

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey  
of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

# Sand-buried Ruins of Khotan



## CHAPTER I

### CALCUTTA TO KASHMIR



MOHAND MARG, KASHMIR.

It was from the Alpine plateau of Mohand Marg, my beloved camping-ground for three Kashmir summers, that I had in June, 1898, submitted to the Indian Government the first scheme of the explorations which were to take me across the great mountain barriers northward and into the distant deserts of Khotan. Almost two years had passed when I found myself,

early in May, 1900, again in Kashmir and within sight of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey  
of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Mohand Marg. With a glow of satisfaction I could look up to the crest of the high spur, some 10,000 feet above the sea and still covered with snow, on which my tent had stood, and where my plans had been formed. It had taken two years, and bulky files of correspondence; but at last I had secured what was needed—freedom to move, and the means requisite for my journey.

In the meantime official duty, and minor archæological tours to which I devoted my vacations, had taken me over widely different parts of India. From Lahore, where during eleven long years, amidst the worries and cares of University office work, I had ever felt the refreshing touch of the true East and the fascination of a great historical past, I had been transferred to Calcutta. With its strangely un-Indian conditions of life, its want of breathing space, and its damp heat, the “city of palaces” appeared to me like a tropical suburb of London. From there I had visited Sikkim, that strange half-Tibetan mountain-land where true Alpine scenery is invaded by the luxuriant vegetation of the tropics. I had wandered in South Bihar, the ancient Magadha, tracing the footsteps of Hiuen-Tsiang, the great Chinese pilgrim, among the ruins of the sacred Buddhist sites which he had seen and described more than twelve hundred years ago. Also the fascinating tracts along the Indus and the North-West Frontier, where the influence of classical art has left its witnesses in the ancient ‘Græco-Buddhist’ sculptures of so many a ruined monastery and shrine, had seen me once more on a flying visit.

The thought of the task which was drawing me beyond the Himalaya had followed me everywhere. But it was only when the final sanction for my proposals reached me on a sultry monsoon night down in Calcutta that I had been able to start some of the multifarious preparations which the journey demanded. Busy as I was with official duties and literary work that had to be concluded before leaving India, I managed to

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey  
of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

arrange for the supply of many articles of equipment, both personal and scientific. The tents which I had ordered from the Cawnpore Elgin Mills; the galvanised iron water-tanks, made at Calcutta workshops, that were to serve in the desert; the stores of condensed food, the photographic outfit, and the semi-arctic winter clothing which I had indented for from London—all were slowly moving up to Srinagar, whence my little expedition was to start.

But only in Kashmir itself, and not in over-civilised Calcutta, was it possible to complete my practical preparations. So I could not entirely suppress a feeling of unholy joy when an increase of plague, or rather the fear of it, caused Calcutta colleges to be closed some weeks in anticipation of the usual summer vacation. On the 10th of April I was free to escape northward. It was a source of satisfaction to me that on the day of my departure I was able personally to take leave of the late Sir John Woodburn, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, and to express my deep gratitude for all the kind help and interest with which he had furthered my undertaking.

The week I spent in Lahore in order to pick up various portions of my outfit and to supervise their despatch passed rapidly amid old friends and surroundings dear to me. After Calcutta the Punjab spring appeared still comparatively cool. All the same I enjoyed as keenly as ever the invigorating change to the fresh air of the hills when the Tonga carried me from Rawalpindi first to the fir-covered heights of Murree, and then along the Jhelam Valley up towards Kashmir. Often had I done this journey along the ancient Hydaspes, where it rushes down towards the plains in an almost uninterrupted succession of rapids and cataracts, but never so early in the year. Whether it was the sight and fragrance of the shrubs still in blossom along the road, or the glittering caps of snow still lying on many of the higher spurs, or simply the prospect of a year's explorations, never had this drive of nearly two days appeared to me so enjoyable.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

On the 25th of April I passed once more into the Kashmir Valley by the gorge of Baramula, now as in ancient days the “Western Gate of the Kingdom.” The snow still lay low down the mighty Pir Pantsal range which forms the southern rampart between Kashmir and the outer world. But the great riverine plain which opens out just beyond Baramula was decked in all the gay colours of a Kashmir spring, blue and white irises growing in profusion over village cemeteries and other waste spaces. At Baramula, where my servants, sent ahead with the heavy baggage, awaited me, I took to boats for the remaining journey to Srinagar; for old experience had shown me the convenience and attractions of river communication in Kashmir. The day I spent gliding in my comfortable ‘Dunga’ through the limpid water of the great lagoons which fringe the Volur Lake, and along the winding course of the Jhelam, gave delightful repose such as did not again fall to my share for many months. Familiar to me as are *quæ loca fabulosus lambit Hydaspes*, there was plenty to feast my eyes upon. The floating meadows of water-lilies and other aquatic plants which cover the marshes; the vivid foliage of the great Chinar trees which shade all hamlets and Ghats along the river banks; the brilliant snowfields on the Pir Pantsal, and the higher ranges to the north over which my road was soon to lead—these and all the other splendours of Kashmir spring scenery will never lose their charm for me.

