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978-1-108-07760-6 - On Alexander's Track to the Indus: Personal Narrative of Explorations on the North-West Frontier of India Carried Out Under the Orders of H.M. Indian Government
M. Aurel Stein

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On Alexander's Track to the Indus

The Hungarian-born archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943) is probably best remembered today for his explorations in Chinese Turkestan, and especially his discovery of the Buddhist treasure of Dunhuang, described in his earlier works, *Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan* and *Ruins of Desert Cathay* (also reissued in this series). Stein was equally interested in the territory north-west of the North-West Frontier, and in this highly illustrated 1929 work he describes an expedition to survey the route of Alexander the Great's invasion of India in 326 BCE. Having long been intrigued by 'that comparatively small area to the west of the Indus which Alexander's march of conquest towards India for a brief span of time illuminates as it were with the light of a meteor', and by archaeological remains showing a blend of Hellenistic and Buddhist art, Stein offers a fascinating account of an ancient clash of civilisations.

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M. AUREL STEIN



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RUINED BUDDHIST STŪPA OF TŌP-DARA, ABOVE HAIBAT-GRĀM.

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ON THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER OF INDIA

CARRIED OUT UNDER THE ORDERS
OF H.M. INDIAN GOVERNMENT BY

SIR AUREL STEIN, K.C.I.E.

INDIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY



WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS AND
MAPS FROM ORIGINAL SURVEYS

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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TO THE MEMORY OF
COLONEL SIR HAROLD DEANE, K.C.S.I.
THE GREAT WARDEN OF THE
INDIAN NORTH-WEST MARCHES
THIS RECORD IS INSCRIBED
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE
AND SINCERE ADMIRATION

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P R E F A C E

THE explorations described in these pages had for their scene a region beyond the administrative border of the Indian North-West Frontier not previously accessible to Europeans. In the initial chapter of this volume a brief account will be found of those recent developments in 'tribal politics' which through the rise to power of a strong and capable ruler in the person of the Miāngul Bādshāh, now 'Wālī of Swāt', brought peace to a land singularly favoured by nature but for centuries torn by the discord of man. For the enlightened spirit with which he welcomed my visit and for the unfailing help and care by which he rendered my travels both safe and fruitful, I shall ever cherish deep gratitude. But equally grateful I feel to those kind friends on this side of the border whose willingly offered support, as recorded in the same chapter, made it possible for me to explore that fascinating country under the generous auspices of H.M.'s Indian Government.

A kindly Fate, and sympathetic comprehension on the part of those who officially dispense it, have enabled me, during intervals of my forty-one years' Indian service, to carry out explorations over the greater part of Innermost Asia, and along the whole of those north-western borderlands of India which by their historical past have powerfully attracted me since my early youth. These travels, devoted to antiquarian and geographical research, have taken me from westernmost China right through Central Asia and from the snowy Pāmīr ranges down to the desolate coast of the Ikhthyophagoi by the Arabian Sea. But nowhere did they touch ground so replete with historical interest as in that comparatively small area to the west of the Indus which Alexander's march of conquest towards India for a brief span of time illuminates as it were with the light of a meteor.

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It was the main object of my tour to follow up the track of the great Macedonian in this region so far as it is at present accessible outside Afghānistān. The classical records of his campaign would alone suffice to invest these parts with a special human interest. But their history has been so exceptionally varied and eventful at other periods also, that a rapid review of it seems here justified, be it only to provide the right background for what the country reveals to us in the life of its present day and in the silent ruins of its past.

We have grown accustomed to divide the ancient world, as some do the modern, between East and West. But in many ways India stands apart, separated from either by its own ancient civilization, just as it is fenced off geographically by the ocean and great mountain ramparts. It is on this part of the North-West Frontier, where the main routes of trade and migration debouch from the Afghān highlands, that India, before modern times, came chiefly into contact both with the East and the West.

Long before Alexander's invasion produced the first direct impact of the West on India, the great valleys of Peshawar and Swāt had seen the descent of conquerors from that part of the true East which we know as Īrān. The victory won in prehistoric times by an invading Aryan chief on the banks of the Suvāstu, the Swāt river, is sung already in a hymn of the Rigveda. Gandhāra, comprising the present Peshawar district with the neighbouring tracts, figures among the provinces that the great Darius had secured for the Persian empire of the Achaemenidian kings of kings.

