

the boys not to shell that day! This gave us a charming insight into the character of the Lebanese.

We now turned homewards, but still there were buildings of fame and beauty in our path which helped us to grasp further the history of the Middle East. First we visited the ruins of the striking Roman temples at Ba'albeck, built in the first two centuries A.D. Then, returning to the coast and swinging north, we halted at reputedly the oldest city in the world, usually known as Biblos, and climbed up the ancient castle which has been many times rebuilt, most recently by the Crusaders. Gazing westwards, our eyes sank down from the powerful, compelling blue of the Mediterranean to burrow among the many excavated walls at the foot of the castle, trying to distinguish Phoenician from Persian, Greek from Roman, Arab from Crusader. On a highway such as the Mediterranean coast it was indeed scarcely surprising that so many civilizations should have come and gone, and all have left their mark in such close proximity to one another.

We parted from the coast at Tripoli, and making for Homs we stopped on the way at the prince of all Crusader castles, Krak des Chevaliers, just inside Syria. Immensely solid and brilliantly restored by the French in 1936, we spent the night securely within its 25-foot-thick walls. The next morning we marvelled at how little effect 850 years have had on this vast and unforgettably imposing structure. Accompanied by magnificent memories such as this one, and many others, some of which I have described, we now sped north-west for home, and passing through the spectacular Cilician gates, rejoined our outward route at Ankara and in just over a week were back in Cambridge.

In conclusion, I should like to mention especially Persia, the spiritual focus of our expedition. We were impressed throughout by the generosity, the kindness, the hospitality, the remarkable sense of duty, of the Persian people. We travelled from place to place with the utmost co-operation of the authorities, visiting, as I have suggested, one of the most beautiful cities in the world and also some of the most interesting archaeological sites. In a land of so much kindness we even forgave the Persians their roads! Finally, I shall try to recapture the beauty of one of our most exquisite moments in Persia, in this shot of Persepolis at dusk, taken looking across the plain towards Shiraz, with the columns rising eerily from the great platform and the sun sinking slowly beneath the horizon in the south-west.

The CHAIRMAN: You have, ladies and gentlemen, already expressed your appreciation of Mr. Reddaway's talk by your applause. I think we should also show how pleased we are not only with what we have seen, but the most excellent manner in which Mr. Reddaway took us through the whole journey, balancing it all so nicely so as to complete his talk within the time allotted, and that is no easy task when describing such an expedition. I feel sure you all wish to show your further appreciation. (Applause.)

