
A Fifth Journey in Persia: Discussion

Author(s): Mr. Chirol, Thomas Holdich, C. E. Yate and Major Sykes

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boundary of the Indian Empire was for the first time fully realized by us. We camped opposite Zulfikár pass, to enjoy its stern beauty to the utmost; and a short march on the following day brought us to Zorabád, which is a frontier station, and is garrisoned by a small number of Persian troops. Unfortunately it is unhealthy, about one-half of the population having been prostrate with fever a few days before our arrival. Zorabád is inhabited by fifty families of the Organji tribe, who migrated from Khiva a generation ago.

From Zorabád two short stages brought us to the Kashaf Rud, the water of which was extremely salt, so much so that our horses declined to drink it. At Bágh-i-Bághu, however, we at last secured some pheasants, the *Phasianus principalis*, specimens of which I have given to the Natural History Museum. Here we were within three stages of Meshed, and a few days later returned to our headquarters, after accomplishing yet another tour of great interest, during which I had added considerably to my knowledge of Eastern Khorasán.

In April, 1906, I was granted leave, and, as every hour was precious, I travelled to Kakha in two days, and managed to reach London on the tenth day, after bidding a temporary farewell to the capital of Khorasán.

Before the paper the PRESIDENT: I am dispensed to-night from introducing to you the reader of the paper, Major Sykes, because you all know him. It is now some years since he produced his work on Persia, which was the result of eight years of study there. His name will always be connected with the country of Persia, and I should like, before asking him to read his paper, to indicate the opinion in which he is held by one of the highest authorities in this country on subjects connected with countries in close relation to our great dependency—I mean Lord Curzon of Kedleston, our distinguished Vice-President. Some three weeks ago, speaking at a meeting where Major Sykes was delivering a paper on the Parsees of Persia, Lord Curzon said of Major Sykes, among other complimentary remarks, that there was no living Englishman with a greater knowledge of Persia. Such testimony makes it unnecessary for me to say anything further. I will now call upon Major Sykes to read his paper.

After the paper, the PRESIDENT: I will now call on a member of a profession which is not forbidden to speak to the public. I see here one of its most distinguished representatives, Mr. Chirol, to whom the general public owe a great part of their knowledge of Persian affairs and of the relations of Persia to this country.

Mr. CHIROL commented briefly on the terrible state of decay into which Persia had fallen. Every traveller was struck by it, and Major Sykes's paper had afforded fresh evidence of it. The rivalry of Great Britain and Russia had the effect of preventing the Persians from taking the remedy into their own hands, as Nadir Shah and other strong men had done in olden days, who, from time to time, by dint of personal power and measures which we should call revolutionary, pulled the State out of its rut and created a new order of things which continued until another period of decay came, when the process was repeated. "Now," a Persian once remarked to him at Shiraz, "even that resource is taken from us, because the whole effect of the rivalry of the two great powers in Persia is to bolster up a régime which we Persians, who have some knowledge of the conditions in other

countries, know to be absolutely effete." Undoubtedly that had been one of the most unfortunate results of the rivalry between the two powers; and from that point of view, perhaps, as much as from any other, an Anglo-Russian understanding might help to restore Persia to something of her former position and prosperity.

Sir THOMAS HOLDICH: I should like to say just a few words on the geography of the country about which Major Sykes has spoken to-night, because, interesting as that country is to us now, it is bound to be far more interesting hereafter. He has taken us to the extreme north-west corner of the country called Khorasán, which now includes only a part of Eastern Persia. The time was, and not so long ago, when Khorasán meant the whole of Afghanistan, and extended across the Indian frontier as far as the gates of Lahore. Incidentally, it has been of great interest to me to hear that the two first pillars of that historical boundary between Russia and Afghanistan that we set up with so much care and difficulty, say, twenty years ago, are so well preserved as to be visible from the opposite side of the Hari Rud river. It is a surprise, and I must say a pleasant surprise, to me to learn that these pillars are so well nursed, and that they are whitewashed and polished even as our pillar-boxes may be polished in London. But of far greater interest, I think, is a fact to which Major Sykes has not alluded in his paper, viz. that it took him exactly nine and a half days to get from Meshed to London. Now, this fact opens up a great vista for the future. It is along this line that, in future times, East and West will be chiefly connected, and it is on this route that future generations—generations, perhaps, that I shall not see—will find their way from the shores of England to the plains of India. If you will refer to the map, I should like to point out to you that from Askabád on the Russian line of railway north of the mountains to Herat is about as far as it is from London to Edinburgh. From Herat by Kandahar to Quetta is about twice as far. You may take it, then, that from Quetta to Askabád is about two and a half days' journey, if you could make that journey by rail; about the same length of journey as Major Sykes made from Meshed to Askabád. Consequently, it seems to me that it will be possible in future to bring India, even at the present rate of railway progression, within nine days of London. Of course, I am aware that Quetta is not exactly in India; nevertheless, Quetta may be reckoned nowadays as an Indian station. Well, there are two or three ways of getting to Quetta, and as all these ways more or less touch upon Khorasán, perhaps I may be allowed to tell you a little about the geographical conformation of that country from personal experience. Between the Russian railway and Meshed there lies a band of very difficult mountains. In fact, the whole country is mountainous, and, so far as I know, there is no royal road across it; it would be a matter of immense difficulty to bridge the distance between Askabád and Meshed. From Meshed southwards to about the latitude of Herat there are still considerable difficulties. Again, bands of hills in regular order running from north-west to south-east present themselves transversely to any line which may be carried across that interval. The hills themselves are, perhaps, not great in altitude, but they are close set and the valleys are narrow, and there would be great difficulty in crossing them with any line projected for railway purposes. But from that point level with Herat south-west to Seistan no vast difficulties occur. It is difficult, I admit, all the way, but not so difficult as it is further north. Having reached Seistan, what do you find? I have visited Seistan, and we have heard something about it from Sir Henry McMahon in this room a few days ago. Seistan is a country which might almost be called God-forsaken. There, we are told, the spring is heralded by snakes; there we encounter a terrific wind, which is only tolerable because it sweeps away hoards of pestiferous

