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A Sixth Journey in Persia: Discussion

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which produces a great variety of crops, and where they say that a plough only lies idle for forty days. This is, in part, due to its mean elevation, barely exceeding 3000 feet, and its proximity to the still lower levels of the Lut. At Meshed, for instance, figs and pomegranates do not grow, whereas in this district, they are especially fine.

From Kunder, we passed to the south of the modern capital, and hearing of extensive ruins on the edge of the low-lying district of Mahavalât, we crossed a low range and camped at Himatabad, where some of the famous small, dark green melons with pink inside, were brought for sale; and I must own that their flavour disappointed me. East of Himatabad were ruins also known as Shahr-i-Sufid; and among the low hills are traces of Kala Shir, said to be a corruption of Kala Hajir, or "the fort of Hajir," who was a noted *pahlawan* or champion in the days of Rustam. He was in charge of the Diz-i-Sufid or "White Fort;" and fought with Sohrab, but was vanquished and captured by that heroic youth. All these ruins are said to date back to the Zoroastrian period.

We now swung north to Azghand, an important village with some very fine cypress trees. It was the private property of Ishâk Khan Karai, who nearly a century ago, was besieged in it for a whole year by Hassan Vali *Mirza*, son of Fath Ali Shah. As both sides became tired of the siege, peace was made, and Ishak Khan gave his daughter to the prince, from whom my host at Turshiz is descended and Asghand still remains in his family. A long stage brought us to Turbat-i-Heideri, and so back to Meshed, after successfully accomplishing the objects I had in view.

The PRESIDENT (after the paper): The extremely interesting lecture we have just listened to proves how much there is yet to be learnt with regard to the geography, both ancient and modern, of Persia, especially perhaps of the ancient geography, which must be based on archæological researches. I am quite sure that Major Sykes will continue his valuable researches, and that we may look forward to other lectures from him, dealing with other interesting parts of Persia. Major Sykes has had great obstacles to surmount, for it is always extremely difficult in a distant land for a foreigner to learn about the habits and customs of the people; in fact, it sometimes has occurred to me that we do not sufficiently study the accounts given by foreigners of their own countries. In all seriousness, this is a branch of study which geographers might with advantage look to more carefully than they have in the past. In connection with this, I perhaps may remark that Major Sykes, together with an Indian colleague, has just published a most interesting book called 'The Glory of the Shia World.' On the title-page it is described as the translation of a Persian manuscript; it appears, in fact, to be the account, in autobiographical form, of the life of one Nurulla Khan, obviously a man of some standing, for we hear that he is the grandson of a person described in a note as the original of Haji Baba. Now, I confess I do not quite know the full meaning of that note, and I will also confess that in reading this work some suspicions crossed my mind which I could not possibly allude to in the presence of Major Sykes. If any of those here present had had an ancestor who had dined in the presence of Defoe, would they have expected him to have asked him whether Robinson

Crusoe was a real individual? Such a question would surely have been impertinent, and I am sure you will think I was discreet, when I had the pleasure of dining with Major Sykes just now, in not asking him any impertinent questions about Nurulla Khan. When you come to read his amusing work, you must endeavour to stifle any doubts that may arise, and whatever else may be said of Nurulla Khan, he is certainly a very amusing personage.

General BERESFORD LOVETT: I deem myself most fortunate in having been able, during one of my erratic visits to England, to be present at this meeting to hear the very able paper read to us by Major Sykes, to have had the pleasure of making his acquaintance, and to congratulate him on his many achievements towards a better knowledge of the geography of Persia and a better insight into the workings of the Persian mind. I fancy that by this time the “*nufus-i-batani*” of the average Persian is an open book to him.

Referring to his journey from Astrabad *via* Bostan to Shahrud, I know that route well, although it is now about twenty-eight years ago since I made a plane-table survey of that and collateral routes, and reported on their military importance to the late Sir Charles Macgregor, then Quartermaster-General in India, when I was H.M. Consul at Astrabad.

