

from end to end, was of the same opinion in regard to that country, as he shows when he speaks of "the precariousness of cultivation, even where to many travelers fertility has appeared undeniable and of considerable extent."

The mistake of overestimating the possibilities of Iran is very common among travelers. For example, O'Donovan describes the country between Abbasabad and Mazinan, a few miles west of Sabzawar, on the road from Meshed to Teheran, as "a dreary flat, entirely uncultivated, though plentifully supplied with water from the Kal Mura River, which has left marks of extensive inundations in numerous white deposits of salt. This plain would undoubtedly produce abundant crops of rice, if properly cultivated." After passing numerous ruins of fortifications, reservoirs, tanks, and other structures, O'Donovan "crossed the Kal Mura, a river about forty yards wide here and tolerably deep, though on the maps it is usually marked as dry in summer. The country around was once extensively cultivated, as the traces of irrigating ditches show. . . . Nowadays, cultivation is only attempted immediately around the towns, and even there . . . the crops are miserably poor." In June, 1880, when O'Donovan passed this way, the Kal Mura River must have been phenomenally high, for when Smith traversed the region in May, 1872, a year of fair rainfall, with good crops, he found the Kal Mura at the same place "a narrow rivulet of salt water." O'Donovan does not appear to have thought of connecting the "miserably poor crops" with the "numerous white deposits of salt." Apparently, it was salinity and lack of water, not lack of energy, which prevented the Persians from raising "abundant crops of rice."