collegium Maronitarum* established at Rome by Gregory XIII in 1585 to achieve the Patriarchate of his community; Lithgow must have conversed with him in either Latin or Italian.

His stay in Jerusalem followed the usual pattern of North European visitors at this time, with the usual visits and attendance at ceremonies. He refused the offer by the Guardian of San Salvatore to be made a Knight of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, although offered a reduction in the usual fees; Lithgow avers that he could not have taken an oath of allegiance to the Pope, the Kings of Spain and France and the Doge of Venice since this would have meant acknowledging the superiority of the Roman Church. He did, however, have tattooed on his arm the name of Jesus, the Holy Cross and the crown of King James. He returned home via Egypt, involving an arduous and dangerous journey through the Sinai Desert, in the course of which several of Lithgow’s German and Dutch companions died of heat-stroke or thirst.

A second journey to the Mediterranean lands covered the years 1613 to 1616, and took him to North Africa, including Tunis, Algiers and Fez; interesting here are his contacts with the corsairs of Tunis and Algiers, including with various renegades from the Christian lands, the most notable of these being Captain John Ward, who had reputedly been in the English Navy at Plymouth till he turned pirate and eventually landed up in Algiers as an honoured convert to Islam; he entertained Lithgow in his palace there and gave him safe conducts for his journeys through the Maghrib. He turned homewards in the normal way through Italy, but in no haste to get home, he decided to make an immense detour through Central Europe, traversing Hungary, Transylvania, Moldavia and Poland, finally sailing back to England from Danzig towards the end of 1616. In Austria, he fell in with the retinue of an Ottoman ambassador returning from Vienna to Hungary, and had the company of a Greek dragoman called Gratianus from Bratislava to Komárom. Regrettably, he gives no details of his itinerary across the Hungarian plain from Esztergom onwards through what was of course Turkish-occupied territory, but rather more information about Transylvania. He found Transylvania highly congenial. He was struck by the fertility of the central plain, containing what he describes as „the best

mixt soyle of Europe". The local people were very welcoming: „Here I found every where kind and familiar people; yea, and the very Vulgars speaking frequent Latin, and so commonly doe all the Hungarians." Above all, he praised the enlightened rule of the Voivode Bethlen Gábor and admired the strength of the various strands of Protestantism within the principality.

A journey across Poland, where he made many contacts with old-established Scottish merchant communities in places like Cracow, Warsaw and Danzig, brought him home, but three years later he was off on the planned but, in the event, abortive trip to the land of Prester John which I mentioned. Back in England yet again, he vainly sought to get reparation from the Spanish ambassador in London, Gondomar, for the injuries and losses he had suffered in Spain, and acquired something of the reputation of a Protestant martyr. We know much of him and of his publications over the next twenty years or so, in England, Scotland and the Netherlands, but after 1645 he disappears from recorded history, a surprising end for someone who had been so much in the public eye.

#### IV

Our final traveller was likewise a Scotsman but differs from the other two, both fervent Protestants, in that he was a Roman Catholic. George Strachan was a younger son of lesser nobility from the Mearns, a district of northeastern Scotland in Kincardineshire, to the south of Aberdeen. At the turn of the sixteenth century, this part of Scotland still had a strong Catholic element, under the protection of the greatest magnates there, the Gordons, Marquesses of Huntley (and later, Dukes of Gordons), though in the course of the seventeenth century the Gordons became Protestants.

We know a lot about Strachan's early travels and his friendships from his surviving *Album Amicorum*, a kind of autograph book with encomia from fellow-students, friends, teachers, etc. He kept the *Album* for a full decade, and this enables us to plot his travels around Europe from 1599 to 1609. He was back in Scotland for a while, but left again when he found that his family there had meanwhile become Protestants. He was at several continental universities, Catholic and Protestant, and often amongst colonies of Scottish Catholic émigrés. In 1600 Pope Clement VIII had issued a bull of foundation for a Scots College in Rome; Strachan was there for a while, but apparently decided against a career as a priest. Instead he acted as a courier between the Jesuit leadership in Rome and Scotland, reporting on the religious situation there, times which were in fact, with the strength of Protestantism coming from the union of thrones of Scotland and England under James VI and I, very unfavourable for Catholics. He wandered around Europe, did private tutoring, including for the son of the Genevan Protestant Reformer, Isaac Casaubon. For a while he was in the service of the Duke of Guise, King Henry IV of France's cousin Charles of Lorraine. William Lithgow met him at Aix-en-Provence, and tells how he presented an ancient coin that he had picked up in the ruins of Troy in 1611, to „Master Strachan, mathematician to the Duke of Guise".

