War and Discovery in Arabia: Discussion

H. St. J. B. Philby; Henry McMahon


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further ravages by disease, the urban population is now computed to be much under 10,000. It will be observed that the Hejaz railway, after being forced out to the west north of the city by the basaltic mass of Jebel Ohod, comes from north-west down to the south-west of the city before finding its terminus before the Bab el-Anbaria. Since it is at this gate also that most Pilgrims arrive by road from Mecca, I suppose the position of the station was chosen to facilitate their transit from road to rail and vice versa. Moreover, the Bab el-Anbaria is fortified, and just within it is a large hospice, while outside is a wide camping-ground. Fakhri Pasha and a special committee sent from Damascus in 1917 announced a scheme for the rebuilding and modernization of the city; but all that happened in fact was the destruction of a great number of the houses for the sake of their beams and other woodwork required to feed the locomotives on the Hejaz railway. The large palm plantations outside the city on the east and north-east, in which the garden suburb of Awali is situated, were much ravaged by the Turkish soldiery early in the Revolt, and the Beni Ali, a Shiite section of the Harb tribe, who cultivated them, were massacred. Fakhri then commandeered the plantations and had them tended by forced labour till the surrender of the city in January 1919.

Before the paper the President said: A few meetings ago a Cambridge Professor urged upon us that travellers in distant parts of the Empire and other regions of the world should possess a very much higher scientific training than they did. He recommended that they should be trained in geography, surveying, natural history, zoology, and a great number of other sciences. Well, this evening we have here only an Oxford man, and as a consequence he is four boat-lengths behind Cambridge. I think he already admits that he is not a geologist, and I dare say if we pressed him he would admit he was not a zoologist or an entomologist or a botanist, or perhaps even an anthropologist; but anyhow he is the best that we can find outside Cambridge. He has, as you know, devoted almost a lifetime to the study of the archaeology and the peoples and geography of the Near East. We, at any rate, considered him worthy of the Gold Medal of our Society, and I am sure that we shall have an exceedingly interesting lecture from him this evening. I ask Commander Hogarth to give us his address.

Commander Hogarth then read the paper printed above, and a discussion followed.

The President: The lecturer referred to the great work done on the other side of Arabia and right through the centre of Arabia by Mr. Philby. Mr. Philby lectured to us last April upon one part of his journey, and he is lecturing to us in a few weeks' time about another part, and during the last fortnight we have awarded him our highest award—the Gold Medal of our Society. The lecturer this evening has referred principally to the work on the Hejaz side, but we shall be very glad if Mr. Philby will give us some account of how what has been described this evening connects up with the work he himself did on the farther side.

Mr. H. St. J. B. Philby: I feel rather reluctant to inflict myself on you
now even for the customary five minutes, because as you have heard this evening I shall be doing so at somewhat greater length shortly, and I have already done so for an hour about a year ago. Also I feel I am scarcely competent to talk, at any rate at any great length, about the main part of Commander Hogarth's most inspiring address, though in a month's time I hope to be discussing one small section of the very large area he covered—the most southerly section, which he scarcely mentioned and which comes into a journey I made across Arabia. But I feel it is incumbent on me to say a few words in view of the very generous remarks just made about my own work by the President and by Commander Hogarth himself in the course of his address. Commander Hogarth has not stinted in his commendation of the work done by those officers who had the good fortune to work in Arabia during the war, but there is one name missing from his list. I am sure he will be the first to agree that I do well to draw your attention to that omission. In doing so, I should like to pay a very high tribute to Captain Shakespear, whose work lives after him in this country, as his name does in Arabia, and whose death on a battlefield in Arabia within a very few months of the outbreak of our war with Turkey was not only a grievous loss to geography, as all who know his work can amply testify, but was a very great loss to his country.

As regards the question of the watershed—a question in which, I may confess, it was Commander Hogarth's book 'The Penetration of Arabia' which first taught me to take an interest; the Wadi Aqiq I followed for about 20 miles of its course through the foothills between Taif and the Rakba Plain, and I saw it trending away northward over that plain until lost to sight; and I was told in December 1917 that it ultimately flows down to Medina, and that, when it is in full flood, it carries down bushes and other rubbish to Medina itself. I was also told that it passes by way of the well-known watering-place Ashaira, which was said to be in its bed, and beyond that past some wells called Tanduha. I gathered from my informants that, as a matter of fact, an easterly branch of it goes off to join the Wadi Rima, the other towards Medina. The matter is one, I think, that can scarcely yet be considered decided. It requires further investigation, but I think there can be little doubt that the Wadi Aqiq does, at any rate partly, form a tributary to the Wadi Hamd, the rest of it forming a tributary to the eastward-flowing Wadi Rima; its source, I should think, lies in the mountains not far south of Taif. From the other side of that watershed, or from another more southerly lava mass called Nawasif, which Commander Hogarth did not mention, flows the Wadi Subai, which I regard as probably the most southerly tributary of Wadi Rima itself. Southward of that point the whole drainage of the mountains seems to collect in the neighbourhood of Wadi Dawasir, down which it flows as far as it can across the sand-strewn desert of those parts. One point about the watershed of Arabia generally: I did not feel quite clear from the lecturer as to whether he implied that there was one uniform slope from west to east after you cross the watershed between those two points—that is to say, the western branch flowing down through the great hills towards the Red Sea, and the eastern branch flowing down towards the Persian Gulf. It seems to me in that connection interesting to note that between Wadi Rima and Wadi Dawasir, which are undoubtedly the two greatest drainage channels of the Arabian desert plateau, there is another drainage actually on a higher level than either, almost midway between them, somewhere between the 23rd and 24th parallels of latitude, that under various names flows through the mountainous country in the neighbourhood of the 44th degree of longitude in a generally easterly direction down towards the Persian Gulf. That channel is
the Wadi Sirra in its upper reaches, and changes its name as it goes along South of this general line the slope of the peninsula seems to be south-easward and north of it north-easward. Commander Hogarth stated that penetration of the Hejaz never took place except with the knowledge and approval of the King of the Hejaz or one of his sons. I do not know whether he made that statement deliberately, or whether I should challenge it. He stated the rule as it undoubtedly was, that nobody went into the Hejaz without the knowledge of the King of the Hejaz or his sons. But there are the inevitable exceptions which prove the rule, and I fear that in one instance I was myself the offender, for in December 1917 when I arrived at Taif I found that, through no fault of my own, I was not only an unexpected but an extremely unwelcome guest in the Holy Land. There is another exception—far more striking, far more epoch-making than mine, but I do not propose to divulge it. I think Commander Hogarth knows of it as well as I do, and there is at any rate one person present to-night who knows it better than either of us.

