Across Arabia: From the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea: Discussion

Mr. Hogarth; Haddad Pasha; William Haggard


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refreshments; all day long strings of camels pass and repass each other, with merchandise for Mecca, and we passed a good number of people making the journey on foot, including even solitary women, for since the departure of the Turks the routes, which they guarded with their military posts, have become comparatively safe. Wherever one goes in those vast spaces, which up to a few years ago formed the Turkish Empire, one hears the same story—a story of blighting tyranny tolerated by its victims only because its author was the Caliph of Islam.

Little by little the hills spread out before us, decreasing in height until we topped the last ridge to see before us a thin blue streak which was the sea. In a few moments it had become a broad blue band stretching from right to left across our front, and we reached the last blockhouse of Raghama perched on an eminence at the head of a long sloping beach, at whose bottom lay the coral palaces of Jidda at the water's edge. The delicate blue dome of the tomb of Eve, reputed to have been buried here after her long journey across Arabia, lay away to our right outside the walls of the city, whose name commemorates the ancestor of the human race and which we entered through the portals of the Mecca gate—our journey done and Arabia crossed from sea to sea.

Before the paper the President said: The lecturer of this evening has already lectured before us about a year ago upon his journey in East Arabia. This evening he will give us an account of the very remarkable journey which he made right across Arabia from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea. He is a member of the Indian Civil Service, and not many members of that Service have been able to give us papers. They are mostly engaged upon the administrative work in the interior of India, but when they get their opportunity they make the best possible use of it, and it is a very great pleasure to us to have Mr. Philby addressing us once more.

The paper printed above was then read, and a discussion followed.

The President: We should like Mr. Hogarth, our great authority upon Arabia, to give us his views upon the lecture to which we have just listened.

Mr. Hogarth: We have listened to a most fascinating account of Arabia, illustrated by certainly the best set of Arabian photographs I have ever seen. I had no idea Mr. Philby had got such various clear-cut photographs, both of Arabian scenery and also of Arabian towns. I am sure you will join with me in thanking him most heartily for the pleasure he has given us to-night. I have not listened to a more interesting paper for a long time. There are not many points about which I shall detain you. I pass over Mr. Philby's remarks about the Khurma dispute, only saying that it certainly is still unsettled, and perhaps will never be settled. When one remembers that that rivalry between the Hijaz and Ibn Saud's country of Riyadh is as old as the Prophet, even as the days of Ignorance, I do not think it is likely to be settled by any efforts of our own Foreign Office, or in any time I, for one, am likely to see! With regard to archaeology, I have a word to say about the point on which Mr. Philby touched at the beginning of his lecture. He agrees with me, I see, that these stone circles he saw in Central Arabia are graves: that is to say, they are perished mounds. Probably the original form of the grave was a mound laid
upon a circle of stones. The weather has weathered away the earth and the stones are left free. It is true that the mounds in the island of Bahrain, which Theodore Bent excavated thirty years ago, have similar circles in the middle of them; but it remains to be seen whether Mr. Philby's circles will be found to have also tomb-chambers of the same type as those at Bahrain. If that is so, they probably belonged to the same civilization. But I am afraid the evidence for calling the Bahrain mounds Phœnician is worth practically nothing. Mr. Philby has said that the tomb which Mr. Bent excavated was pronounced on very good authority to be Phœnician. So it was, thirty years ago, on what was good authority then; but the evidence on which that authority relied was certain ivories in the British Museum, originally found by Layard at Kalah (Nimrud), one of the capitals of ancient Assyria, which were put down as Phœnician because it was not then known that anybody else was capable of producing that particular kind of art. Now, however, we know that it is not in any way impossible that they should have been produced by peoples of north Syria, or by the Assyrians themselves; and I think the great bulk of authority now declares that they are not Phœnician. In the tomb which Bent excavated, which had been very thoroughly plundered, he found very little except a few fragments of ivory, and it was on the strength of this ivory, and of a resemblance which its workmanship bears to those ivories in the British Museum, that Mr. A. S. Murray declared the tomb which Mr. Bent had excavated to be undoubtedly Phœnician. But even if it were Phœnician, or if the ivories from Assyria were Phœnician, I am afraid it would prove nothing about the origin of the Phœnicians. As Mr. Philby has said, the Phœnicians, if they ever did migrate from the Persian Gulf, did it about 3000 B.C. The Nimrud ivories are of a very much later age, some two thousand years after. Therefore any resemblance there may be between these little fragments of ivory at Bahrain and the great hoard of ivories which Layard found, can prove nothing whatever about the origin of the Phœnicians. It would merely prove that Assyrian kings engaged some workmen from Phœnia proper to come and work for them, or bought some things from Phœnicians. I should imagine it more likely that the Nejd mounds go back no further than the early Christian era—than that kingdom of Yamama which developed into the short-lived Empire of Kinda, which at one time spread up to the borders of the Euphrates and captured Hira. Still, of course, that is a mere guess until the mounds are excavated. I merely enter a caveat against assuming we have solved in Nejd the mystery of the Phœnicians—if there is any mystery to solve! Mr. Philby also mentioned Gerra, that famous port to which Roman trade tended across Arabia from Petra and other places. He has drawn attention, for the first time I think, to the remarkable resemblance between the name of Ojair and that of Gerra, and he wondered how the transference of the name had come about. I suggest that the first transference probably took place when Katif to the north of Ojair grew into importance, which was about the time of the Prophet. Gerra probably then sank into insignificance. But a little later the oasis of Hasa became important, and when Hasa itself became the capital of the Carmanian state, traders, taking the shortest route to the coast, refounded Gerra on a site nearer to the capital. When Mr. Philby arrived in Jidda, I met him there, and, although there was no getting over the difficulty at the time, I very much regretted that he was not able to carry out the plan with which he originally came to Jidda, namely, to return overland to Riyadh by another route. He intended to take a line to the south of the line he had followed in coming, and upon the way to explore some of the unknown
points which lie about the outfalls of the great wadis of Asir. However, he had come into Hijaz without any warning being given to King Husein, and it was perhaps not unnatural that the old man should be so much upset at this sudden appearance of a Christian and an emissary from his diplomatic friend, but ancestral enemy, Ibn Saud, that it became impossible to persuade him to allow Mr. Philby to go back overland. You know how well he used his next opportunity to get down into the southern part of Ibn Saud's kingdom; and certainly from that mission of his to Ibn Saud in the course of the war, a most remarkable increase in our knowledge of Central Asia resulted. I can only again thank him on your behalf, and congratulate him both upon his safe return and upon the remarkably interesting way in which he has described his journey to us this evening.