I had also the honour to read a paper before this Society in January, 1882, explanatory of my journey from Astrabad to Shahrud and back to Astrabad *via* Bostan and Charbagh, inclusive of an ascent of the great Shahwar mountain. This journey was in July, and I fancy Major Sykes's journey was in November. I remember remarking on the number of streams crossed on the southern aspect of the great chain that divides the Caspian basin from Irak, as well as the numerous waterfalls. This was long anterior to the time when I began to take an interest in hydro-electric developments. So I will ask our lecturer whether he remembers crossing any considerable streams on his way across the Shah Kuh range, because that would go towards showing the permanence of the discharge and consequent possibility of utilizing the water-power to advantage. I may be permitted to express my regret that, since I had the honour to address this Society, I realize now how sadly diminished in numbers is the band of Persian explorers with whom in former years I was associated. I miss Sir John Champaign and Sir Oliver St. John, Sir Frederick Goldsmid, Sir Robert Murdock-Smith, and, lastly and recently, Sir Charles Euan Smith. All of these explorers contributed their quota to a better knowledge of Persian geography. In this connection, and with reference to my map of the Elburz between Tehran and Astrabad and between Astrabad and Shahrud, I should like to ask whether this part of Persia has yet been surveyed in the sense that survey is regarded by the Survey of India? Then Major Sykes, in his paper, writes about Hyrcanian tigers. There is a specimen of one at the Natural History Museum. A few Sundays ago I went to have a look at my victim, and found him looking quite cheerful, in spite of confinement in a glass case for twenty-eight years.

Sir MORTIMER DURAND: I have known Major Sykes a long time now, about twenty years, and all that I saw of him when we were in Persia together led me to feel the deepest confidence in his statements of fact. I have never met any man who studied Persian questions with greater care or a more thorough determination to get all his facts perfectly accurate. That is one of the best possible qualifications for an explorer, and there is probably no authority on the country now equal to his.

Mr. D. G. HOGARTH: I am afraid I have nothing of much interest to say. I am very grateful that Major Sykes's zeal should have taken him, with his great

knowledge and exceptional opportunities, into this out-of-the-way part of Persia, and that he should devote his attention to the problems of ancient geography. He has not dealt very fully with these problems in speaking to-night, but they are more fully treated in his paper. It is very difficult to get much further with them, and although he has spoken modestly about his achievement, I fancy he has taken us as far as we are likely to get for a good many years to come. There is almost no material to go upon. The eastern marches of Alexander are beset with difficulties. Some years ago I studied these difficulties; I will not say I solved them. The difficulty is to know where this great army, led by Alexander the Great, was at any moment between distant fixed points; it is usually impossible to say, if there are two routes, that he took one more than the other. I do not myself exactly know why Major Sykes says he must have gone up the Gurgan valley rather than have passed under the south of the Elburz range. Topography becomes particularly difficult when we have to deal with an event like the capture and death of Darius, although a good deal is known about it. We are told that Alexander caught Darius in six days after leaving Rhages, which is near Teheran. These were six days of the fiercest possible pursuit, and the stages may have been 30, 40, or 50 miles long. If they are 30 they bring Alexander to about Damghan; if more, to Shahrud or beyond. In Major Sykes's paper, he has drawn an argument on this matter from the silence of the historians of Alexander, about which I should like to say one word. Hekatompylos, the capital of Parthia, has been placed at Damghan. Major Sykes says he thinks it impossible that it should have been there, because in the narratives of the pursuit and capture of Darius no mention is made of the fact that he met his death near Hekatompylos. Our best authority for Alexander was writing as long after the events as we are after the last of the Crusades, and it is by no means certain that he would have had the curiosity to mention Hekatompylos. And there is just one little fact which is mentioned in the story. The wagon in which Darius was, it is said, was drawn aside to a little spring, and there the great conqueror came up with the man he was pursuing. That is to say, the event seems to have happened right out in the open upon the caravan road, and this fact alone would explain the absence of any mention of Hekatompylos. I do not dispute Major Sykes's own identification of that city further to the north; the only thing I do feel a little doubt about is his restriction of Parthia to the rich region north of the Elburz range.

