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978-1-108-07752-1 - Ruins of Desert Cathay: Personal Narrative of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China: Volume 1

M. Aurel Stein

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

BETWEEN HYDASPES AND INDUS

EVER since, in 1901, I returned from my first journey into Chinese Turkestan, happy recollections of successful labour among its mountains and deserts kept my mind fixed upon the hope of fresh explorations. By the excavations I then effected it was my good fortune to bring to light for the first time authentic remains of that ancient civilization which, as the joint product of Indian, Chinese, and classical influences, had once flourished in the oases fringing the Tarim Basin. There was every reason to hope that explorations renewed over a wider area, and with a more liberal allowance of time and means, would be equally fruitful. But the very abundance of the results which had rewarded my first effort retarded the attainment of that eagerly sought chance. Their scientific elaboration had to precede a fresh journey, and to assure that elaboration in a manner befitting pioneer work in a new field involved a task of exceptional difficulty. It was not enough to record and illustrate in full detail discoveries so ample and varied; the very novelty and the remoteness of their region laid it upon me to become their interpreter also from whatever historical and geographical light could be gathered.

The task was doubly heavy for one who had to struggle for leisure from exacting official duties. So it was not until the summer of 1904, while employed as Inspector-General of Education on the North-West Frontier, that I was able to submit to the Government of India detailed proposals about another journey which was to carry me back

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to my old archaeological hunting-grounds around the Takla-makan desert, and thence far away eastwards to within the Great Wall of China. Owing to the kind interest shown by Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, and the help of devoted friends able to realize how closely the proposed explorations touched the sphere of India's historical interests, my scheme obtained, in the spring of 1905, the approval of the Indian Government and the Secretary of State. Their favourable decision was facilitated by the Trustees of the British Museum, who agreed to contribute two-fifths of the estimated cost of the expedition, £5000 in all, against a corresponding share in the prospective 'archaeological proceeds,' as official language styled them.

I had originally tried hard for permission to start during the summer of 1905. But my efforts were frustrated by the difficulty of securing that freedom from routine work which I needed for the completion of my scientific Report on the former journey. At last by the 1st of October 1905 I was released from administrative duties. Rarely have I felt such relief as on that day when I could set out from my alpine camp in Kaghan, the northernmost corner of the Frontier Province, to Kashmir. There six months of 'special duty' were to enable me to complete in strict seclusion my scientific Report, and also to make the multifarious preparations indispensable for the fresh explorations before me.

It seemed quite a holiday, and at the same time like an appropriate training, when, by six days' hard marching, largely over mountain tracks which probably never before had seen any laden traffic, I managed to move my camp with its respectable array of book boxes across the high passes above the Kishanganga into Kashmir. It was pleasant, too, to find myself, after an enforced absence of over five years, again in the beloved Alpine land to which many seasons of congenial antiquarian labour had attached me. Yet soon those happy summers seemed as if passed in a previous birth.

Incessant desk-work, more fatiguing to me than any hard marching or digging, kept me imprisoned in my little

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cottage above the Dal lake near Srinagar from morning till dusk. Had it not been for my solitary walks in the evening, I should scarcely have had time to observe how the glowing tints of the Kashmir autumn gave way to the dull mists and muddy snows of the valley's cheerless winter. It was a period of great strain and anxious labour; for a variety of practical considerations which cannot be detailed here, made it a matter of the utmost concern that I should be free to start for Turkestan as early in the spring as the high passes northward were at all practicable. But in the end the unbroken exertion of those trying six months bore fruit. Towards the close of March, when the sun had at last begun fitfully to smile again upon the Alpine land, which Hindu mythology represents as Himalaya's favourite daughter, my *Ancient Khotan* was practically completed. Thanks to the help of self-sacrificing friends far away, the greater portion of its two stout quarto volumes had safely passed through the University Press in distant Oxford.

Nor had the many preparations for the long and difficult travels before me been neglected. Correspondence had settled all details about the two native assistants whose services were to be placed at my disposal by the Survey of India and the Military Department. What stores, scientific instruments, and other equipment were needed from London, Calcutta, and elsewhere had been ordered in good time. In Srinagar itself willing hands of faithful old Kashmiri retainers had busied themselves over the furs, felt boots, and other articles of personal outfit which were to protect us against the climatic rigours of Central-Asian mountains and deserts. Their care, too, had effected what repairs were needed in my little Kabul tent, supplied by the Cawnpore Elgin Mills in 1900 for my first journey, and ever since my only true home, to make it thoroughly fit for another three years' campaigning.