The President: General Haddad Pasha, the representative in England of the Emir Faisal is present: he has been the right-hand man of Colonel Storr, our very talented and successful Governor of Jerusalem, and we hope he will be kind enough to give us some observations on Arabian life and customs.

General HADDAD PASHA: I am sorry I am not accustomed to address an audience in a language which is not my own. You have seen many pictures of Arabia—the Bedawin and the Arabs—and how do you expect an Arab coming from that country to speak to you in your own language? More than that, I am at a great disadvantage, I am sure you will agree, when I am asked to speak after speakers such as Mr. Philby and Commander Hogarth. Still, I am an Arab adventurer, and I therefore venture to speak a few words about my country. I have never been in that Arabian desert, so I cannot give you much information about that based on personal experience, but I can tell you something about my own country, about other Arab provinces, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Palestine. People in this country, it seems to me, do not realize the essential unity of the Arab provinces. People in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine, all consider themselves Arabs—even those who are no longer nomads. Those people still speak Arabic and use idiomatic expressions which take one back at once to the old classical Arabic. Just before coming to England I went to a certain village up in the mountains, a Christian village, where no Bedawin have been during the last two hundred years. I quote one of the songs I heard there, which is purely Bedawin:—(The speaker here quoted some lines in Arabic which he translated as follows:)

When horse meets horse, the head of the spear
Will water its shaft with the foeman's blood.

