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## The Perso-Baluch Boundary: Discussion

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It is in these valleys that the wealth of Makrán lies, and it is wealth not to be despised even in these days. Thick groves of date palms occasionally fill up the landscape like a sea, with the white towers of village forts rising above them, as islands break the surface of an inlet; rank luxuriance of cultivation lies under the palms, where wheat-fields enclose fruit orchards, and fair-sized streams are diverted into a network of irrigation channels. There are districts in Makrán where the fierce heat of early spring forbids the existence of any form of life whatsoever, and there are also sweet, well-shaded valleys, the beauty of which is hardly surpassed even in Kashmir. In amongst them all lie the remains of an ancient civilization, such as may be seen in the ruins of old cities, of old forts, of roads, and of canals. These tell a tale which we may hope ere long fairly to unravel.

Old as this Asiatic world may be, it is yet a new world to much of scientific inquiry. Its geography is fairly solved, but its ethnography is still a riddle, and its history, when research and investigation shall unfold it, will fill up many a gap in the stories of the nations, if it can never claim a national character itself. I deeply regret that I have neither photographs nor sketches to illustrate some of the more remarkable corners of this No man's land. It is not that I have neglected to secure such records, but that they are in India, whilst I am here. I can only hope that in calling your attention to this long-forgotten country I have claimed your interest in succeeding records when perchance there may be leisure and opportunity to tell a completer tale.

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Before the reading of the paper, the Chairman, Admiral WHARTON, said: I am sorry that Mr. Curzon, who was to have presided here to-night, has been prevented by his public duties. We can understand that at present he has not much time to spare. I am particularly sorry, because I feel a sailor is out of place in the chair when talking about the borders of Afghanistan, of which I know nothing and Mr. Curzon a great deal. I do not think I need do more than introduce to you the lecturer, Captain McMahon, who will now read his paper.

After Captain McMahon's paper, Admiral WHARTON said: While Captain McMahon was tracing his boundary, Colonel Holdich was tracing another boundary, and he has kindly consented to give us a short account of his experiences.

After the reading of the papers, the following discussion took place:—

Admiral WHARTON: I am sorry Sir Frederic Goldsmid is not here; I had a letter this morning from him to say he is unfortunately laid up. He conducted the former delimitation commission between Afghanistan and Persia, and brought it up to the point where Colonel Holdich and Captain McMahon took their surveys. Also Colonel Woodthorpe wished to be here, but I am sorry he has not been able to come. Would Mr. Alcock say something of the collections Captain McMahon brought back?

Mr. ALCOCK: There is very little of general interest I can say about the collections brought back by Captain McMahon and Dr. Maynard. As Captain McMahon has said, its chief interest is reptiles; in fact, judging from that collection, one is quite prepared to understand that Baluchistan is a land of reptiles. Another feature of the collection is the large number of scorpions, spiders, and venomous

spider-like creatures. I worked it out and examined the reptiles carefully; there are a good many species, including the viper Captain McMahon spoke of. It is a most interesting form, and we have christened it *Eristicophis*,\* on account of its pugnacity: though all vipers are excessively pugnacious. I have not been able to examine the collection of scorpions and spiders and venomous spider-like creatures, which is large and interesting, but I have arranged with Mr. Pocock, of the British Museum, to examine and report on them.

MR. BLANFORD: Captain McMahon has traversed a tract of Baluchistan quite different from that I crossed with Sir Oliver St. John in 1872. It is exceedingly interesting to hear, both from him and from Colonel Holdich, that the country, previously unknown, has at length been opened up. I can entirely confirm Captain McMahon's account of the abundance of reptile life, as that is exactly what I found in going through the same country.