THE VALLEY OF THE ASSASSINS

By P. R. E. WILLEY

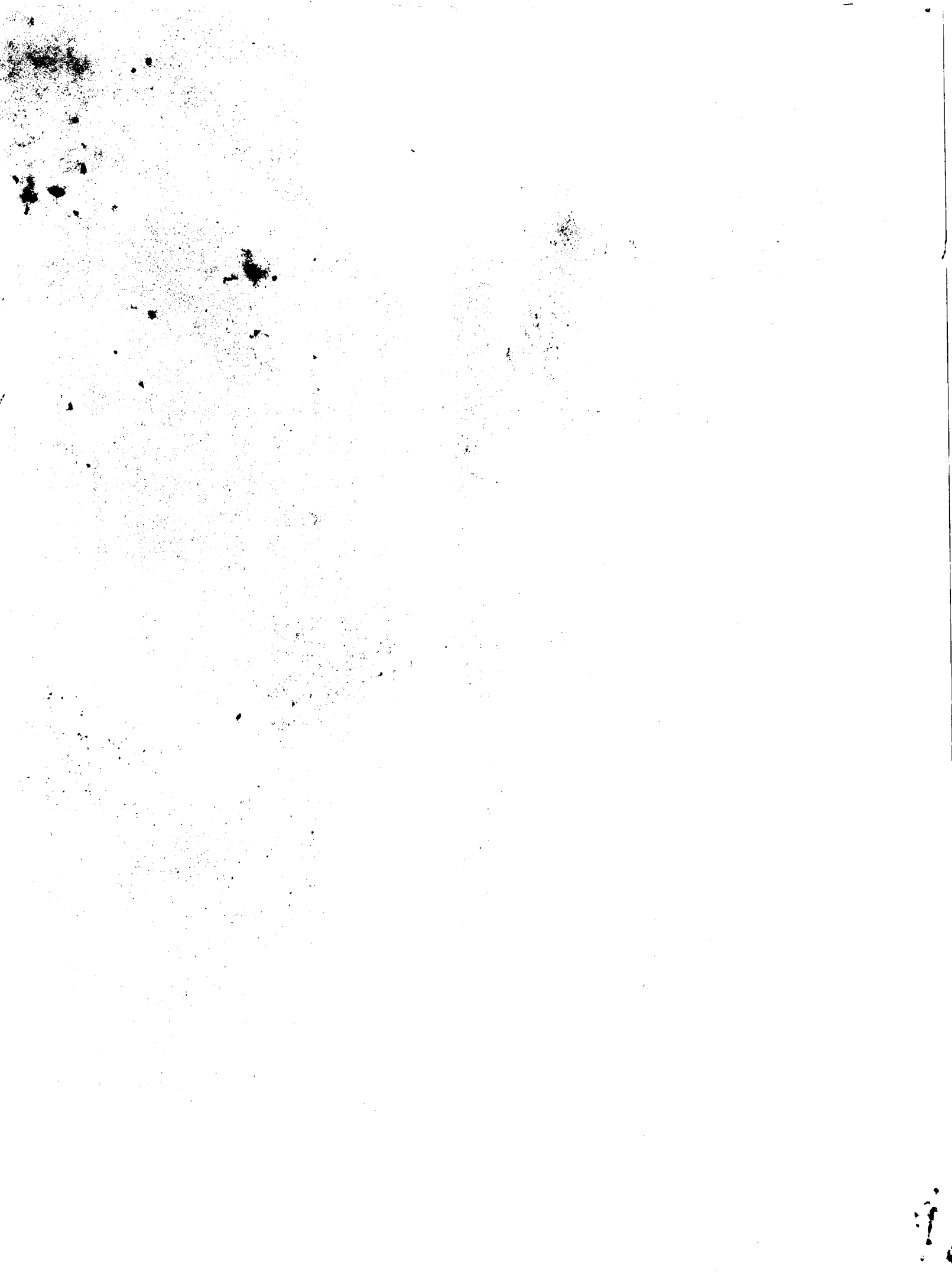
The second of two Young Peoples' Lectures delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society on Wednesday, January 13, 1960, Sir Philip Southwell, C.B.E., M.C., in the chair.

The CHAIRMAN: We now come to the second lecture of this series and I introduce Mr. Willey, a Housemaster at Wellington, and Commanding Officer of the Wellington Combined Cadet Force. He has come to tell us of the expedition he led to the Valley of the Assassins, illustrated by lantern slides, following which Mr. Richard Mordaunt will show the film taken during the expedition. There were six Oxford undergraduates with the expedition which went to the Elburz mountains in order to examine the fortresses in the Valley of the Assassins and, if possible, to establish the site of the castle of Maymun Diz. I now ask Mr. Willey to be good enough to address you.

LADIES and gentlemen, I was hoping to be able to say after Mr. Peter Reddaway's talk that his expedition, true to the tradition of Cambridge, dealt with the modern side of Persia, while our Oxford expedition delved into the country's remote past. This, however, is not strictly true, because both expeditions were looking into the past while not forgetting the present.

The official title of our expedition was the "Oxford Expedition to the Elburz Mountains," but despite our high-sounding title we were really a party of adventurous amateurs. The expedition consisted of five Oxford undergraduates and two old Wellingtonians who had recently left school, so that altogether we were a party of eight, although two of our number explored the ruins of Persepolis and other places in the south and did not actually come into the valley with us. We had with us an interpreter and a medical officer, who was, in fact, a first-year medical student. He did a magnificent job in protecting us from the more serious diseases, although we were all afflicted by dysentery and one or two members by jaundice. The interpreter was also an Oxford undergraduate who seemed to be able to cope very well with the native dialect of the valley. Our patron was Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck.

