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Alexander Burnes

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ART. VII.—*Account of the Remains of the celebrated Temple at Pattan Somnath, sacked by Mahmúd of Ghizni, A. D. 1024. By LIEUT. ALEXANDER BURNES, of the Bombay Army.*

Read 18th of January, 1834.

THERE are few facts in Eastern history better authenticated than the invasion of India by Mahmúd of Ghizni: the details of his sack of Pattan Somnath have been narrated, in some detail, even by the accurate Gibbon,¹ and a few particulars, therefore, regarding the present condition of this far-famed temple and city, collected in October, 1830, may not be unacceptable to the Society.

The town of Pattan is situated on the coast of Gujarat, in latitude 20° 54', about forty miles higher up than the Portuguese settlement of Diu. Its antiquity is unquestioned; and the people residing in it related to me, with literal accuracy, the facts recorded of the sultan's smiting the idol: "What!" said he, when the Brahmins offered to redeem it, "do you consider me a merchant of idols?" and drawing his sword, broke it to atoms, and discovered the anxiety of the priests in the precious stones and jewels which it contained.

The traditions of the people, considering that a period of upwards of eight hundred years has elapsed, are worthy of record, however incredible some of the details may appear. They are as follows:—"The Caliph had heard with indignation that an infidel prince, ruling in Pattan, and great in his own estimation, slew a Mohammedan daily, and had the 'tíka,' or mark on his forehead, renewed day by day from the gore of a fresh sacrifice." They had it even, "that he ground the victim in an oil-mill, or pounded him in a mortar. Mangrol Isa, a man pious and devout, was despatched to remonstrate against these inhuman practices, but his advice was of no avail; and the darwesh transmitted the particulars of this unheard-of cruelty to the sultan, Mahmúd of Ghizni, who, in his zeal for the propagation of the faith, besieged Pattan with an army for twelve years, massacred or converted its inhabitants, annihilated its great temple, and put to death its prince, by name Jay-pal, since which period Pattan has continued, with one or two temporary successful usurpations, a Mohammedan settlement. The temple of Somnath was at once converted by the sultan into a mosque, its

¹ See chap. lvii.

cupolas were overtopped with minarets, which still remain, and the minor temples in the city shared a like fate."

The pious Hindú does not deny the fate which befell his god; he consoles himself with the belief that he retired into the sea on the intrusion of the unclean Mohammedan, where he has since continued. The building is no longer used as a mosque, and now neglected by both Hindú and Mohammedan, it is appropriated to the meanest of purposes. A Brahman, who pointed out to me the curiosities of the city, compared this once far-famed edifice to the human body deprived of life. "It once," he said, "had honour, but you now behold the frame-work rotting and neglected." The description was apposite. He would have had me further believe that the building was of high antiquity, of another age than our own, and prior to the era of Krishna himself, near the scene of whose deeds, however, Pattan is situated, since he resided at Dwáraká, which is on the same coast.

The great temple of Somnath stands on a rising ground on the north-west side of Pattan, inside the walls, and is only separated by them from the sea. It may be seen from a distance of twenty-five miles. It is a massy stone building, evidently of some antiquity. Unlike Hindú temples generally, it consists of three domes, the first of which forms the roof of the entrance, the second is the interior of the temple, the third was the "sanctum sanctorum," wherein were deposited the riches of Hindú devotion. The two external domes are diminutive: the central one has an elevation of more than thirty feet, tapering to the summit in fourteen steps, and is about forty feet in diameter. It is perfect, but the images which have once adorned both the interior and exterior of the building are mutilated, and the black polished stones which formed its floor have been removed by the citizens for less pious purposes. Everything in the vicinity of Pattan corroborates its age, and confirms the relations of the people.

Two marble slabs, with sentences from the Koran, and inscriptions regarding Mangrol Isa, point out where that Mohammedan worthy rests. They are on the western side of the city, and the place is still frequented by the devout Moslem. Near it is a cupola, supported on pillars, to mark the grave of the sultan's cash-keeper, with many others; and the whole city is encircled by the remains of mosques, and one vast cemetery. The field of battle, where the "infidels" were conquered, is also pointed out, and the massy walls, excavated ditch, paved streets, and squared-stone buildings of Pattan itself, proclaim its former greatness.

At present the city is a perfect ruin, its houses are nearly unoccupied, and but for a new and substantial temple, erected to house the god of Somnath by that wonderful woman, Ahalyá Bhai, the wife of Holkar, (who, by similar acts, has extended her fame from the Ganges to the Indus,) and the vicinity of a place of Hindú pilgrimage, it would soon be without a tenant, beyond the Arabs of the Júnagar chief who garrison it, and now talk in peace of the bloody victories of the sons of the prophet in this "infidel land."

In the architectural remains of antiquity in India, it will generally be observed that the pillars are low and diminutive, with extended capitals, formed by one stone jutting considerably beyond another, to receive the blocks of stone which were placed over them to form the roof. This is the case with the temples of Júnagar, in Girnar, with those at Bhadreswar in Cutch, and many other places I have seen, that are believed to be of antiquity: it is likewise to be discovered in the great temple of Somnath. It is the nearest approach to the arch at which the Hindús seem to have arrived; and in the particular instance of Somnath, it is striking to remark how aptly the Mohammedans have converted these clumsy attempts into chaster forms.

In the great temple they have inlaid an arch between every two pillars, more for ornament than strength, and I only discovered it by remembering that the arch was unknown in India before the Mohammedan conquest, and that I surely did not deceive myself in finding it in the temple of Somnath. A closer inspection soon verified the fact, and on examining the stones which composed these additions, they were found to consist of inverted Hindú images, and mutilated pieces from the exterior of the temple.

Such a fact seemed in itself to throw light on history. In the dilapidation of the temple we had proof of Mohammedan devastation; and in the arches which they had reared under the ruder plans of the Hindú, that they might the better give to it the appearance of a Mohammedan sanctuary, we had the architecture of the Eastern and Western world combined together in one edifice.

I must not omit to mention another building, worthy of notice, in the centre of the city. It is still known by the name of the "Jama Masjid," or Great Mosque, though it has also been a Hindú temple. It is in the Jain style of architecture, of an oblong square figure, with pillars on the great sides, and four domes resting on pillars at the end which faces the entrance: the shafts of all these pillars are low.

The place is now inhabited by fishermen, for neither the

“mimber” or pulpit of the Mohammedan, which has been chiselled out of its walls, nor its antiquity, have any attractions for either Mohammedan or Hindú.

There are no inscriptions to be discovered in the temple of Somnath. Colonel Tod, however, has lately given to the world the translation of a valuable inscription, still to be seen here, illustrative of an era of the kings of Nehrwala or Pattan; but even the exertions of some inquiring European, who has had the floor under the interior dome dug up, failed to throw any further light on this subject. Enough, indeed, seems to be known, for rare is it that tradition coincides so much with historical truth as in the accounts given of Pattan Somnath.