For my entry into Chinese Turkestan I was eager to use a new route, singularly interesting for the student of early geography and ethnography, but practically closed by political difficulties to the European traveller. It was to take me from the Indian administrative border

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near Peshawar through the Pathan tribal territory of Swat and Dir into Chitral, and thence across the Hindukush to the uppermost Oxus Valley and the Afghan Pamirs. My lamented chief and friend, Sir Harold A. Deane, K.C.S.I., that truly great Warden of the Marches, then Chief Commissioner of the North-West Frontier Province, whose kind help and interest never failed me, had readily agreed to my project. A political obstacle which I had reason to consider very serious was removed more easily than I had ventured to hope; for H.M. Habibullah, King of Afghanistan, on being approached through the Indian Foreign Office, had granted me, with a promptness for which I shall always retain sincere gratitude, permission to cross a portion of his territory not visited by any European since the days of the Pamir Boundary Commission.

But before reaching Afghan soil beyond the Hindukush I should have first to get into Chitral, and the misgivings entertained locally as to the possibility of safely crossing with baggage the difficult Lowarai Pass, leading from Dir to Chitral, then deeply buried under snow, still interposed a formidable barrier. I had the strongest reasons to apprehend the results of any delay in this crossing; for if I could not reach the headwaters of the Chitral River before May ended, I should run a very serious risk of finding its narrow uppermost gorges above Mastuj, which give access to the Oxus watershed on the Baroghil, closed completely to traffic by the melting snows of the spring. The official correspondence on this subject continuing for months had grown imposing. In the end its file was quite bulky, though much of it consisted of telegrams on the thinnest paper! So when April arrived without any assurance as to an early date being allowed for the Lowarai crossing, I felt it high time to leave Kashmir for the Frontier and to make personal efforts to clear the way for an early start.

A truly bright day, the first of the season, preceded my departure from Srinagar early on April 2, 1906. But the trees and fields I passed on the road down to Baramulla, Nature's ancient 'Gate of the Kingdom,' were still

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in their wintry bareness. For the sight of the first iris I hoped in vain. As the clattering tonga carried me down through the narrow forest-clad gorges of the Jhelam there were plenty of broken bridges and other obstacles to distract attention. So I can scarcely tell exactly at what point spring coming up the Hydaspes and I hurrying down had a passing encounter by the roadside.

After the gloomy cold of a Kashmir winter I was quite ready to appreciate the signs of the approaching hot weather which greeted me on arrival in the Punjab plains. My first days there were claimed by Lahore, once my official 'station' for eleven years, whither the wish to say good-bye to old friends and the more prosaic necessity of having my teeth looked to before protracted travels 'in the wilds' were now calling me. A few peaceful days under the hospitable roof of my friend Mr. E. D. Maclagan, then Chief Secretary to the Punjab Government, gave the brief relaxation which I was not likely to meet with again for a long time. These happy days sped past only too fast. Yet, what with long-missed familiar faces and sights all round me and the pleasant memories revived by visits to some delightfully neglected old gardens in the Lahore Campagna which used to be my favourite places of refuge during long years of strain and unceasing exertion, I could say farewell to my kind hosts with a feeling as if I had lived through again much that had cheered me in my Indian past.

At Peshawar, to which I proceeded on April 10th, there was plenty to keep my thoughts fully occupied with the present and immediate future. An auspicious chance had so willed it that Lord Minto, the new Viceroy, was to pay his first visit to the capital of the Frontier Province just before the time I was planning for my start from the Peshawar border. It was important for me to interest His Excellency in the explorations before me, and the intercession of his Private Secretary, Colonel (now Sir James R.) Dunlop-Smith, K.C.I.E., C.S.I., whom old friendship has ever prompted to smooth things for me, had already assured to me the desired interview. I could not have revisited my old headquarters on the Frontier

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under more pleasant aspects. Peshawar was deliciously cool, and displayed all the spring glory of its gardens with their exuberance of roses and irises. Recent rain had cleared the atmosphere, and the great semicircle of trans-border ranges, dominated by the towering mass of Mount Tartara westwards, raised its barren outlines above the vast arena of the smiling Peshawar Valley with a sharpness truly fascinating. The coming visit of the Viceroy was drawing Frontier officers from all parts of the border into Peshawar, and every hour brought cheerful meetings with old friends. There was plenty to do in my office, not this time with papers and files, but with the packing of my too numerous books, which a timely 'burial' in tin-lined cases was to save from white ants and other risks during my long absence.