Soon after this, Strachan embarked on the second phase of his career, leaving Western Europe. He had taught for a while at the College of Le Mans in Normandy, but did not obtain a permanent job, and in any case, the College, which had failed to secure an adequate endowment, soon afterwards closed its doors. He also failed to secure appointment in Paris as papal agent for Scottish Catholics. He clearly could not achieve a



livelihood commensurate with his undoubted talents and great learning, and one suspects that it was his own character and inclinations that unfitted him for a settled, regular, humdrum life; as with so many British persons, up to modern figures like T.E. Lawrence and Wilfred Thesiger, the lure of the Middle East now proved overwhelming. Apart from this, he seems to have had an avid desire and outstanding talent for learning oriental languages, not just for pure scholarly satisfaction but perhaps also with the aim of acquiring information which would be useful for envoys to the East in this time of post-Tridentine missionary fervour. He came to master Arabic and Persian, in which he became probably the most fluent Western scholar of his time, and very likely knew at least some Turkish.

Unlike Lithgow, Strachan left no account of his travels to the East, but fortunately, he made the acquaintance of the Italian traveller to Persia and India, Pietro Della Valle. Della Valle had a high opinion of Strachan both as a scholar and as a sincere and warm-hearted person, and he accordingly mentions Strachan several times in his *Viaggi*, in the form of letters sent back to Italy between the years 1616 to 1622 from Baghdad, Isfahan and Gombroon. In his letter from Isfahan of 1622, Della Valle as though foreseeing that this would be his last contact with Strachan, gives to his friend back in Italy an account of Strachan's career:

*Mr George Strachan was born in Scotland, in the Mearns. He was of a noble family, but being a cadet in his house, he had but meagre resources in his country. He was therefore brought up in France as a youngster and pursue his studies commendably in Paris. Endowed with an exceptionally great talent, he made much progress not only in the Latin, Greek and Hebrew literatures but also in such sciences as philosophy, theology, law and mathematics, of which he has a deep knowledge and, furthermore, in every kind of curious learning. When he attained maturity, he wanted to see different parts of the world and master various languages for this purpose. He resided in Italy and in Rome, and perhaps in other countries of the Christian world. He went later to the Orient, and shortly before my arrival there [i.e. in August 1614] was for a while in Constantinople, where Monseigneur de Sancy, who was there at that time as ambassador of France, received and cherished him with his customary courtesy. From Constantinople he went to Syria, visited Mount Lebanon, and arrived in Aleppo...*

Strachan had apparently reached Istanbul in 1613, lodging with the Baron de Sancy just as Lithgow did with Sir Thomas Glover. He moved on to the Levant and in 1615 settled at Aleppo in order to perfect his Arabic. A letter of his to a colleague, Christophe Dupuy, extant in the Bibliothèque Nationale, suggests that the King of France (by then Louis XIII) should be urged to collect Arabic and Persian manuscripts for the royal library as his predecessors had done for Latin and Greek scholarship, one cogent reason for this being *la propagation de la foy*. He himself started purchasing and collecting Arabic manuscripts. We do not know whether Strachan had acquired elements of Arabic whilst still in Europe, but the possibilities of getting there a really deep knowledge of the language were poor at the opening of the seventeenth century: there was some teaching available at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne, but the real founder of a methodical, sound study of Arabic, the Dutch scholar of Leiden, Thomas Erpenius, had only just finished compiling his Arabic grammar and dictionary when Strachan left Europe. As we

have heard, quite a steady stream of persons were at this time travelling from Europe to the Levant and, in particular, to the Holy Land; the journey was not easy and had its dangers, but making it was not an extraordinary achievement. What was unusual was what Strachan now did, plunging deep into the Syrian Desert in order to share the life of the Bedouin there and to acquire their lore and language. From 1616 to 1618 he was physician (having attended some medical lectures at the University of Montpellier) to the Arab Amir Fayyad b. Muhammad b. Mudlij of the Abu Risha family, who ruled over, nominally as a dependent of the Ottomans but in practice largely independently, a shaykhdom in what is now western Iraq, conveniently controlling and levying tolls on the caravan trade between Baghdad and Syria. Whilst here, Strachan seems to have made a feigned conversion to Islam and to have married the Amir's widowed sister-in-law; in one of the Arabic manuscripts that he purchased at this time, he describes himself as „the Frankish physician Muhammad Chelebi.” But he balked at the prospect of having to be circumcised, and in the end departed for Baghdad and lands further east, once more a firm Catholic after this temporary lapse; the notes on his manuscripts show him as strongly antipathetic to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad.

