

Asia, who never pass through Bagdad without turning aside to pray there.

At the foot of Orontes, whose rich foliage waves over a thousand silvery streams which reflect the splendour of the Asiatic sun, there is a city—once royal and magnificent—lying extended amid ruined columns, prostrate temples, and mausoleums of red granite with inscriptions written in some language long unknown: it is Ecbatana, the ancient capital of the Medes, now the obscure Hamadan. At one of the extremities of the fallen city rises a brick monument, the door of which, according to the old sepulchral style of the country, is very small and made of one solid stone: it is the tomb of a young queen, fair and virtuous, who braved death to save her people—the noble Esther, who was laid there on a bed of ivory overlaid with gold, embalmed in musk and amber, and wrapped in a shroud of Chinese silk,* beside the great Hebrew patriot Mardochai.† This illustrious tomb, which the Jews of Persia regard as a place of peculiar sanctity, and to which they repair in crowds at the time of the feast of Phurim,‡ is still, and has been for two thousand years, the term of a pilgrimage.

In the middle ages, under the Saracen domination, the Arabs having threatened the Jews with a general massacre during a grievous drought which prevailed all over Syria and Palestine, if rain did not fall on a day appointed, they gathered in great numbers around the tomb of Zachary, which is still to be seen in the

* He built her a mausoleum after the manner of the Iranians, (Iran was, before Cyrus, the true name of the vast kingdom which is now called Persia,) fill'd her skull with musk and amber, wrapped her body in Chinese silk, placed her, as kings are placed, on a throne of ivory, and hung her crown above her; then they painted the door of the tomb red and blue." (Firdonsi, *Book of Kings*, Kei Khosrou.)

† *Travels of Sir Robert Ker Porter in Persia and Armenia.* The present tomb of Esther and of Mardochai occupies the same place as did the old, which was destroyed by Tamerlane.

‡ This festival, which was instituted at Suza by Mardochai and Esther, was solemnly celebrated on the 14th or 15th day of the month of Ader, which is our February moon. The Jews had formerly a custom of making a wooden cross on which they painted Aman, and dragged it through the city, so that every one might see it. They afterwards burnt it, and threw the ashes into the river. The emperor Theodosius forbade them to enact this comedy, fearing that it might possibly have reference to the death of Christ.