insects which would make life impossible; there, in the course of a single week of hot weather, you might very well sample all the plagues of Egypt. There should be no mistake about it—Seistan is not a white man's country. Passing Seistan southwards, you must remember you are still in Persia; it is a point which is sometimes overlooked, that if we want to reach Seistan from India we must pass through Persia. Finally, there is that inevitable desert to be crossed between the Persian frontier and Nushki (leading to Quetta), where all the sand and detritus of the Helmand river accumulates by reason of those north-western winds which blow all the year round. It is not a pleasant prospect taken as a whole, and looking at it from a traveller's point of view, one would say that the route generally between Askabád and Quetta, through Seistan, is about as unpleasant a route as you could well choose.

Now about the geography of the Afghan frontier. From Askabád to Merv, and from Merv to Khushk, there is open country which is of no very great interest. From Khushk, as you ascend to the mountains, you pass into a cool atmosphere and a pleasant climate. Crossing those mountains by the Baba, or any other easy pass, you run down the smooth slopes leading to the Herat valley. Once in the Herat valley you are in a sort of oasis, which is not exactly in the middle of a desert as is often represented, but it is distinctly the most fertile and the best developed region in that part of Afghanistan. From Herat again you might expect to meet considerable difficulties in the matter of hill ranges, intervening between itself and Kandahar to the south; but as a matter of fact there is an open way, and no important obstacle. You would pass by several places which are of considerable importance. First there is Sabzawár, which is a very flourishing city. It has always been a green place, as its name denotes, but since the demarcation of the Afghan boundary, Sabzawár has risen to considerable importance. I believe as a centre of trade it now almost rivals Herat itself. Southwards you pass by various places, among others the little hill town of Adraskand, prettily situated, where there is a considerable manufacture of carpets. The carpets turned out there are not equal, either in appearance or in value, to those which Major Sykes has kindly exhibited to-night, but nevertheless they are very passable and very useful. South-west of Adraskand you again tap an agricultural country, of which the capital is Farah; perhaps not an ideal place for residence, for it partakes a little too much of the characteristics of Seistan. You will see that it is about on the same level. Turning eastwards, you run through an open country leading to that great plain of Bakwa, which we are told by Colonel Yate is (according to tradition) the plain on which the final destinies of India are to be fought out between Russia and England. And so to Kandahar, from which point I need follow the Afghan route no further. From Kandahar to Quetta—we all know something of that route. Now, the whole of that Afghan line of approach to India is comparatively easy, so far as gradients and alignment are concerned, and it has certainly the advantage of a magnificent climate. I am only dealing strictly with the geographical aspects of two routes—the Russian and the Afghan; but I may say plainly that between the Afghan route and that running through Seistan, the highland or Afghan route is infinitely preferable from every point of view. It would be interesting to follow this subject further, but I feel I am treading on comparatively thin ice, and I must confine myself to geography. In my own mind I am firmly convinced that the time will come when the great systems of railways which exist in Russia, and those which have been built up by our own energy in India, will be connected by steel links formed by the lines of an international railway.