We left England at the beginning of August, 1959, and came back at different times, I in the middle of September, and most of the other members of the party three weeks or so later. We had originally intended to travel out and back in a 1942 converted Commer bus which had been kindly lent to us by an Oxford firm. All went well until we arrived at Châlons-sur-Marne when the bus came to a halt and investigation revealed that six big ends had gone. We were told that the damage would take two weeks to repair. After an urgent council of war we decided we could not wait for this length of time and that we must continue our journey by train. We transferred our essential kit from the bus, which we left behind to be repaired and picked up on our return, into kit bags kindly provided by



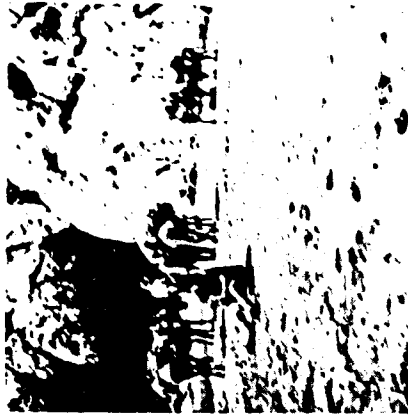
the French Army and entrained for Paris, where we caught the Orient Express to Istanbul. At first this seemed an unpromising start but was in reality a blessing in disguise as we were able to spend so much longer in the Valley of the Assassins and to carry out all our objectives.

I trust you will now bear with me while I give a brief historical and geographical survey of the area traversed by the expedition.

The Valley of the Assassins or, more prosaically, the Alamut Valley, lies in the Elburz mountains in the north of Persia about half way between Teheran and the Caspian Sea. (Population 20,000.) This was where the infamous Isma'ili branch of the Shi'ite sect, founded by Hasan-i-Sabbah at the end of the eleventh century, flourished and spread until it was destroyed by the Mongol invaders under the "World Conqueror" Hulugu Khan in 1256. Another branch which existed at the same time in Syria lasted a few years longer until it, too, was practically exterminated by the Sultan of Egypt. The word "assassin" is derived from Hashishin or eater of hashish, but secret assassination of their political opponents, a practice introduced by Hasan, always formed one of their most powerful weapons. The religious doctrines of the sect were identical to those of the Isma'ili.

Hasan-i-Sabbah, the Grand Master of the Assassins and Old Man of the Mountains, established himself by trickery in the castle of Alamut in 1090, after a chequered career which had taken him from Ray, where he was born, to Egypt, Bagdad, and back to Gazwin. Here in Alamut he converted many people, who were attracted by his extreme asceticism, to the new faith. The castle itself had first been constructed in the year 860-1, as Juvaini, who accompanied the Mongol armies, tells us in his account of Hulugu's campaign entitled "The History of the World Conqueror." It was already a fairly formidable fortress, but Hasan set about making it impregnable. Store rooms were hewn out of the solid rock, a stream was diverted and the approaches were strengthened "by plastered walls and lead-covered ramparts." Hasan died in 1124 and the assassins, under their subsequent hereditary leaders, continued to prosper, despite frequent defeats in battle and their evil renown in no way diminished. Gradually, however, the line became enfeebled, until their last ruler, Rukn-ad-Din, was unable to put up more than a token resistance to the advancing Mongol hordes and surrendered his fortress of Maymun Diz. He and about 12,000 of his followers were put to death in a particularly barbaric way and Juvaini relates that "of him and his stock no trace was left, and he and his kindred became but a tale on men's lips and a tradition in the world."

