

from his nostrils. Zoroaster had his fire temple at Baku, and it is probable that these inflammable wells did much to confirm the literal idea of Hell, common to many religions of Semitic origin. Alexander the Great, the conqueror of Asia, saw the burning lake of Ectabana centuries before the birth of Christ, and Marco Polo, the mediaeval explorer, with all his romancing, revealed the truth about the oil resources of Baku in later centuries and discerned their commercial value. Before his time the Roman conquerors had realized the value of the mineral oils of the near East and used them as illuminants. Nor were the ancients ignorant of the value of petroleum in its various forms as a cure for natural ills, and used it both externally and internally. The fact that it had, in their eyes, a magic origin, heightened its curative value for them.

The ancient peoples of the regions of the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf were not alone in appreciating the practical uses of this gift of bounteous nature. The oldest records of China and Japan contain allusions to the use of natural oil and gas for heating and lighting, while Europe in the middle ages was aware of the medicinal value of the oil deposits of Galicia, Northern Italy and Bavaria. Since the middle of the nineteenth century the most prolific source of oil in the world has been the continent of North America, but the knowledge of its resources in this respect are not entirely a modern discovery. As early as 1632 Joseph de la Roche d'Allion gave an account of oil springs he had seen in what is now the State of New York,