Alexander's triumphant invasion passed by, indeed, without leaving a trace in Indian literature or tradition. But Hellenistic princes from Bactria, which Alexander had colonized with Greeks, afterwards ruled on both sides of the Indus during a couple of centuries and there kept the door

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open for influences derived from the classical West. It is a fascinating chapter in history, though we can study it only in the fine Greek-modelled coins of these rulers and in those sculptures of Graeco-Buddhist art which the ruined Buddhist shrines of the Swāt and Peshawar valleys have preserved for us.

Then when the great Indo-Scythian empire of the Kushān dynasty had replaced the small Hellenistic chiefships on both sides of the Hindukush and had further extended its sway beyond the Indus, it was from this north-western borderland that fervent religious propaganda carried the Buddha's doctrine, together with Graeco-Buddhist art and Indian literary culture, into Central Asia and thence into China. This spread of Buddhism right across Asia may well be considered India's greatest contribution to the civilization of mankind in general. These fair border valleys, dotted with sacred Buddhist sites, thus acquired special sanctity for monastic communities so far away as the Yellow Sea, and attracted the visits of those pious Chinese pilgrims whose records now serve to guide us among the ruined sanctuaries of Swāt, their *Udyāna*, 'the Garden'.

Without these records we should have scarcely anything to lift the darkness that descended on this region during the centuries when White Hun and Turkish domination succeeded the decay of the Indo-Scythian empire. Declining Buddhism gave way to lingering Hindu worship and this in turn succumbed about A.D. 1000 to the victorious onslaught of Islām under the great Maḥmūd of Ghazna. From the civilization and art which the Muhammadan conquerors of India brought with them out of Īrān, itself fertilized long before by Hellenistic influences, the border tracts could receive but little benefit. They soon became a mere passage land tenanted by warlike Pathān tribes from the hills, ever ready to dispute the 'Gates of India' to any but the strongest

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of the new foreign rulers of Northern India. The once flourishing territory in which they had settled lapsed more and more into barbarism. The Memoirs of the Emperor Bābar, the great founder of the Moghul Empire in India, have little else to tell of Peshawar and Swāt than tales of frequent hard fighting with the tribes.

The advent of Sikh power, under Mahārāja Ranjit Singh, in the first half of the last century, was but a short-lived reaction from the Indian side; across the Indus its hold was never more than very precarious. Such as it was, the Sikhs were unable to extend it to the Swāt valley, where the tribes under the spiritual leadership of the famous Ākhund of Swāt, the present ruler's grandfather, maintained an uninterrupted independence.

It was left to the British 'Rāj', after the annexation of the Panjāb, to restore peace and steadily reviving prosperity to these border tracts, ravaged by centuries of invasion and internal disorder; and it has been the destiny of British arms to keep watch and ward here ever since. The help I invariably received, wherever my work took me, from the officers who share in the hard task of guarding the Frontier, will, like the friendships I was privileged to form among them, ever rank with the most cherished recollections of my life. It was my good fortune to find the earliest of these ever helpful friends in Colonel Sir Harold Deane, that lamented great Warden of the Marches, who in due course became the first Chief Commissioner of the North-West Frontier Province, and to his memory this volume must be inscribed.

It only remains to record my thanks for help received in connexion with the present publication. They are due to the Government of India for their kind permission to make this account of my tour in Swāt accessible to a wider public and to illustrate it by a selection from the photographs

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I took in the course of it. To the Survey of India Department I am indebted for the use of the topographical materials secured with the aid of Surveyor Tōrabāz Khān, who had been deputed by it to accompany me on the journey. The Royal Geographical Society has kindly allowed reproduction of the sketch-map prepared from the original surveys and first published in its *Journal*, while the more detailed map of the Pīr-sar area, where I believe I have located Alexander's Aornos, was drawn and printed under the friendly care of Colonel H. T. Morshead at the Geodetic Survey Office, Dehra Dun. Here I may conveniently also note that the translation of passages in Arrian's *Anabasis* relating to Alexander's campaign between the Panjkōra and Indus has been taken from Mr. M^cCrindle's *Invasion of India*, with such modifications as examination of the Greek text appeared to me to render desirable.

Finally, I must offer my special thanks to the publishers, who readily agreed to whatever could make this small volume attractive to the eye, and to the Oxford University Press, whose care has greatly facilitated its being satisfactorily passed into print in spite of the great distance at present between us. On a separate page I have thought it useful to name certain publications in which I have recorded observations on the early history and antiquities of the North-West Frontier gathered in the course of former explorations.

AUREL STEIN.

CAMP, MOHAND MARG, KASHMĪR.

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