Although there have been many famous explorers in Persia and the name of the Valley of the Assassins is fairly familiar to the Western world, it is strange that so few people have visited it. In the last century Col. Monteith and Lt.-Col. Sheil published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* of 1833 and 1838 an account of their visits to the valley and other places along the Caspian, and in recent times the names most associated with this part of the world are those of Miss Freya Stark, who published her impressions in the *Valleys of the Assassins* in 1934, Professor Hertzfeld and Professor Ivanow. They have given excellent pic-



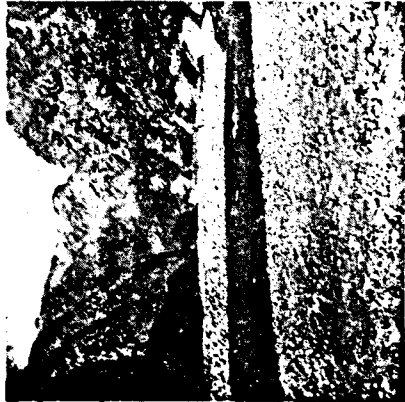
THE ENTRANCE TO THE ALAMUT RUD



SOME INHABITANTS OF THE VALLEY



A GENERAL VIEW OF THE VALLEY AND THE ALAMUT RUD



THE ENTRANCE TO THE VALLEY



TEA-HOUSE AT BADASHT



MAYMUN DIZ



tures of the customs and people of the valley but for us its principal interest lay in its past history and its castles. Altogether there are over fifty of them, some quite small, and we know that the three principal ones at the time of the Assassins were Lammasar, Alamut, and Maymun Diz. There has never been any doubt as to the site of Alamut, and Lammasar was discovered by Miss Stark, but so far it has not been possible to give any exact location of Maymun Diz where the final defeat of the assassins took place. Professor Ivanow in his article in *Islamic Culture*, of October, 1938, entitled "Some Isma'ili Strongholds in Persia," discusses the theory tentatively advanced by Miss Stark that Maymun Diz is the same as Alamut. He comes to the conclusion that this is unlikely. Juvaini has given a very full description of the siege and surrender of Maymun Diz and by comparing his description with the topography itself, it is possible to reach certain conclusions.

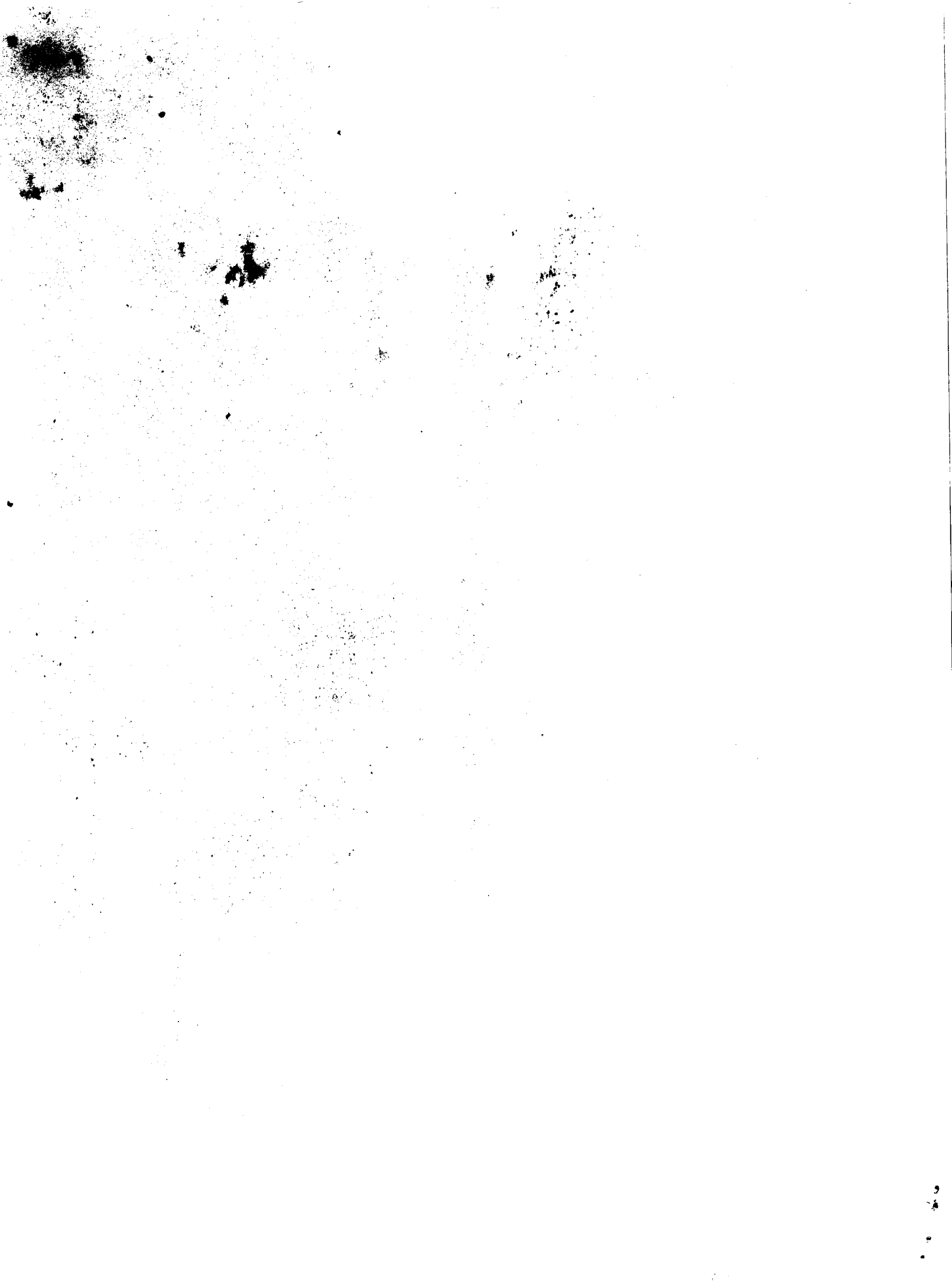
Having read all available sources and inspired by these authorities, we decided to make our objectives the following:

