

CHAPTER XVII

THE CASPIAN SEA AND ITS NEIGHBORS

THE Caspian Sea, like the other enclosed basins which we have examined, has fluctuated in level during historic times. Its relation to the Sea of Aral and to the Oxus River has complicated its history, and has caused much disagreement among modern writers. Humboldt has devoted almost two hundred pages of his great work on Central Asia to the subject; Rawlinson has investigated it carefully; Brückner has made an exhaustive study of the fluctuations of the sea, especially during the last two centuries; and many other writers have contributed more or less to a discussion which began two thousand years ago, and in which no agreement has as yet been reached.

Among the ancients, some considered the Caspian Sea a part of the great "stream of Ocean" surrounding the habitable earth; others supposed it to be one of four symmetrical gulfs which were thought to penetrate from the northern and southern oceans into the dry land; while still others, who knew that it was an enclosed basin, inferred that it must have an underground outlet to the Black Sea, which, as a matter of fact, lies eighty-five feet *above* it. Previous to the days of Herodotus, the Caspian Sea is mentioned only vaguely. Two ancient records, one Greek and one Egyptian, have been supposed to refer to it, and possibly to the Sea of Aral; and the traditions of the Argonauts have been thought to show that water communication