During the second night the boat passed the winding reaches in which the river traverses Srinagar, and the next morning found me once more in the Chinar Bagh, my old camping-ground in the Kashmir capital. With the increasing crowd of European visitors from the Indian plains, the shady grove by the side of the “Apple Tree Canal” has long ago ceased to be a place suited for work or even quiet enjoyment. But haunted as it is at all hours of the day by the versatile Kashmir traders and craftsmen who provide for the Sahibs’ camping requirements, it was just the place adapted for the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey  
of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

purpose of my first stay at Srinagar. There were plenty of orders to give for mule trunks and leather-covered baskets or 'Kiltas,' in which stores, instruments, &c., were to be packed. Fur coats and warm winter clothing of all sorts had to be provided to protect myself and my followers against the cold of the Pamirs and the Turkestan winter; bags to carry provisions, and all the other paraphernalia which my previous experience showed to be necessary for a protracted campaign in the mountains. Clever and intelligent as the Kashmir craftsman ordinarily is, it requires protracted interviews to ensure that the work he is going to execute is really that intended. So what with endless particulars to be explained, and all the bargaining which local custom renders indispensable, there remained little time during these busy days to collect information on the important questions affecting the first part of my journey.

The Government of India in the Foreign Department had granted me permission to use the Gilgit-Hunza route for my journey to Kashgar. The special conditions prevailing along the "Gilgit Transport Road" made it necessary to give timely and exact intimation as to the amount of transport required, the number of followers, &c., all the more as the time I had fixed for my start, the end of May, was in advance of the regular transport season. Luckily, Captain G. H. Bretherton, D.S.O., Assistant Commissary-General for Kashmir, to whom I had to apply in the matter of these arrangements, proved exceptionally able and willing to afford information. Guided by his experience, I was soon in a position to prepare with fair accuracy my estimates as to the time, means of transport, and supplies needed not only up to Hunza, but also beyond towards the Chinese frontier. It was no small advantage to obtain quickly a clear working plan of these practical details. For upon the exact information which I could send ahead to Gilgit and Kashgar depended my hope of securing, without loss of time, all that was needful for the onward journey.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I was heartily glad when I succeeded within five busy days in disposing of these preliminaries. The few weeks which remained to me in Kashmir were none too long for the literary tasks that had to be completed before my departure. For over ten years past I had devoted whatever leisure I could spare from official duties to work connected in one form or another with Kalhana's "Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir." The Sanskrit text of the great poem, the only record of a truly historical nature that exists in the classical literature of India, and one full of interest for the student of Indian antiquities, religion, geography, &c., had long ago been edited by me. But my translation and commentary required protracted researches into all that has survived of ancient Kashmir in records, traditions, and antiquarian lore, and the two stout quarto volumes which they filled in print were only now approaching completion. The introduction which was to give an account of these labours still remained to be written, and in order to complete it in time, together with some minor tasks of a similar kind, seclusion was indispensable.

"To go into Purdah," as our Lahore phrase ran, within Srinagar or its immediate environs, was well-nigh impossible, and Mohand Marg, my mountain retreat of former seasons, was still covered with snow. My knowledge of Kashmir topography, however, stood me in good stead, and after a short search at the debouchure of the great Sind Valley over which Mohand Marg rises, I found near the hamlet of Dudarhom a delightfully quiet grove by the river-bank where I could pitch my tents. There under the shade of majestic Chinars and within view of the snow-covered spurs of Mount Haramukh, I was soon hard at work from morning till evening. It was not an easy task to sum up and review the results of labours that had extended over so long a period and over so wide a field. Yet I felt grateful that I was able to bid farewell to them, while having that Alpine scenery before my eyes with

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey  
of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

which I shall ever associate the happiest recollections of my Kashmir researches. But still more cheering, perhaps, was the thought of the new field of exploration that awaited me northward, far beyond the ranges I had viewed from my 'Marg.' Undisturbed by intrusion of any kind, these three short weeks afforded leisure for concentrated work which, after the preceding "rush," seemed almost as enjoyable as if it had been a period of rest.