1. To carry out a thorough investigation of the rock of Alamut.
2. To find, if this were possible, the site of Maymun Diz.
3. To investigate the castle of Lammasar.
4. To investigate any other castles we came across; and
5. To bring back with us samples of any pottery or other interesting items that we found on the castle sites.

We accomplished all our objectives and succeeded in discovering another castle at Shir Kuh which, as far as we know, has not been looked at before.

After the break-down of the Commer I have said the expedition en- trained for Paris and Istanbul, and from thence made the journey by train to Erzerum. The only way to go on now was to take a long-distance bus which, after negotiating seemingly impossible hairpin bends at high speed, carried us to Teheran, where we spent three days in the British Embassy compound, receiving every possible assistance from H.E. the British Ambassador and his staff in obtaining the necessary security passes from S.A.V.A.K. Preparations completed, an Embassy Land-Rover carried us on along the route to Qazvin and then northwards to the small village of Wars, after which the Land-Rover could go no further and the expedition camped for the night in an extremely draughty wood. Next day a team of mules and donkeys carried our baggage over the magnificent but cruel Chala Pass (8,500 ft.), and down to the junction of the Talicpan and Alamut rivers at Shir Kuh. As time was short we decided to visit the castle of Shir Kuh later, and so we pressed on to our first objective, the rock of Alamut, rising high above the village of Shubar Khan, which we reached two days later. This village was not marked on any of our maps, and the inhabitants of the valley were even less reliable than the information on the maps. These seemed to take a fiendish delight in placing things about twenty miles from where they actually were.

It is not until one gets close to the rock of Alamut, which Juvaini likens to a "kneeling camel with its neck stretched out," that it is possible to appreciate its fine strategic position. The rock is set against the



background of the towering Hadekhan range and rises about 800 ft. above the foot of the valley, the castle itself being built on a sheer bluff another 80 ft. or so high. We scrambled around the castle, sometimes at great risk to ourselves, exploring especially the southern slope, where we clambered down about 50 ft. to inspect a water cistern cut deep into the rock, and which was supposed to be bottomless. We threw a stone in but had no means of measuring its depth. There was evidence of extensive underground rooms which had been bricked up but which, if they could be excavated, would certainly yield extremely interesting finds. Legend relates that the vines clustered on the barren rock face near the cistern we inspected are those which Hasan-i-Sabbah himself planted. For keep sake we brought back one or two leaves.