Neither the man who was singing that song, nor his father, had ever used a spear. As a matter of fact, the Bedawin are in possession of excellent rifles, and they always prefer machine guns when they can get them. When the Arabs invaded Palestine they occupied certain provinces, and in every province they had a special tribe. Now the people of Palestine still keep the tribal names and their traditions, although they have different methods of living. This unity goes deeper than religion, and in my opinion, European historians have been at fault in identifying too closely the Arab race with Mohammedanism. One of our greatest poets, who was a leader in Arabia before the Prophet, was a Jew. His name was Al-Samaw'al (Samuel). He is well-known in the history of Arabia. Another well-known poet was a Christian Imru-al Kaiss. He and all his powerful tribe were Christians. This feeling of unity amongst the Arabs to-day transcends religion. Mohammedans and Christians throughout the Arab provinces feel themselves bound by one tie, and that is their Arab blood.
I refrain from talking politics, but I should like to lay great stress on the misunderstanding which exists in England about the unity of the Arab race. I have cousins of my own born in Damascus or other cities of Syria. They are married in Palestine. But this is no more exceptional than a Londoner marrying a lady from Manchester—it is exactly an analogous case. Reading the New Testament one cannot fail to realize that the people of Jerusalem looked to Damascus as the commercial centre. It has always been looked upon as that. There has always been communication and direct contact between the two cities. They are indeed in the same country. I am afraid the statesmen of Europe, and public opinion in Europe, do not realize that Syria and Palestine form one country. We understand it, and it is for the purpose of achieving it that King Hussein, his sons, and the people of the Hijaz have fought for the liberation of the other Arab provinces. Acting under the same impulse Mesopotamian and Syrian soldiers, Christians and Mohammedans, crossed the desert, joined King Faisal, and fought for the common cause. They have only one aspiration, and that is the unity of the Arab nation, the restoration of the glory of the Arab nation. Their great idea is to establish a state to co-operate with the civilized Powers for the good of the world. I do not myself see, and many Syrians do not see, why they cannot co-operate with the Jews. I think the Jews and the Arabs ought to work together on the liberal principles established by King Faisal. I understand many of the Zionist leaders approve of these principles and quite agree with them. They are the establishment of a national government on the basis of British principles of justice and fairness, giving fair play to every sect. But considering that in Palestine eighty per cent. of the population are Moslems, twelve per cent. Christians, and only eight per cent. Jews, to talk of the establishment of a Jewish Palestine, taking no consideration of the actual inhabitants of the country, is I trust not the object of the authorities, and would be, to say the least, quite irrational.

The President: Mr. Philby mentioned Mr. Palgrave, who seems to have been more eloquent than accurate in his descriptions, and Sir William Haggard, who is present this evening, knows something about the history of Mr. Palgrave; we shall be very glad if he will tell us what he heard some forty years ago.

Sir William Haggard: I was unfortunately not able to be present at the last lecture given by Mr. Philby, but I read it with great interest, and I saw in it some remarks about the possibility of Mr. Palgrave's inaccuracy. It is a very important thing that that should be settled, one way or another, and perhaps the few words I may say now may go towards that settlement. In the course of my life it has been my lot to come across Mr. Palgrave several times. I met him when he was a Jesuit Father, and was at a monastery on the Rhine which I visited with my father, and I remember as a boy thinking that his conversation was very light for a Jesuit Father, a society which I had always thought was composed of serious persons. It was borne in upon me in another way later on that that idea I had formed of him in early days might be correct. I went up the Persian Gulf over forty years ago, having in the interval read his book on Arabia (which, by the way, he told me and my father he was really writing at this monastery when we saw him after his return from Arabia) and whether it was from his personality or what I do not remember, but, as I read it, I fancied I had some doubts as to its being accurate. Anyhow, finding myself at Muscat on my way up to Persia from Bombay, and spending the day there with Major, as he was then, afterwards Colonel Miles, the well-known and highly respected Resident and Consul-General, I asked him if he knew
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Palgrave. "Oh yes," he said, "I knew Palgrave well enough." I said, "Do tell me what is your opinion as to the accuracy of his book." "Well," he answered, "I cannot say anything about the rest of Arabia, where I have not been—on that I have no opinion—but I can offer an opinion, and more than an opinion, on what he said about my district"—that was the province, or kingdom, of Muscat—"there is not a word of truth in it. I have travelled all about this. Palgrave talks about groves of palms—they do not exist: of cities and villages which are purely imaginary, and," he finished up by saying, "he talks about a road up that rock," pointing to the great precipice which overlooks the harbour of Muscat. That is, all I can say. It is only hearsay evidence, but anybody who knew about Colonel Miles will know he was a man whose veracity nobody could impugn, and what he said may, I think, be taken as pretty good evidence that there were grave inaccuracies in Palgrave's history of Arabia, the reliability of which, as I have since heard, has been very much discussed.