Colonel C. E. YATE: I will not enter to-night upon any discussion on the

subject of a junction between the Indian and Trans-Caspian railways raised by Sir Thomas Holdich. Sir Thomas is in favour of such a junction, and I am against it. We have often discussed the question, and our views are diametrically opposed, and as it happens that my views are fully stated in this month's (June, 1906) *Nineteenth Century*, I will say no more on the matter at present, but turn to the subject before us.

I need not say that I have followed Major Sykes's lecture throughout with great interest. He has carried me back through many of the scenes and to many of the places I visited when I was consul-general at Meshed ten and twelve years ago, and I congratulate him on his description of those places, and I also congratulate Mr. Herbert Sykes on the illustrations he has so kindly provided for our enjoyment this evening. Major Sykes has not had time to give us a half or a quarter of the varied information he has collected and put down in his paper, and for the perusal of that in full we shall have to wait for the publication of the *Geographical Journal*. Meanwhile, I will just touch upon one or two points connected with his various tours.

One thing specially struck me with regret, and that was to hear from him of the destruction of all the beautiful mosaic tilework that adorned the arches and inner walls of the old madrassah or school at Khargird, near Khaf. When I visited this madrassah in 1894 it was still in a fair state of preservation, and the glazed tilework was nearly perfect—so much so that I noted in my book on 'Khurasan and Seistan' that it ought to remain as long as wind and weather permitted. That this beautiful mosaicwork should have been so ruthlessly destroyed by the hand of man is a loss to the world in general. The only other example of this art that I know of in that part of the country was the old Musalla, or place of prayer, at Herat. The remains of that beautiful building were levelled to the ground by the order of the late Amir, Abdur Rahman, of Afghanistan, in 1885, and as I was at Herat at the time I was able to collect a few specimens of the mosaic tilework that adorned the front of it, and these I presented the other day to the new museum that we founded at Quetta shortly before I left. I am now asking that one or two of those specimens may be given to the British Museum, as now that this madrassah has gone as well, the difficulty of getting specimens of this ancient art will become more and more difficult every year.

I must specially congratulate Major Sykes, and also Mrs. Sykes and their infant son, on their journey across the desert from Yezd to Tabas. When one hears of such long waterless marches as those done by Mrs. and Miss Sykes in this journey, and also of those previously done by Miss Sykes, it shows what can be done by ladies in Persia when the spirit is willing and the flesh is not weak.

In Major Sykes's account of his tours in Kerman, the description of the shrine of the famous saint, Shah Niamat Ulla, at Mahun was of special interest to me. This saint was the author of the prophecy, that Major Sykes and Sir Thomas Holdich have referred to, regarding the great battle that is to be fought on the Dasht-i-Bakwa, a plain in Afghanistan about halfway between Kandahar and Herat. This prophecy is interpreted by the Afghans to apply to England and Russia, and I first heard of it somewhere near Balkh in Afghan-Turkestan in 1886. Subsequently I had it quoted to me in various other places in Afghanistan, but none of the Afghans who told me of it could tell me who was the author of the prophecy, and it was not till I got to Meshed in 1893 that I succeeded in tracing it to the particular saint whose resting-place at Mahun has now been so graphically described by Major Sykes. The Afghans firmly believe that the great battle for the supremacy of Asia is to be fought out between the English and the Russians on this Bakwa plain, but none of them could tell me who was to be the victor.

The tradition is that so severe is to be the fight that at the conclusion of the battle 12,000 riderless horses will be found wandering over the plain, and as part of General Skobeloff's scheme for the invasion of India was "to organize hordes of Asiatic horsemen, who, to a cry of blood and plunder, were to be launched against India," I think we may congratulate ourselves, from the numbers of horses referred to in the prophecy, that it is these Asiatic horsemen who are to get the worst of it, and our minds may therefore be at rest on that account. It would be interesting, though, to know the exact words in which the saint recorded this much-talked-of prophecy. I tried my best to get a copy of the saint's writings when I was in Persia, but without success. They are very rare, and exist only in manuscript, and if Major Sykes ever succeeds in finding a copy, I trust he will not fail to let the world know the exact rendering of this passage.

Major Sykes has told us something of the new Central Persian telegraph line that promises in future to form our main line of communication between India and England. This line, taking off from the main Teheran-Bushire line at Kashan, has been laid on the Persian side through Yezd, Kerman, and Bam to Kohi-Malik Siah, that curious rocky hill on the Seistan border that forms the tribeyt of India, Persia, and Afghanistan. Here it has been joined by the Indian telegraph line from Quetta and Nushki, laid along the Quetta-Seistan trade route. This junction at Koh-i-Malik Siah is now to be supplemented by another line from Karachi *via* Las Bela, Panjghur and Palantak to Koh-i-Malik Siah, thus giving direct communication from India with Persia and England through both Quetta and Karachi. Now that India has done so much to open up communications and to stimulate trade on her side of the frontier, we can only trust that Persia will see that it is to her interest to do something also. I hope, therefore, that arrangements will now be made with the Persian Government for the linking up of the Persian line from Meshed to Seistan with the other three lines at Koh-i-Malik Siah. The distance from Nasratabad in Seistan to Koh-i-Malik Siah is only 80 miles, and this small extension would give an alternative line of communication in case of any accident on the other lines.