Our attention was drawn to the stables in the rock, where the assassins were supposed to have kept their horses. These stables were again hollowed out of the rock itself. There was also an intricate system of sentry-boxes all round the castle, perched precariously like swallows' nests; the assassin brickwork was well built from natural lava and some of it is still in good condition. Altogether their defensive system was extremely good.

We spent four days examining the castle and it became evident to us as a result of having read Juvaini's description that Alamut could not be Maymun Diz. The local inhabitants then told us that there was a castle above the village of Mu'allim Kilaya, so we decided to go and have a look at this castle which, we were told, had not been visited by Miss Freya Stark or Professor Ivanow. Having once more gone through the tedious performance of bargaining for mules, we moved off through the village of Andij and on to Mu'allim Kilaya, about sixteen hours' march towards the mouth of the Alamut Rud but by no means easy on account of the steep ridges we had to cross. About a mile above Mu'allim Kilaya we came to the castle, and saw at once that the rock out of which it is hollowed was far, far more imposing than that of Alamut. The rock of Maymun Diz was almost cathedral-like with its towers and buttresses, although much of it is conglomerate rock. Actually at times it was difficult to distinguish between man-made and natural defences. The approach was extremely precipitous and dangerous; the main entrance had been destroyed and as we had no climbing equipment, we were hauled up on ropes by the local guides. Two or three of these fine and agile men helped us to get inside the castle so that we were able to explore two separate gallery systems, inside which we found definite traces of brick walls and a well-preserved arch; also pottery similar to that found at Alamut. We investigated the whole site as fully as we could and came to the conclusion that this was, in fact, the site of Maymun Diz as described by Juvaini. Our feeling of elation was, of course, tremendous. We hope to return in the summer of 1960 to complete our investigation of this rock.

We wanted to visit the rest of the valley, and we decided to split so as to accomplish the last of our objectives. With Richard Mordaunt and the interpreter, I went to look at Lammasar, and three other members left the valley going *via* Garमारud into the valley of the Shah Rud and on over the mountains to Teheran, arriving there exhausted three days later. At

Lammasar we explored the castle thoroughly and again made maps and photographs. We picked up a lot of pottery which the British Museum has identified as Isma'ili pottery of the eleventh to thirteenth century. This castle is, in fact, the largest and best preserved of all the assassin castles and from a distance looks almost like the ruins of a typical Norman stronghold. On our way to Lammasar we called in at Shir Kuh, where we found the site of a large castle which guarded the approach to the valley. This, too, we photographed and mapped.

From Teheran the expedition gradually made its way back to England, all the members carrying with them a pleasant memory of the kindness they had always experienced from these incredibly primitive and naive folk. They seemed open, frank and sincere, but completely ignorant about the past history of the valley.

Mr. Richard Mordaunt then showed and commented on the film taken during the course of the expedition.

Group-Captain St. Clair Smallwood: Sir Philip Southwell has had to leave to catch a train, so please accept me as his deputy. We have all enjoyed ourselves so much this afternoon that I hope we shall be able to induce these undefeated teams to come back to talk to the Society again when they have made another journey in Persia. I congratulate Mr. Willey on a very successful combined operation, and feel that as long as he is in charge of the Corps at Wellington they are in very good hands. We thank both our lecturers very much indeed for coming to describe their experiences and assure them that we have much enjoyed the whole afternoon. (Applause.)

CORRESPONDENCE

The following extracts are taken from a letter from Mr. G. A. Calver, now in Teheran.

"... you mentioned the need for the Society to look to commerce for its members in the future. This is very clear.

"If you have the meetings in the evening, people of middle seniority in commerce in London can come. If some propaganda is done they will then bring their trainees. Let the trainees join for 10s. a year and let them pay full rates at 21. Thus you will get young men who are going to the East. They will remain members while they are in the East, and when they finally come home.

"Let a lot of the meetings be specifically directed at young men going to the East—how they will live, what they will see, etc.

"Then something must be done (other than receipt of the Journal) for members who are in the East.

"Local branches must be formed, and if already formed, must have activities—meetings and dinners. When the Society knows of some eminent man going to a certain place in the East on a visit, arrangements should be made for him to meet and address the local branch."