The President: I am sure that I can in your name corroborate what Mr. Hogarth has said as to the great value of Mr. Philby's journey across Arabia from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea, for which we have given him the Gold Medal of our Society. Mr. Philby has described his experiences with the becoming modesty of the real traveller, but we should recognize that journeys of that kind are not made without great risk and without the exercise of the utmost skill and tact in dealing with the peoples with whom the traveller is brought in contact. The Arabs have many charming qualities, but they are a fiery race, and we can quite understand that if Mr. Philby had made the slightest error in judgment he might have suffered for it with his life. So when a man comes here and relates his experiences and appears to us to have got through very easily, we must use our imaginations and understand the skill and daring and tact which he must have displayed in order to get through as he did. I should like to repeat what I said on the last occasion on which we were discussing Arabia, and that now we have got in touch with these Arab chiefs we should keep up this touch. There are bones of contention between the chiefs. We know in India of many bones of contention between chiefs. We know that very often they do not in the least want the quarrels to be settled. The quarrels go on for centuries and centuries, and add zest to life among the people who entertain them. But all the same, it is an instinct with British officers to do their best to bring about a good feeling between the two chiefs in spite of their little contentions, and Mr. Philby has done most excellent service in establishing friendly relations with that great chief Ibn Saud. We hope very much that he may again visit Arabia, and that he may complete the great scheme of journeys he has in mind, and that other officers like Mr. Philby may be also visiting other parts of Arabia, increasing our knowledge, keeping up touch, as I say, with the peoples. I would add also the hope, that it may be the same officers who have already got in touch with the chiefs who may be employed upon this further work. Arabia is one of the least known parts of the world, a part of the world in which this Society is specially interested, and it would be a great gratification to us if we could feel that work which has been done in the war should now be continued in time of peace. I am sure you will all want me to tender to Mr. Philby your expression of pleasure and high appreciation of the valuable lecture he has given us, and also of those valuable slides. It is a great pity we cannot have colour, because I am sure Mr. Philby will agree with me, colour plays a very great part in desert countries. It appears all grey in those photographs, but as a matter of fact, in all desert countries
both at sunrise and sunset, there are most brilliant colourings, red, yellow, pink, and purple, and we hope some day Mr. Philby will come back with some coloured illustrations also. I tender then to Mr. Philby, on your behalf, a most hearty vote of thanks.

NOTES ON THE CANAL SYSTEM AND ANCIENT SITES OF BABYLONIA IN THE TIME OF XENOPHON

Major Kenneth Mason, R.E., M.C.

[Note: The place-names both in the text and in the maps are as spelled by the author, in conformity with the system of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force.—Ed. G. F.]

The story of Cyrus the Younger and his bid for the throne of Persia in B.C. 401 has been made familiar to us by Xenophon. Unfortunately, however, the latter gave us no map of the country he traversed, and the old landmarks have mostly disappeared. From the point at which the invaders entered Mesopotamia to the crossing place of the Greater Zab on their retreat, none of the ancient sites have been identified with any certainty. A land which obliterated nearly all memory of the glories of Nineveh within two hundred years of its sack is not likely to leave much trace above ground of lesser places, such as the Babylonian village of Cunaxa.

Archæologists will no doubt in time lay bare Xenophon's "large and populous city" of Sitace and his "large town of Opis," as they have done in the case of Assur, Nineveh, Babylon, and many other places of lesser note. Up to the present, however, we have to depend on the commentaries of such distinguished travellers and observers as Chesney, Ainsworth, Sir Henry Rawlinson, etc.

The following notes are the result of an attempt to follow Xenophon in greater detail after having had the advantage of modern methods of travel and observation. Colonel Beazeley has pointed out the application of aerial photography and observation to the delineation of ancient sites, citing the Abbasid city of Samarra as an example. Though inexperienced in archæology, the advantage of flights and motor journeys over nearly all the Mesopotamian country described by Xenophon led me to investigate, as far as I was able, the actual route of the ancient Greeks, and to suggest likely sites for the ancient towns they passed.

The claim is not put forward that these sites are established in any way. This can never be the case until the archæologist has dug up the foundation cylinders or other certain proofs of the identification of the ancient cities. The views set out are the result of investigation of the topography on the ground, and may assist others with more knowledge of the historical and literary side of the question and less perhaps