On the 23rd of May I completed the last of the tasks for the sake of which I had retired to my peaceful camping-ground. The date fixed for my start was drawing near, and with it came the necessity for returning to bustling Srinagar for the last preparations. Thanks to the convenient water-way provided by the Anchar Lake and the ancient Mar Canal, a single night passed in boats sufficed to bring me into the Kashmir capital. I found the grounds usually occupied by European visitors more crowded than I had ever seen them. Lines of house-boats along the river-banks and endless rows of tents in all the 'Baghs' seemed to leave no room for a new arrival. Fortunately, in years gone by I had had ample occasion to study the topography of Srinagar, in its modern as well as its ancient aspects, and thus I discovered at last a spot for my camp, on the narrow strip of ground which lines the west foot of the Takht-i-Sulaiman hill towards the Dal Lake. Hidden behind willow plantations and "floating gardens" peculiar to the lake, the little Bagh of Buchvor offered the needed quiet to complete my arrangements.

Busy indeed were the days I passed there. All details of the camp outfit had to be revised; the freshly arrived stores to be sorted and packed into loads for pony transport; surveying and other instruments to be tested and protected against damage; and amid these preparations there were accounts to be settled and farewell visits to be received. Numerous were the questions of my Pandit friends which I had to answer as to the place and object of my journey. More conversant

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey  
of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

though they are with mythical than with real geography, yet I found that my reference to the 'Uttarakurus' (the Ultima Thule of Indian mythology) as the land for which I was about to set out, did not altogether satisfy their curiosity.

Ram Singh, the Gurkha Sub-Surveyor, whose services Colonel St. George Gore, R.E., the Surveyor-General of India, had very kindly placed at my disposal, together with a complete outfit of surveying instruments, joined me punctually on the day of my arrival at Srinagar. He had accompanied Captain Deasy in his recent travels near the sources of the Yarkand River and in the Kuen-luen mountains, and the practical acquaintance he had thus gained of the regions I was about to visit proved useful at once in the course of my preparations. With Ram Singh came Jasvant Singh, a wiry little Kangra Rajput, who was to attend to the Sub-Surveyor as cook and personal servant. He too had travelled in Chinese Turkestan as one of Captain Deasy's followers.

On the 28th of May there arrived Sadak Akhun, the Turkestan servant whom Mr. George Macartney, C.I.E., the British representative at Kashgar, had been kind enough to engage for me. He had left his home in the first half of April and came just in time to start back with me. He was to act as cook and 'Karawan-bashi' combined, and was welcomed with no small satisfaction by honest Mirza Alim, my Kokandi servant, whom I had engaged four months earlier in Peshawar for the purpose of my journey. 'Mirza' had been useful to me by giving me the needed opportunity of practising Turki conversation, but willing as he was to pick up the novel art of attending to the wants of a 'Sahib,' his acquirements did not reach far in regard to the kitchen department. His earlier career as a petty trader in Kabul and Peshawar had not been a special preparation for these functions; and yet his straightforward ways made me anxious to retain him. Sadak Akhun's timely arrival relieved both him



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey  
of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

and his master of all uneasiness as to the future arrangements of the travelling household. For Sadak Akhun had brought with him not only the appearance of a smart 'Karawan-bashi,' but a training in the mysteries of European cuisine amply sufficient for my wants. When he turned up in his fur-lined cap and coat of unstained azure, and red leather top-boots of imposing size, my camp seemed to receive at once a touch of Central-Asian colour.

But it was not only from the Far North that I was anxiously expecting during these days a much-needed complement of my camp. Knowing that no European traveller in the parts I was bound for could wholly refuse the *rôle* of the 'Hakim' forced upon him by popular belief, I had early ordered my medicine case from Messrs. Burroughs Wellcome & Co., the great London firm of "Tabloid" fame. The South African War and other incidents delayed its arrival for months, and even when it had at last been reported by telegram as landed at Calcutta, it seemed doubtful whether it would reach me in time. The Indian Post Office does indeed provide with its usual efficiency for the wants of the distant frontier post of Gilgit. But its power cannot level mountains, and as the transport of heavy articles across the snow-covered passes was not to begin till later in the season, there seemed little chance of that eagerly looked-for case ever catching me up if not received before my start from Srinagar.

Fortune seemed to offer a small mark of favour at least in this direction. For when, on the evening of the 29th of May, the time of departure fixed weeks before, my little flotilla of boats was lying opposite to the Srinagar Post Office, worthy Lala Mangu Mal, the attentive postmaster, triumphantly reported the arrival of the box. When it was at last safely deposited in my hands it was time to set out from the Venice of India. Gliding down the dark river under the seven bridges which have spanned it since early times, and between the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06973-1 - Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey  
of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10

CALCUTTA TO KASHMIR

[CHAP. I.

massive embankments built with the slabs of ruined temples,  
I could not fail to be impressed with—

*quod mihi supremum tempus in Urbe fuit.*

It was midnight before I had seen the last of my old Pandit  
friends, who were waiting each at the Ghat nearest to his  
home to bid me farewell.



ANCIENT TEMPLE AT PANDRENTHAN, KASHMIR.