On April 12th I first saw the new Lord of the Indies when the 'Administration' of the Frontier Province gathered at the Peshawar railway station for his official reception. A pleasant meeting at the same time with Sir Louis Dane, K.C.S.I., then Indian Foreign Secretary and since Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, gave me the welcome impression that H.M. the Amir's ready permission for my passage through Upper Wakhan, just conveyed in an imposing Firman of the 'God-created Government,' was regarded with much satisfaction in diplomatic quarters of the Indian Olympus.

Two days later I had the honour of being received by Lord Minto. The kind interest he showed in what I had to tell him of the results of my past Central-Asian efforts, of official obstacles encountered and overcome, and of the difficulties and risks besetting the tasks now before me, soon reassured me that I might reckon upon what support the personal sympathy of the head of the Indian Administration could give. Often during the long lonely travels which followed, when worrying uncertainties oppressed me whether I should ever succeed in securing the leisure needed for working up my scientific results, or the still more eagerly desired chance of freedom for exploratory tasks in the future, I looked back with sincere gratitude to the encouragement which the appreciation of my aims

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by that statesman of the true *grand-seigneur* type had given me in the start.

With the Viceroy in residence at Government House and many important affairs of the Frontier to settle, Sir Harold Deane yet found time for a quiet talk with me on the morning of my departure. How grateful I feel now for having had this chance of saying in person my farewell words of thanks to him who had always been my truest friend and patron! I felt deeply the parting from the protective aegis of the noble soldier-administrator, so alive to all the historical interest of the Frontier, who had never missed an opportunity of giving me scope for archaeological exploits within or without the border. I was aware that it might be a parting for longer than the time of my journey. And yet there was nothing to warn me that within little more than two years this born ruler of men, whose strength of body and mind impressed the most turbulent tribesmen, would succumb to the ceaseless strain of guarding the peace on the Frontier.

For the mobilization base, as it were, of my expedition I had selected Abbottabad, the pretty sub-alpine headquarters of the Hazara District, which offered coolness and seclusion for the busy time of final preparations. When I reached it on the morning of April 17th I had the satisfaction to find the array of mule trunks containing equipment safely arrived from Kashmir. The cases with stores and outfit which had been ordered from England and down-country places of India also awaited me at the comfortable new Circuit House. But when could I really hope to make all these impediments move off northwards? I had long before decided that my start from the Frontier ought to be effected by the last week of April. But even while at Peshawar I had been confronted by tantalizing doubts as to whether the local help, without which the crossing of the snow-covered Lowarai Pass could not be attempted, would be forthcoming at the right time.

The local reports sent on by the Political Agent in charge of the Swat-Chitral route continued to represent the avalanche risks as so great, owing to abnormally heavy snowfalls, that any attempt to pass with heavy baggage

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needing a large number of load-carrying men would be likely to result in serious loss of life. Vainly did I assert that my Alpine experience would necessarily make me take all needful precautions. As a last resort, I had told Colonel Dunlop-Smith of my difficulty, and that kindly *deus ex machina* offered to write a note in the right sense to the cautious Guardian of the Passes. Whether it was this friendly note from the Viceroy's camp or a mere lucky coincidence, I had scarcely been at Abbottabad for twelve hours when a long telegram announced the receipt of good reports from Chitral. They seemed to have cleared away, as if by magic, most of those formidable snow barriers on the Lowarai and of the still more cumbersome responsibilities.

