



Kalle Hamm

# **Journeys in Kurdistan**

2004





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## **Isabella's journeys in Kurdistan**

Isabella was born in Tattenhall, Cheshire, Britain. She made several journeys all around the world, and published many articles and books during her life. One of these books is *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* published in 1891. She arrived in Persia in January 1890. She sailed from Karachi and arrived in the New Year at the port of Barsa, in present-day Iraq. There she took the boat up the Tigris to Baghdad.

Persia was then the subject of intense rivalry between Britain and Russia. Persia has lost all her trans-Caucasian dominions to Russia. From being an empire that had stretched from the Indus to the Nile, she had shrunk to her present size. Russia's ultimate aim was to reach the Persian Gulf, which would threaten India, Britain's greatest possession. Britain's solution was to strengthen and make Persia something.

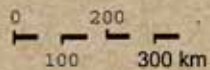
Isabella had little time for power politics. She was moved more by the instincts of curiosity and her reactions to situations and people sprang from deeply religious and humanitarian beliefs. She travelled from Baghdad to Tehran through the mountains of Kurdistan in hard and cold winter weather. A journey that would take a day or so by car or train nowadays lasted forty-six days.

Next she travelled from Tehran to Esfahan. At the end of April she left Esfahan to travel with the Bakhtiaris. The second volume of *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan* starts with Isabella living and moving through the mountains with the Bakhtiaris. She travelled once again through Kurdistan, but now in the hot summer season. The journey originally planned for two months lasted three and a half. She reached Lake Orumiyeh at harvest time. There she continued her journey via Turkey back to Britain.

Kalle Hamm 1.7.2003 Sanandaj, Iran







## **My Journey in Kurdistan**

I arrived in Tehran on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2003, one hundred and thirteen years later than Isabella Bird. I took a bus from Tehran to Sanandaj, the capital of Kurdistan. It took seven hours to drive by bus 518 km over there. One hundred years ago this trip would have lasted approximately one month. Isabella travelled on amuch larger area than me. She also spent more time in former Persia. I was there for only two weeks.

I tried to find the same places where Isabella had been. The main roads are still in their perennial places, but the exact points were difficult to find. I concentrated on Kurdistan: Sanandaj, Bijar, Kermanshah, Hamadan and regions around these cities. Hamadan city was the crossing point. Isabella passed it two times: first time on her journey from west to east, Baghdad – Tehran route, and second time on her journey from south to north, Esfahan – Orumiyeh route.

There are not always proper maps available and all the places are not necessarily on the map. Names have been changed and forgotten during history. It was also difficult to find exact dates for Isabella's visit in certain places too. She used to travel many days and then stopped to write down her experiences of the days passed. I estimated dates according to her text, but they might be incorrect. You can get some kind of idea of pastime anyway.

I photographed people, places and landscapes according to the illustrations in Isabella's Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan. Of course they are not exactly the same. I focused more on feeling, atmosphere and likeness. I placed my photos next to Isabella's illustrations. I also chose some lines from her book and asked local people to comment on Isabella's thoughts. The choice of photograph and texts is my artistic interpretation.

This booklet contains six quotations from Bird's book Journeys in Kurdistan and Persia and after every quotation there is present day Kurd's comment on that. All the names have been changed except mine and Isabella Bird's names.

Kalle Hamm 28.9.2003 Helsinki, Finland







## **First quotation from Isabella Bird's book...**

In the evening I held a "reception" outside my tent. Several of the people brought their children, and the little things behaved most graciously. It is very pleasant to see the devotion of the men to them. I told them that in England many of our people are so poor that instead of children being welcome they are regarded ruefully as additional "mouths to feed". "Ah," said the ketchuda, a handsome Seyyid, "your land is then indeed under the curse of God. We would like ten children at once; they are joy of our lives."

Isabella Bird 23.6.1890 Hamadan, Persia



## **... and Masud's comment**

One hundred years ago Isabella saw how the people loved their children. Parents did everything for the children. Of course there is still love, parents love their children. But you can see by your eyes how five, six, seven, ten years old children are working on the street in the cities. They are living on the street. And they are not coming home until midnight, because they are working.

The most of people, who have lived in the countryside, have moved to cities. These people have no any job. They are doing black job, like selling clothes, shoes, empty bottles, just anything. And for these people life is so difficult. Family can have like seven or ten children. Father can't find a work and he can't get enough money. For this reason they are using their children. They send their children to sell plastic bags and bread, whatever.

Children are growing on the street, on the wrong place. And they are getting wrong kind of ideas. In the future the most of them will be criminal. They are going to have a bad life. They are learning so many bad things on the street. And there are many people who are using the children. They are teaching them bad things. And I'm so worried about these children. They have no any future. They are going to jail, start using drugs. These people make children criminals.

Masud 7.7.2003 Hamadan, Iran











## **Second quotation from Isabella Bird's book...**

I have taken leave of Aziz Khan with regret. He echoes the oft-repeated question, "Why does not England come and give us peace? In a few years we should all be rich, and not have to fight each other." "Stay among us for some years, "and you will get very rich. What have you to go back to in Feringhistan?"

Isabella Bird 16.8.1890 Burujird, Persia



## **... and Salim's comment**

There have always been people in Kurdistan who doesn't understand a real politic. Like this Aziz Khan, he was thinking if England would come, they had given us freedom. But these people are wrong. If England or other foreign country is coming, they say: you are fighting against government, we want you help you. But that's not true. If they are coming they are just using Kurdish people, because of money and Iranian oil.