I have never visited Kerman, and I have not seen the Mission hospital there, but I would take the present opportunity of joining Major Sykes in bearing testimony to the good work done in such places by the Church Missionary Society's medical missionaries. I know Dr. Summerhayes, whom Major Sykes has mentioned, well; he and his colleague Dr. Holland had charge of the Church Missionary Society's hospital at Quetta during the four years I was Chief Commissioner of Baluchistan, and I had thus full opportunity of studying their work. Dr. Summerhayes's life is indeed the hard-working, self-sacrificing life that Major Sykes has depicted, and his devoted and unselfish work will, I hope, receive the acknowledgment that is its due.

In conclusion, there is just one more point that I would touch upon, and that is the question of the roads between Bandar Abbas and Kerman. I had hoped to hear something about them to-night, but Major Sykes has only mentioned one of these roads—that by Gulaskhird, which I gather is some 300 miles in length—and nothing has been said as to their practicability for a railway or otherwise. Major Sykes, however, has told us that Bandar Abbas is situated close to natural gates leading into Persia, and that Bandar Abbas will, in his opinion, ultimately become the chief port of Southern Persia. The subject is a specially interesting one at the present time when we have had various articles and discussions on projected Russian railways in Persia, and especially on the proposed Russian railway line from Teheran to Bandar Abbas. I would beg to ask Major Sykes, therefore, before the proceedings close to-night, to tell us something of the different routes

leading up from Bandar Abbas to the Kerman plateau, and to say whether he considers any of them practicable for a railway except at prohibitive cost, and, roughly speaking, what the length of such a line would be, and what chance there would be of its paying.

The PRESIDENT: We must close the discussion now, and leave Major Sykes to give us the information for which Colonel Yates asked him. Before we pass a vote of thanks, I would draw your attention to the fact that in the Tea Room there is an extremely interesting collection. There are bronze ornaments, bronze weapons, and vessels which were found to the west of Kerman, and are the only articles of the Bronze Age which have been found on the Iran plateau. The blue tiles, the embroideries, and the copper-work are also interesting. I now propose a hearty vote of thanks to Major Sykes for his most valuable address, and also for having drawn forth such an extremely interesting discussion.

Major SYKES: I would in the first place thank you, sir, for the very kind remarks you have made about me, and I thank the audience for the kind way in which they have listened to my paper. As to the tracks from Bandar Abbas to the interior, I would say that there are four or five, but the one I referred to in my paper is the lowest in altitude, and it is the one by which, I would mention, Krateros, with the elephants returning from Alexander the Great's expedition in India, chose, and I think that it is the easiest pass. In conclusion, I would again thank you for the very kind manner in which you have listened to my paper.

BATHYMETRICAL SURVEY OF THE FRESH-WATER LOCHS OF SCOTLAND.*

Under the Direction of Sir JOHN MURRAY, K.C.B., F.R.S., D.Sc., etc., and LAURENCE PULLAR, F.R.S.E.

PART XII.—THE LOCHS OF THE LOCHY BASIN.

THE Lochy basin is a large and important one, having on its boundary-line and within it some of the highest peaks in Scotland, including the highest—Ben Nevis. It stretches from Sgor nan Coireachan on the west to Meall Cruaidh and Creag Ruadh on the east, a distance of over 40 miles, and from Glas Bheinn and Leim Uilleim on the south to Carn Dearg and Carn Leac on the north, a distance of over 20 miles, the total area of the basin exceeding 400 square miles. Within this basin ten lochs were sounded by the Lake Survey staff, viz. Lochs Lochy, Arkaig, Pattack, na h-Earba (east and west), Laggan, Ossian, Ghuilbinn, Treig, and an Dubh Lochan. Five of the lochs exceed 3 miles in length, and four exceed 5 miles in length, while one of them (Loch Arkaig) is 12 miles in length; five of them exceed 100 feet in depth, and three exceed 300 feet in depth, while one of them (Loch Lochy) exceeds 500 feet in depth. It has been found convenient to include in this paper also two small lochs which drain directly into Loch Linnhe, viz., Lochan Lùnn dà-Bhrà on the east and Loch nan Gabhar on the west. Loch nan Gabhar is in Argyllshire, while all the remaining lochs are situated in Inverness-shire. The relative positions of the lochs and

* Plates, p. 664.