The President: One thing has struck us particularly in the address that we have heard, and that is the extraordinary statement that we do not know yet the longitude of Medina and of the railway down to it. It is remarkable that when all these officers were coming and going it was not possible to fix the longitude. It is a very difficult thing to do, but there has been a good deal of time since the armistice in which it might have been done, and Colonel Lawrence of course was going up and down that district. It was not under conditions in which he could take accurate observations for longitude, but we should be very glad to know, if he could tell us, what should now be done in order to satisfy this very important point. It is a thing which ought to be done. No one knows better than he does how it could be done, and if he could tell us what his suggestions would be, we should be very much obliged to him. So far the methods employed seem to be calculation of the rate of progress of the aeroplane and the camel. The aeroplane would go about one mile a minute and the camel about one mile an hour. I do not know if Colonel Lawrence, with his experience, could suggest any more scientific methods.

(Colonel Lawrence could not be persuaded to speak.)

Colonel Sir Henry McMahon: There are others whom you would much rather hear, but they are not courageous enough to get up. I have nothing to add to the very interesting lecture of Commander Hogarth this evening. I must congratulate him on the interesting way he has put forward his subject; also on the way in which he has avoided all details of political interest. That is an example which I am going studiously to follow. The time is too early and the day has not yet arrived when we can discuss matters of Arabia with entire freedom. But I should like to say (and this is why I have got up on this platform) one word about the work that has been done in regard to our knowledge of Arabia. Commander Hogarth has mentioned the Arab Bureau, and he incidentally referred to one or two handbooks. The Arab Bureau was started at the very beginning of the war. It was realized by us in Egypt that Arabia might possibly become an important factor in the war; it might become a country of vital interest, and an effort was made to get together as many officers as could then be found who had any expert knowledge of Arabia, the country, and its people, and I think you will agree with me in saying that the selection was good. It included not only Commander Hogarth but Colonel Lawrence, Miss Gertrude Bell, Colonel Cornwallis, and several others whose names we have heard this evening, including Sir
Mark Sykes. The work of those experts at the beginning was co-ordinated by a very able and distinguished officer, Colonel Clayton, now General Sir Gilbert Clayton. To this Arab Bureau we are indebted for those handbooks to which reference has been made. The Bureau did great work, and it added very largely to the success of all the political and military work in Arabia at a later date. It was to Commander Hogarth that the success of the bulk of that work is due. There are several of those experts here tonight, and I acknowledge with very great pleasure the valuable services they and the Arab Bureau as a whole rendered during the war.

The President: Commander Hogarth gave us a very complete summary of the geographical work which has been done during the war in that little-known land of Arabia. It is a great contribution to geography. We wish he had not confined himself so rigorously to geography, but had given us a little of his own personal experiences during the war, but there it is; in that short space he gave us the main results of the work of many officers during the war. I hope that the good work which has been begun on a big scale during the war will be continued. One of the most lamentable things is very often that after a campaign—certainly it was so in the case of Tibet—we throw the whole country up again and do not follow up the work we have commenced. I hope that in the case of Arabia we shall keep constant touch with the people, go on to know more about them and their country, and have a continual flow of officers coming here and giving us the results of their experiences. Especially do I think this question of longitude of such a very important place as Medina ought to be taken up. I ask you to give a most hearty vote of thanks to Commander Hogarth for his extremely valuable address.

THE OPENING OF NEW TERRITORIES IN PAPUA


Read at the Meeting of the Society, 1 March 1920.

PAPUA, or British New Guinea, comprises the south-eastern portion of the island of New Guinea. Its total area is roughly 90,540 square miles, while its coast-line is estimated at 3664 statute miles. A series of mountain ranges, two of the peaks of which exceed 13,000 feet above sea-level, extend north-west and south-east through the centre of the mainland and form the watershed of an extensive system of rivers, many of which are navigable for small launches of shallow draught.

Useful harbours lie dotted here and there along the coast-line, and it is in the vicinity of these that European plantations are generally located. As it is in the tropics, Papua is subject to the climatic conditions of such regions. But being just outside the hurricane belt it escapes the severe gales which have been so disastrous to some of its less fortunate neighbours. With respect to health conditions it differs little from other tropical possessions. Malaria is prevalent, but with ordinary precautions the white settler may preserve a fairly good standard of health. A great deal depends, however, on the nature of his occupation and the degree of exposure to heat and infection; for a man engaged in pioneer work among