Now there are people in small villages waiting America is going to give them freedom. But that's not freedom; you know what happened in Iraq. Nobody can give you your freedom: you have to take freedom by yourself, not with some other country. Then nobody can steal anything from you. People have to make their freedom by themselves.

Salim 30.6.2003 Kamyaran, Iran











### **Third quotation from Isabella Bird's book...**

Of God as a moral being I think they have little conception, and less of the Creator as an object of love. Of holiness as an attribute of god they have no idea. Their ejaculation, "God is good" has really no meaning. Charity, under the term "goodness", they attribute to God. But they have no notion of moral requirements on the part of the Creator, or sin as the breaking of any laws which He has laid down.

Isabella Bird 27.7.1890 Lake Irene, Persia



## **...and Echobal's comment**

Kurdish people are Muslim since Islam came to Iran. Before that they were Zoroastrian and still there are many holy fire places in Kurdistan which are two thousand years old. Nowruz is originally Zoroastrian feast and It is still the biggest holy evening in Kurdistan. Every Kurd in Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran believe in Nowruz.

People are Muslim right now. Kurdish people are not religious like for example Hezbollah, who want to fight for their religion. The Kurds believe in God and Muhammad, but they are not hardliners like Hezbollah. Ordinary people don't need to show their religion like Hezbollah. They are Muslims for themselves, not to show to the other people. If I'm not doing anything wrong, God is not going to hate me. You have seen how Kurdish people are coming to sit next to you and they talk to you. Religious people wouldn't look at or talk to you at all.

Kurdish people are mostly Sunni, but I don't see any difference between Sunni and Shiia. At beginning Shiia and Sunni were the same, but then political powers separated people. Now government calls Kurdish people Sunni, because they want to keep them separated from majority. There is no any difference between Sunni and Shiia in reality. We are Muslims, we are the same. God is God!

Echobal 4.7.2003 Sanandaj, Iran









**Fourth quotation  
from Isabella Bird's book...**

I think that his [kurd man] ruling religion is loyalty to Isfandyar Khan, and consequent hatred of the Ilkhani and all his other enemies. Going through a pantomimic firing of an English rifle he said, "I hope I may shoot the Shah with this one day!" "For what reason? I asked. "Because I murdered Isfandyar Khan's father, and I hate him." I asked him if he liked shooting, and he replied, "I like shooting men!"

Isabella Bird 6.7.1890 Camp Gokun, Persia





## **... and Ashraf's comment**

Actually I can say Shah's time for was so bad for Kurdish people. The most people, who were political, were in the jail in the Shah's time. Many young people were in the jail because of Shah's savagh. Anybody couldn't be free. I think all the Shahs have been bad for Kurdish people, because Kurdsih people had wanted their freedom. Any Shah couldn't accept that.

One hundred years ago Englishmen divided Kurdistan in four parts and now it's in the areas of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Kurdish people have fought for uniting these areas, but any of these countries hasn't accepted it. This is so difficult. Shah said there is freedom in Iran, but it wasn't freedom. Kurdish people wanted their own state, but Shah didn't want to give that.

Islamic republic came after Shah and right now the situation is the same. In Shah's time there was political fight, now there is partisan fight. People are so scared to tell the truth: they don't like the government. You can't see anything in the cities, but next to Iraq border there are partisans and fights. And now there is so many Kurds in jail and many of Kurds has escaped to other countries and they have so bad life.

Ashraf 6.7.2003 Upper Afaryan, Iran









**Fifth quotation  
from Isabella Bird's book...**

The Persian Kurds impress me favourably as a manly, frank, hospitable people. The men are courteous without being cringing, and the women are kind and jolly, and come freely and unveiled to my tent without any obtrusiveness.

Isabella Bird 18.9.1890 Gaukhand, Persia



## **...and Farasat's comment**

Right now there is Islamic republic in Iran and it pushes people to veil women. But here in Kurdistan people are not so much like in the other cities in Iran, especially in the home. If you go to other cities, Persian, Arab and Turkish women have chador also in the home. But it's not like that in Kurdistan. Of course if women go outside they have to wear chador, but not in the home.

Maybe five percent of Kurdish people are religious and they are using chador in the home. But the most of people don't want to. And men accept that and women are coming and going without chador. Kurdish women have always been free with dressing. You can see that in the home, not outside. But women in Kurdistan don't want to wear chador even outside.

Farasat 30.6.2003 Kavane, Iran











**Sixth quotation  
from Isabella Bird's book...**

Though their out-of-doors life is healthy and their diet simple, they rarely attain old age. A man of sixty is accounted very old indeed. The men are certainly not polite to their wives, and if they get in their way or mine they kick them aside, just as rough men kick dogs.

Isabella Bird 12.6.1890 Ali Kuh, Persia



### **...and Faridah's comment**

Isabella is telling about time in Iran and Kurdistan one hundred years ago. That time man was like shah in the home and in his territory and he could do anything. But now Iran is changed. The man can't be like before. Of course every man wants to have power at home. But they can't do that anymore.

In Isabella's time women couldn't go to school and they didn't know anything about the world. they knew only something which were around them, something so little, maybe something about their city or village. But now there is TV and radio and there are schools. And women go to school. And also in the countryside women go to school and they know many things about the world.

Women don't let men to use them anymore. Of course men are still doing that. Right now there is a law, woman can divorce and man has to accept what woman wants. In the home women are free and their husband can't do anything. Woman can also make decisions.

Faridah 1.7.2003 Sanandaj, Iran





