



## From Ojeir to Hassa--a Reminiscence and a Postscript

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Recent letters from Dr. Paul W. Harrison tell of his wonderful visit to the inland provinces of Nejd across the eastern threshold of Arabia, and a second visit to Hassa, which is the garden province, when compared with the great desert stretching north and west. His letter brought back memories of my two journeys to the capitol Hofhoof, and reminded me of some photographs unpublished taken by my friend Mr. Burckhardt, who also explored this country and met his death shortly afterward in south Arabia. Although bearing the same name, he was no relative of the more famous Burckhardt who visited Mecca.



THE LAST FLAG OF TURKEY—PHOTOGRAPHED  
AT KATIF

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The usual route from Bahrein to the interior of Hassa is to cross by boat to Ojeir on the mainland, and thence to travel by caravan to Hofhoof. In October, 1893, I took this route, returning from the capital to Katif and thence back to Menamah. Embarking at sunset we landed at Ojeir before dawn the next day and I found my way to a Turkish custom-house officer to whom I had a friendly letter from a Bahrein merchant. Ojeir, although it has neither a bazaar nor any

settled population, has a mud-fort, a dwarf flagstaff and an imposing custom-house. The harbor although not deep, is protected against north and south winds and is therefore a good landing place for the immense quantity of rice and piece-goods shipped from Bahrein into the interior. A caravan of from two to three hundred camels leaves Ojeir every week. For although the Jabel Shammer country is probably supplied overland from Basrah and Bagdad, the whole of Southern Nejd receives piece-goods, coffee, rice, sugar and Birmingham wares by way of Bahrein and Ojeir.

The whole plain in and about the custom-house was piled with bales and boxes and the air filled with the noise of loading seven hundred camels. I struck a bargain with Salih, a Nejdi, to travel in his party and before noon-prayers we were off. The country for many hours was bare

desert, here and there a picturesque ridge of sand, and in one place a vein of greenish limestone. When night came we stretched a blanket on the clean sand and slept in the open air; those who had neglected their waterskins on starting now satisfied thirst by scooping a well with their hands three or four feet deep and found a supply of water. During the day the sun was hot and the breeze died away; but at night, under the sparkling stars and with a north wind it seemed, by contrast, bitterly cold. On the second day at noon we sighted the palm forests that surround Hofhoof and give it, Palgrave says, "the general aspect of a white and yellow onyx chased in an emerald rim." As we did not reach the "emerald rim" until afternoon I concluded to remain at Jifr, one of the many suburb villages. Here Salih had friends, and a delicious dinner of bread, butter, milk and dates, all fresh, was one of many tokens



TURKISH CUSTOM HOUSE, OJEIR

of hospitality. At sunset we went on to the next village, Menazeleh, a distance of about three miles through gardens and rushing streams of tepid water. The next morning early we again rode through gardens and date orchards half visible in the morning mist. At seven o'clock the mosques and walls of Hofhoof appeared right before us as the sun lifted the veil; it was a beautiful sight.

Hofhoof can claim a considerable age. Under the name of Hajar, it was next to Mobarrez, the citadel town of the celebrated Bni Kindi and Abd El Kais (570 A. H.). Both of these towns, and in fact every village of Hassa, owe their existence to the underground watercourses, which are the chief characteristics of the province; everywhere there is the same great abundance of this great blessing. A land of streams and fountains—welling up in the midst of the salt sea, as at Bahrein; flowing

unknown and unsought under the dry desert at Ojeir; bubbling up in perennial fountains at Katif; or bursting out in seven hot springs that flow, cooling, to bless wide fields of rice and wheat at Mobarrez.

Hofhoof itself is surrounded by gardens, and its plan gives a good idea of the general character of the towns of Arabia. A castle or ruler's house; a bazaar with surrounding dwellings and a mud-wall built around to protect the whole. The moat is now dry and half filled in with the debris of the walls, which are not in good repair. The town is nearly a mile and a half across at its greater diameter, but the houses are not built as close together as is the custom in most Oriental towns; here is the pleasant feature of gardens *inside* the walls. The date-palm predominates, and indeed comes to wonderful perfection, but the nabak, the papay, the fig and the pomegranate are also in evidence. Indigo is cultivated, and also cotton, while all the region round about is green with fields of rice and sugar-cane and vegetables—onions, radishes, beans, vetches and maize.



BETWEEN HOFHOOF AND KATIFF

Our photographs show glimpses of the region immediately north and west of the capital, and give the reader some conception of the geological formation of the country, which clearly shows the erosion of the sand-stone rock into fantastic shapes by the action of desert sand and winds. The vast stretches of palm prove that Palgrave did not exaggerate and the pools of water are evidence of the marvellous natural fertility of this country. Now that the Turk has disappeared we may look forward to its development, and perhaps some day a light railway will bring the date produce to the coast at Ojeir, and the pier will have a different appearance from the day when we landed, and the Arabs carried thousands of bags of rice and coffee from the sailing craft to go by caravans inland. The gospel, too, will have freer course and be glorified.