The Rub’ al Khali

H. St. J. B. Philby; Bertram Thomas


Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0016-7398%28193112%2978%3A6%3C574%3ATR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Z

*The Geographical Journal* is currently published by The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR’s Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html. JSTOR’s Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/journals/rgs.html.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
OBITUARY

GENERAL SIR ALEXANDER COBBE, V.C., G.C.B., K.C.S.I., D.S.O.

Sir Alexander Cobbe had been elected to serve for a second term on the Council of the Society at the last Annual General Meeting, but within a few weeks died after an operation. By his death the Society loses a Fellow who had gained high distinction in the service of his country, with the Chitral Relief Force in 1895; in the Ashanti expedition of 1900, when he was severely wounded and received the D.S.O.; from 1902 to 1904 in Somaliland, when he won the Victoria Cross; and in the war of 1914–18, when he was mentioned nine times in despatches and held high command in the operations on the Tigris. He was Military Secretary at the India Office from 1920–26, during which time he served his first term on our Council: was then four years G.O.C.-in-C. of the Northern Command in India: and had returned to the India office in 1930.

JAMES COSSAR

We regret to record the death of Mr. James Cossar at Oxford on September 22, at the early age of forty-nine. He was educated at George Heriot’s School and Edinburgh University, and after holding a teaching post at his old school and a lectureship in Glasgow, he became a member of the staff of the Oxford School of Geography in 1919. He did much valuable work in Oxford, concentrating all his energies in his teaching, and sacrificing his own interests for others. Cossar never spared himself in any way, but devoted himself enthusiastically to the work of the School and all connected with it, though in the latter part of his life he worked under great difficulties of ill-health. His loss is felt by a wide circle of old pupils and friends.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE RUB' AL KHALI

A curious error occurs in Mr. Thomas’s most interesting paper on the Rub’ al Khalii which I have only just seen in the Journal for September. In discussing the slope of the peninsula he says on p. 221: “Cheesman found Jabrin on the north-west of the sands to be 600 feet, and Philby found Sulaiyil to the middle-west of the sands to be 600 feet.” On these data and his own observations he bases his belief that the highest part of the sands will be found in the south-west.

On turning to the map I find that the figures given are indeed 604 and 607 respectively, while the explanatory notes state that the heights are given in feet. That is so in the case of Cheesman’s figure, but mine is in metres. The height of Sulaiyil is therefore 1915 feet, and not a mere 600, while the sands to the west and north-west of that locality rise to 2385 feet at Dam and to (probably) over 3000 at the edge of the hills in lat. 20°5’ N., long. 40° E. Najran, Marib, and the inner edge of the Hadhramaut district would all seem to be about that height or slightly more or less, while the eastward trend of the wadis issuing from the mountain fringe would suggest a general easterly peninsular slope. The inference is that the sands rise steadily from east to west on a broad front extending from lat. 22° N. southwards, and come to an end against the foothills where the mountain torrents are strong enough to prevent their encroachment and accumulation.

Along the line Shanna–Mugshine, roughly in lat. 19° N., Mr. Thomas has himself confirmed the existence of this easterly slope in the teeth, as it were, of the northward slope of the southern coastal range. His northward march along
long. 51° E. further confirms the easterly slope already observed in long. 47° E., and it may be safely assumed that it continues farther east—perhaps to the spot marked as quicksands in lat. 21° N. There is of course no evidence on this point.

In his paper Mr. Thomas suggests that the landfall northwards from Shanna along long. 51° E. is uninterrupted. His map however shows that he descended from 970 feet at Shanna to 550 in lat. 20° N. only to rise again to 590 feet a degree farther north. From that point he dropped steadily towards the sea, but it is of interest to note that on the line of long. 49° E. there is a marked southward slope from lat. 24° N. towards Jabrin. There would thus seem to be two eastward-trending depressions in lats. 23° and 21° N. respectively, which are presumably the remains of the channels which once drained the wadis known to exist farther west. The depression northward of Shanna may indeed well be the continuation of Wadi Dawasir, of which all we know is that its bed passes out of our ken, trending somewhat south of east from Sulaiyil.

One more point: Mr. Thomas speaks of Ubar. Why does he ignore or reject the form Wabar known to the Arab geographers? It appears in that form (probably on information supplied by myself at the time) in a R.G.S. sketch-map dated 1921, and prepared to accompany the late Dr. Hogarth's lecture on wartime exploration of Arabia.

H. ST. J. B. PHILBY

Mecca, Arabia. 21 October 1931.

I must thank Mr. Philby for drawing attention to my misquotation of the height of Sulaiyil, in time to make use of the correction in my forthcoming book. In using the figure 600 for 607, to which Mr. Philby refers, it seemed to me that in country not conspicuously flat so great a meticulousness as the latter figure suggests would have shown some want of imagination. But the substitution of feet for metres is, of course, a different matter, and I bow to Mr. Philby's 1991 feet 6 inches. Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me: neque in ira tua corripias me.

My belief that the highest part of the sands will be found in the south-west is strengthened by this disclosure. 607 metres at Sulaiyil suits much better than 607 feet. The slope from Jabrin, 604 feet, to Sulaiyil, 607 metres, is clearly upwards towards the south-west. That slope must inevitably be continued towards the high land mass of the south-western part of the continent. My discovery of the upward westward slope of the southern borderlands towards the Najran bears strong and independent witness.

Mr. Philby's suppositions that the general fall of the southern sands is to the eastwards on a broad front are correct. His suggestions that certain sand undulations (depressions) are a continuation of Wadi Dawasir and other drainage channels of the western perimeter are, I think, reasonable, but present evidence available on this point is insufficient to permit of definite conclusions.

Mr. Philby's difficulty about the fall of the peninsula from south to north in long. 51° E. arises, he points out, from a difference in altitudes of 40 feet between points 60 miles apart. This does not invalidate my generalization—the peninsula viewed in perspective does fall with striking uniformity from south to north in this longitude—any more than that the "descent" of a mountain needs qualifying because of a pimple that has to be clambered over halfway down.

Mr. Philby asks why, when speaking of Ubar, I ignore or reject the form Wabar. One answer is that none of the serious Arab geographers seems to mention the place at all; and it would scarcely have been considerate to take up the space of the Geographical Journal with local traditions of Yaqut and Nashwan bin Sa'id.

BERTRAM THOMAS

East India United Service Club. 16 November 1931.
[Note by Editor: By an error of the draughtsman the three heights shown toward the western edge of Mr. Bertram Thomas's map published in G.J., September 1931, are all wrong. Riyadi, Laila, and Sulaiyil are shown at 585, 538, and 607 feet. These figures are the heights in metres. They should read, disregarding fractions, 1919, 1765, and 1991 feet.]

MEETINGS: SESSION 1931–1932

First Evening Meeting, 2 November 1931. The President in the Chair

Paper: The Garwhal Himalaya around Kamet. By Mr. F. S. Smythe

First Afternoon Meeting, 9 November 1931. The President in the Chair


Second Evening Meeting, 16 November 1931. The President in the Chair


Paper: The Basin of the Parana. By Mr. W. S. Barclay