It was as well to have my mind eased on this point; for the work awaiting me at Abbottabad was heavy for the short time in hand. There was the checking of all equipment articles, instruments, and stores; their safe distribution and packing into mule trunks to make loads of the right weight for the difficult tracks ahead; the preparation of exact lists; not to mention writing work of all sorts which an Indian official can never hope to escape from—not even in Central-Asian deserts. It scarcely meant any lessening of this initial strain that I was now being joined by my Indian assistants. The first to arrive was worthy Naik Ram Singh, the fine-looking Sikh corporal of the First (Prince of Wales's Own) Sappers and Miners, who, through the kind offices of my friend Colonel J. E. Dickie, R.E., Commanding Royal Engineers on the N.W. Frontier, had been allowed by the Military Department to volunteer for my expedition. When he had paid me a visit in my Kaghan camp the previous summer, his look of physical strength and cheerful disposition, and his hereditary skill as a 'Mistri' or carpenter, seemed to show him specially suited to act as 'the handy man' whom I should need. I had taken care to make it clear to him that the task for which he had volunteered, and for which he was to receive substantial compensation in the shape of a salary about five times as big as what he would be entitled to in the way of pay and allowances even when employed on field service outside India, implied

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serious hardships and possible risks. But he cheerfully stuck to his offer, and the effective special training which the regimental authorities of his distinguished corps had subsequently provided, qualified him also to help me in the development of photographic negatives, drawing of plans, and similar technical tasks.

A day or two after I was joined by Rai Sahib Ram Singh, the skilful native Surveyor who had accompanied me on my former journey. The Survey of India Department, now under the direction of Colonel F. B. Longe, R.E., willing as ever to assist me in the execution of my geographical tasks, had readily agreed to depute him with me and to bear all costs arising from his employment. Since we parted in 1901 the Rai Sahib had had the good fortune to add extensively to his survey experiences in Central Asia by accompanying Captain Rawling and Major Ryder on their successful expeditions in Tibet. I was heartily glad that there came again with him honest Jasvant Singh, the wiry little Rajput who had acted as his cook on my first Turkestan journey. Never have I seen an Indian follower so reliable in character, so gentlemanly in manners and bearing, and so cheerful under hardships and trying conditions of all sorts.

I had every reason to regret from the start that his high caste as a Mian Rajput of the bluest blood precluded his giving to myself the benefit of his ministrations. For the Indian Muhammadan whom I had managed, not without difficulty, to engage at Peshawar as my cook for the journey, soon proved to be a failure professionally as well as incapable of facing prolonged hard travel, even when fortified by clandestine drink and doses of opium. I had been obliged to have recourse to this worthy, since young Aziz, the Ladaki whom a friendly missionary had sent down from Leh in the autumn in response to my request for a cook with experience in rough travel, had displayed sad ignorance of European cookery and rooted inability to acquire its rudiments even when professional teaching was provided to fit him for my requirements, modest as they were. But otherwise he was willing, trained by former employment to look after ponies, and in any case a

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'hardy plant,' and fairly intelligent, like most of his fellow-Shalguns, cross-bred of Kashmiri and Tibetan. So I decided to take him along, with the fond wish that his help as cook's understudy might not often be needed. Our small party further included my faithful old caravan man, Muhammadju from Yarkand, who had braved the wintry passes in order to join me, and had narrowly escaped with his life at the close of March when an avalanche swept away and buried half a dozen of his fellow-travellers on the Burzil.

Rai Sahib Ram Singh had brought up a small armoury of surveying instruments from the Trigonometrical Survey Office, and also a few carbines and revolvers with ammunition which prudence demanded we should take from the stores of the Rawalpindi Arsenal. The equipment provided with much care by the workshops of the First Sappers and Miners at Roorkee was also necessarily bulky, including as it did tools of all sorts for the Naik, and a raft of special design floated by numerous goatskins, which were to be utilized also for transport of water in the desert. By dint of much overhauling, elimination, and arrangement I succeeded at last in reducing the whole of our baggage to fifteen mule-loads, one less than the train with which I had started on my first expedition. Three among them, with articles not likely to be required until the autumn, were to go by the Kara-koram trade route to Khotan. Taking into account that our equipment comprised indispensable stores of all kinds, calculated to last for two and a half years, and among them the great and fragile weight of close on two thousand photographic glass plates, I felt satisfied with the result of my efforts at compression.

Fortunately Abbottabad presented itself to me not merely in the light of a 'Transport and Supplies' base. I found there a number of kind friends and—spring in all its hill glory. Banks of white and blue irises stretched over the slopes of the pretty 'Station' gardens. The thoroughly English-looking bungalows were covered with masses of roses, among them that pride of the Frontier, the large-petalled Mardan rose. All along the quiet shady lanes of the little cantonment the scent of blossom-