Dr. STEIN: It is an unexpected honour for me to be called upon to say a few words here, inasmuch as I have never had the good fortune of travelling in Persia. But as my earliest Orientalist studies were concerned with the ancient history and creed of that country, I cannot resist the temptation of adding my tribute of appreciation as to the extreme value of the services which Major Sykes has been rendering for many years past to the geography of Persia. He has made himself into a living gazetteer, I may say, of middle Persia and the north of Persia now, and has by his labours worthily continued those splendid traditions of research which are connected with some of the most distinguished early political representatives of this country in Persia. There may be many yet here who remember how Sir Henry Rawlinson, in the very beginning of the serious study of ancient Persia, served the interests of science quite as thoroughly and zealously as he served the political interests of this country and India.

What I wanted to say in regard to archæological matters, I am rather glad Mr. Hogarth's remarks have taken out of my mouth. The difficulty about the definite identification of particular points on Alexander's marches is much increased by the fact that modern local tradition in such matters does not rest upon a

recollection of the real story of Alexander, but is mainly due to familiarity with what historical students call the romance of Alexander. I should think that for the inhabitants of those parts of Persia the real events must have faded very soon into oblivion, considering what a succession of inroads and conquests they were exposed to. I am gratified to know that there are sites which will repay thorough and systematic archaeological exploration in future. In the mean time I may express the hope that the line of that ancient wall to which Major Sykes has called attention will be surveyed, even were it merely on the surface. I believe that by observing actual topographical features along it, it will not be too difficult, in the light of the facts gathered along other ancient walls in the West and East, to determine a rather important point. Was it really a genuine defensive border wall, or was it what most Roman walls were originally—a line of fortified posts intended to facilitate the holding of an important strategical route, needed for the better control of some outlying base? However this may be, the defence was intended against those incursions from the great Turanian plains from which Persia has suffered so much throughout all ages. When we hear Major Sykes telling us about the pleasant little raids which are being exchanged on that old border between Iran and Turan, I realize that the historical student has still an opportunity here to study, it is true on a small scale, those interesting problems with which Persia has had only too much to do since ancient times. It remains for me only to express my great pleasure in having seen these excellent slides which bring before us such a distinct impression of the country, and also my thorough appreciation of the great service which Major Sykes has rendered to the cause of the historical geography of Persia.

Major SYKES: I thank you very much for listening to the lecture, and I only regret that I was not able to give it perhaps more lucidly, but the actual paper that has been written can be referred to. There is one point asked by General Lovett, which was whether there has been any better survey of the Elburr done than that which he did, and my reply is, so far as I am aware, his still holds the field.

EXPLORATION IN NORTH-WEST MONGOLIA.

By DOUGLAS CARRUTHERS.

In my last short report, written from Cha-kul, on the upper Yenisei, I gave in brief the extent of our work in those regions. Now that the expedition has reached its winter quarters at Kulja, I am sending a more detailed account of its course both in those regions and through Mongolia and Dzungaria.

The party, consisting of Mr. M. P. Price, Mr. J. H. Miller, and myself, started in May, 1910, from the Siberian lowlands in the neighbourhood of Minusinsk, and passed over the Syansk ranges into the secluded basin formed by these mountains, together with the Tannu-ola range, and drained by the numerous headwaters of the Yenisei river. Owing to the late spring, however, we were unable to start travelling until the first week in June, for the snow lies deep in the forests until a late date.

The whole of the Syansk region between the Yenisei and Lake Baikal is covered with the most impenetrable type of virgin forest, called by the