In 1619 he was in Isfahan, where for three years there had been a permanent factory of the English East India Company. This was a time of great rivalry for influence at the court of the Safavid Shahs of Persia and for control of trade from Persia to Europe, between England and the temporarily united kingdoms of Spain and Portugal. The Portuguese had since 1514 had a fort and a trading post at Hormuz on the southern coast of Persia, well-placed for dominating the maritime trade route from India to the head of the Gulf; in 1622 Shah 'Abbas I, with English naval support, was to eject the Portuguese permanently from Hormuz. Strachan was a Catholic exile from his homeland, and the Spanish ambassador in Isfahan made approaches to him to secure his aid; but Strachan's patriotism proved too strong for this, and he entered the service of the East India Company, bringing to it valuable local knowledge and language skills. He unfortunately became involved in disputes and intrigues within the Company's factory, and in 1621 spent a year with the Discalced Carmelites, a strongly missionary order, at their house in Isfahan, teaching Arabic to the friars there. In a Will made at this time, witnessed by Pietro Della Valle, Strachan bequeathed his existing Arabic and Persian manuscript collection to the Carmelites of Rome, and these were sent back in a chest with the Vicar-General of the Carmelites in Persia and India, who was on the point of leaving for Europe. Strachan rejoined the East India Company for a while, but thereafter, information on him becomes very sparse. He was still in the East in 1634, because he wrote an interlinear Latin translation for two Persian works on logic and philosophy respectively, now in the British Library, but he probably died there in Persia at some time after this, never having been able to return to Europe.

The extant manuscripts of his collection show Strachan as a careful and judicious scholar and as being far from an amateur or dilettante of Arabic and Persian studies. He purchased manuscripts or had them copied for himself because he wanted to read them and use them for his own studies. Strachan delivered 61 manuscripts to the Carmelite Vicar-General, and 25 or perhaps 28 manuscripts survive in the Vatican Library and a further twelve at the National Library in Naples. Thus a good third of Strachan's manuscripts have been lost, including, it seems, all but one of his Turkish ones. We know that the manuscripts were Strachan's from his numerous notes in Latin written in them

and the *tamalluk* or ownership inscriptions on them. Two British Library manuscripts of Strachan's were acquired by an East Indian Company official in Baghdad in the eighteenth century (these include the philosophical works with Strachan's interlinear Latin translation), and Cambridge University Library has a Persian *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* „Interpretation of the Qur'an" which Strachan acquired at Isfahan in 1624.

Giorgio Levi Della Vida has described the surviving manuscripts in detail. Strachan was especially interested in Arabic language and literature. He had grammatical works like the well-known *Shafiya* and *Kafiya* of Ibn al-Hajib and the *Ajurrumiyya* of Ibn al-Ajurrum, and works of *adab* or polite literature like the *Nahj al-balagha* attributed to the Caliph 'Ali. There was much poetry, including the *Mu'allaqat* or „Poems considered precious" of the pre-Islamic poets with al-Zawzani's commentary (which Strachan had copied in Iraq, not being able to afford to buy the original); the *Burda* ode in praise of the Prophet by al-Busiri; and *diwans* or collected poetry by such standard authors as al-Mutanabbi, Abu 'l-'Ala' al-Ma'arri and Ibn al-Farid, the most important and valuable here being that of the Sicilian poet Ibn Hamdis (the oldest and most precious of Strachan's manuscripts; only two other copies of this *diwan* are known). Since Strachan claimed to be a physician, it is surprising that there are no medical works in his extant collection and only a few scientific or pseudo-scientific works on mathematics, astronomy, the interpretation of dreams, etc. His manuscripts on Islamic religion were probably acquired more from a sense of duty and for polemical purposes rather than for pleasure; Della Valle says that Strachan engaged in long theological discussions with the ulema in Amir Fayyad's entourage. He had manuscripts on the variant readings of the Qur'an, on *hadith* or tradition, a copy of the popular fifteenth-century Qur'an commentary, the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, and several works on Shi'ite theology, interesting in that this topic was almost entirely unknown in Europe at this time. Finally, he had a Persian manuscript of Sa'di's *Gulistan*.

From all this, Strachan emerges as a cultivated and enthusiastic scholar of wide interests, which makes it all the more regrettable that he left for us no work of original scholarship or account of his eventful life and travels.