SIR HENRY BRACKENBURY: I am afraid I can add nothing useful to the geographical aspects of the question which has been brought before you to-night, and certainly nothing as to the geological aspect, and my knowledge of Baluchistan is but very small, for, though I visited Domandi with Captain McMahon when first he saw it, in the winter of 1891, and galloped over the plain of Zarmelan, and visited Chaman with him, I know little of the country in its rougher aspect. But there is one point I should like to say a word on, and that is what may be called the personal aspect of this work, the work as done by the man. I was a member of the Government of India which ordered these boundary expeditions, these delimitation expeditions, and we knew that there was a difficult task before those who had to conduct them. I think Captain McMahon's modesty—one of his characteristics—made very light of these difficulties; he has told us something and left us to gather something of the nature of that country, how most of it is an arid desert. Do you know how the people themselves describe it? They say that the Almighty, when making the world, used all the water, and grass, and flowers, and trees to make other beautiful countries, and when He had used all these, and had nothing left but a heap of rubbish, He threw that down and made Baluchistan; and I have heard others comment upon that and say, "We cannot understand, when He had made Baluchistan, that He took the trouble to make any other hell." That is the country in which Captain McMahon conducted that boundary expedition, a country infinitely desolate, infinitely arid, infinitely drear, and he had not only the difficulties of intense heat and want of water to contend with, but he also had to contend with that human difficulty which few know now so well as he does—the difficulty of dealing with the Afghan. I think it is only those who have dealt with the Afghan that can really know how obstructive a human being can be. Captain McMahon has shown a very charming photograph of his Afghan colleague, and spoke of his winning smile, and told us they didn't often smile both on the same day. From what I know of Captain McMahon, there was a subdued smile on Captain McMahon's face even when an open smile was on the face of his colleague, a smile which occasionally changed to the wrong side of his colleague's face. For these difficulties which Captain McMahon had to contend with were enormous; it is in the nature of Orientals, especially Afghans, to create difficulty in every matter connected with diplomacy. Here a boundary had to be defined. It was apparently a simple thing, because it had been traced upon the map and agreed to by Sir Mortimer Durand and by the Amir at the time of the mission to Kabul, of which Captain McMahon was a member; but it is one thing to trace a boundary on a map, and another thing on the ground. And there were special difficulties connected with such a question, such as watercourses

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\* ἐριστικός = lover of fighting.

and irrigation, to whom the rights belonged; these give rise, when both parties are not anxious for a speedy issue, to endless delays and difficulties. Captain McMahon had to contend, first of all, with great physical difficulties; secondly, with these human difficulties, and by neither one nor the other was he ever discouraged; he had that characteristic which is absolutely necessary in dealing with these Eastern peoples, not only perfect courage, but absolutely infinite patience, and it was by these two combined qualities, courage and patience, that these boundary commissions were brought to their thoroughly successful ends. Sir, I think it is a matter of great pride to us as Englishmen, it must be a matter of great pride and constant self-congratulation, that there are always to be found men, young men, possessing these great and these grand qualities—men who, like Captain McMahon and Colonel Holdich, will continue to do for this empire the class of work they have done, and will continue to keep this great empire what it is.

Admiral WHARTON: The very eloquent and moving words you have just heard from Sir Henry Brackenbury leave me very little to say. I think, reading between the lines of Captain McMahon's story, we can see there were all these difficulties which Sir Henry has mentioned, of which Captain McMahon said nothing, and the stories we have heard to-night give us an idea of the sort of work that goes on throughout our empire from year to year in a quiet way, in the course of business that no song is made about, that make us proud we are Englishmen. I am sure we shall be only speaking your sentiments in offering our hearty thanks to Captain McMahon and Colonel Holdich for their extremely interesting papers.

CAPTAIN MCMAHON'S MAP.—This sketch-map was compiled from the Survey of India map of Afghanistan of 1889; from the map published in the *Geographical Journal*, 1896, illustrating Colonel T. H. Holdich's paper on "Ancient and Mediæval Makran;" together with slight additions and alterations made by Colonel T. H. Holdich and Captain A. H. McMahon. The coast-line has been taken from the Admiralty charts.

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### THE RIVER ODER.\*

AMONGST the many geographical advantages enjoyed by these islands, one of the least considered is our comparative immunity from great floods. The historical works of Lauder and others, and the later chronicles of the daily newspapers, do indeed contain accounts of destruction done by total inundations, but at the worst the total damage is rarely considerable, and there are few inhabitants of the United Kingdom who regard any of its rivers as a source of real and imminent danger to themselves or their property. Under these circumstances, as might have been expected, we know little about the hydrography of this country in detail, and the production of a work like that before us is impossible.

The Imperial Decree of February 28, 1892, placed two questions before the German Commission charged with the investigation of the

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\* Der Oderstrom, sein Stromgebiet und seine Wichtigsten Nebenflüsse; herausgegeben vom Bureau des Ausschusses zur Untersuchung der Wasserverhältnisse in den der Ueberschwemmungsgefahr besonders ausgesetzten Fluss-gebieten. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer.