Northern Afghanistan
Northern Afghanistan
by
Major C. E. Yate

with an introduction by
Rudolf Abraham

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THE INTRODUCER

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When Robert Byron first visited Herat in the winter of 1933, he singled out three books in his weighty travelling library as being of particular significance. The first was an English translation of the Babur-nama, the fifteenth century memoirs of the first Mughal Emperor Babur; the second was Afghanistan, a large volume of photographs by Olaf von Niedermayer; the third was Major Charles Edward Yate’s Northern Afghanistan, or Letters from the Afghan Boundary Commission.

The Afghan Boundary Commission, a joint Anglo-Russian incentive with the Amir Abdur Rahman’s nominal consent, was endowed with the task of delineating the frontier between Northern Afghanistan and Russia’s Central Asian territories, scientifically and permanently. Effectively its capacity in the field was expanded to include a complete survey of the Herat region; a decision at once invaluable for its documentation of the area, but obstructive to the Commission’s success as a whole, in that it slowed its progress and diminished its popularity, by increasing the already considerable burden on the town of Herat itself.

Afghanistan’s northern frontier remained the outstanding issue of contention between Britain and Russia. The existing frontier was based on the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1873, which had been drawn from vague and inaccurate maps. To a certain extent, even the Amir appeared uncertain of the extent of his territory, with a number of areas to which he laid historical claim (quoting the sixteenth century Tarikh-i Rashidi for support) being disputed by Russia. Now, with the Russian advance having anyway reached its southernmost extent; a relatively passive Liberal government in London under Gladstone willing to negotiate a settlement with Russia (to the chagrin of the hawks); and with
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Abdur Rahman firmly established as a compliant ruler of a unified Afghanistan, circumstances finally promised a mutually acceptable diplomatic solution – although ultimately, a settlement was only finally reached in 1895 with the Pamirs Agreement, and this was anyway largely based on the Agreement of 1873.

Even while the Commission was actually in the field, the two powers almost came to blows. The incident in question, generally known as the ‘Penjdeh incident’, followed the massing of Russian troops at Penjdeh, opposite the Afghan province of Maimana and regarded by Abdur Rahman as part of his territory. Since the British had agreed to support Afghanistan in the face of any hostile action by another power, it appeared that she might have cause to honour her word, if the Amir demanded support. In the end the situation was only defused by the Abdur Rahman’s willingness to relinquish his claim to an area of falling revenues and troublesome tribesmen.

Britain had long hoped to turn Afghanistan into a buffer state forming part of India’s northern defences, a policy which had so far led to two disastrous Afghan Wars (the first of which resulted in the loss of all but one of the 16,000 troops who tried to beat a vain and luckless retreat from Kabul to Jalalabad). Russia, for its own part – whether with the direct consent of St Petersburg, or through the forward policies of its generals in the field - was steadily expanding its territorial acquirements in Central Asia: Tashkent in 1865, Samarcand and Bokhara in 1868, Khiva in 1873, and finally Merv in 1883. This last brought her alarmingly close to Herat: and Herat was seen by many as the gateway to India.

Presented as a series of letters written at different times and published in connected form, *Northern Afghanistan* describes the progress of the British party (consisting of some 1,300 men and 2,000 animals) over a period of more than two years. Yate is a detailed and informed observer, recording inscriptions from historical monuments (a number of which were subsequently published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*) and providing valuable topographical and toponymic information. His observations regarding the city of Herat and its architectural monuments - and it was this, his description of “Herat and its antiquities,”
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which so interested Byron - are of particular importance, especially in view of the fate subsequently allotted many of them. Together with the Russian Orientalist N. de Khanikoff, who had visited Herat in 1858 and who published the first scholarly account of the city’s monuments, and the French officer Joseph Pierre Ferrier who stayed in the city on a number of occasions in 1845, Yate must be considered the most thorough writer on the monuments of Herat of the nineteenth century.

Part of the ‘work’ undertaken by the Commission was the systematic destruction of a number of its finest historical monuments – and this, its most miserable legacy, is somewhat glossed over in the text - to prevent their potential use as strategic cover by an advancing military force. In particular, the complex known as the Musalla – the “lofty tessellated pillars and buildings” of which Yate noted on his first glimpse of Herat - suffered irreparable damage. This complex lay on the northern side of the city, and any military offensive (that is, a Russian one) was expected from the north.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the first Moghul emperor Babur wrote that, in the whole inhabitable world there was not such a town as Herat, the splendour and beauty of which were quite without compare. Following the death of Timur in 1405, when it came to replace Samarcand as the Timurid capital, and under the successive rules of Shah Rukh, Abu Sa’id, and Sultan Husayn, Herat could boast one of the most brilliant and enlightened courts in Asia, producing poetry, miniatures and architecture of quite staggering beauty. Effectively the focus of the Musalla was the Madrasa-Mausoleum and adjacent Mosque of Gowhar Shad - the wife of Shah Rukh, son of Timur - built in the first half of the fifteenth century, and reckoned by most who saw them among the finest architectural monuments in existence. Certainly Byron concluded them to have been so, even from their state of utter ruin. Anyone who has gazed upon the blue domes of Samarcand, or glimpsed the shimmering façade of Gowhar Shad’s other mosque in Mashhad, can only wonder that there was once a more splendid and more exquisitely decorated example of this architectural style.
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The destruction of the giant Buddha statues at Bamyan by the Taliban in 2000 brought almost universal condemnation upon that regime. We might pause to consider that this blatant act of vandalism was not unique; that in fact it has numerous precedents, just as often perpetrated by those forces to which we have been more sympathetic, or simply turned a blind eye. Indeed, from the destruction of the Musalla by the Afghan Boundary Commission in the 1880s to the factional fighting in Kabul preceding the Taliban’s rise to power, history presents us with a catalogue of destruction of Afghanistan’s priceless historical monuments. Many of the buildings which survived the Commission came under direct artillery fire during the Soviet invasion: the Mausoleum of Gowhar Shad was hit by Soviet artillery in 1984 and 1985, and of the two remaining minarets of the Madrasa, only one survives, and in relatively poor condition. Elsewhere in Afghanistan, the twelfth century Shah-i Mashad Madrasa has been completely destroyed, as has the third to fourth century Buddhist monastery of Tapa-i Shotor. The Kabul museum, hit by an anti tank rocket, was subsequently looted. Numerous archaeological sites, such as Ay Khanum which dates back to the campaigns of Alexander the Great, have been pillaged and in some cases even dug up with a bulldozer. The list is endless. And all this in addition to the usual ravages of earthquakes and time.

Ironically, it is not to the work of the Commission but to the recommendations of another figure that Afghanistan’s political demarcation owes its most visible, and perhaps also its most peculiar, legacy. In 1885 the great Asian explorer Ney Elias set out from Yarkand on his epic winter crossing of the Pamirs — what was effectively a highly secretive mission to explore the upper reaches of the Oxus and ascertain the recognised boundaries of the area. The first Englishman to cross the Pamirs, and the first to actually visit the Afghan dependencies of Shigan and Roshan, Elias surveyed more than a dozen unmapped passes over 12,000 feet and located and identified an as yet undiscovered peak over 24,000 feet (Mustagh Ata in the Chinese Pamirs).

Elias was never able to complete his survey of the Wakhan, however. Finding the Commission (now under the command of
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Captain Ridgeway, already in the field, and receiving no reply to his repeated requests to the Indian government for further instructions (Ridgeway offered him no more than the position of surveyor on his own team), he returned to India, via Badakhshan. Only later was he to find out that Ridgeway had subsequently retired from the field without actually surveying the Wakhan, and – most likely, for reasons of professional rivalry - had simply not bothered to tell him. Elias received no official honours for his work, but his recommendations – that Afghanistan and China should form a common boundary, thus denying Russia a common frontier with Britain, and frustrating any designs she might conceivably have on India - were effectively those later adopted. The Wakhan Corridor continues to divide, albeit narrowly, the modern republic of Tajikistan from Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province.

Northern Afghanistan remains a classic, first-hand account of Afghanistan’s political demarcation - many features of which, such as the Wakhan Corridor, remain with us today - and of travel through a region whose potential for instability persists into the present century.

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CHAPTER ONE
THE HIGHLANDS OF THE PAROPAMISUS

CAMP TAGOU ROBAT, 1st July 1885.

AFTER the hurricane, which nearly tore our tents to ribbons, at Sinjao, on the 16th and 17th June, no time was lost by Colonel Ridgeway in getting us into more sheltered quarters, and on the 19th we started for the Karukh valley, lying north-east of Herat. Our marches were:—

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>19th</td>
<td>Gondou-Bala</td>
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<td>20th</td>
<td>Deh Shakh</td>
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<td>21st</td>
<td>Deh Moghul</td>
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<tr>
<td>22d</td>
<td>Mach Gandak</td>
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At this latter place we halted on a grassy sward, on the banks of the Karukh stream. Our route had led us across the drainage of the country below the main range, and between that and the low range of hills that lies immediately over Herat to the north, thus avoiding the Herat valley, although so close to the city itself. On the morning of the 20th, a small party of us, consisting of Colonel Ridgeway, Major Bind, Dr Charles, Lieutenant Drummond, and myself, striking off to the right of the line of march, followed a track down the bed of the stream through the low hills till we came to the hill at the mouth of the Kamar Kalagh gorge immediately overlooking Herat, from the top of which we had a capital bird’s-eye view of the city. The north wall immediately faced us, with the lofty tesselated pillars and buildings of the Musalla between us and the north gate. The citadel was clearly visible, while the immense height of the walls, or rather of the mounds on which the walls are built, was shown by the lowness of the city inside. The roofs of the houses and the chaharsu or central dome, with a few trees here and there, were all that was visible, and with that we had to be content for the present. The wind was so
boisterous on the top of these hills that we were not sorry to get shelter from it in the gorge below, and turning our horses’ heads northwards again, we rejoined the camp for breakfast at Deh Mogul. The next day’s march to Mach Gandak was the prettiest we had had for some time. Our road led across a series of small ridges dividing a succession of little valleys one from the other, with the high range of mountains in the background, from which all these little valleys came radiating down. The villages were all separate little fortlets, with nothing visible but four square walls, too high even to allow of the domes forming the roof of the houses inside to be seen. The crops for the most part were nearly ripe, and the fortlets and orchards scattered about all gave an interest to the scene. At Mach Gandak we found Captains Maitland, Talbot, and Griesbach awaiting our arrival, on their return from a tour in the Dawandah range, which bounds the Karukh valley on the east, dividing it from Obeh and the upper waters of the Hari Rud.

We all enjoyed the treat of being encamped once more on a grassy sward, free from the wind and dust that made our lives such a burden to us in the Sinjao valley. The cavalry horses, too, and especially the grass-cutters, must have revelled in the change; but, alas! though political officers and camp quartermasters may propose, the doctors dispose, and before many days had elapsed the fiat went forth that the ground was damp and unhealthy, and a further move was advisable. Owing to the quantity of cultivation about, the only other site available was a bare stony bit of plateau covered with thistles, and the change was looked forward to with anything but pleasure. However, as everything was quiet in Herat, and there was no news of any Russian movements on the frontier, or any apparent cause for special anxiety. Colonel Ridgeway determined to go out and see for himself some of the sites for a summer camp farther up the valley lately visited by Captains Maitland and Griesbach. Accordingly a small party of us, consisting of Colonel Ridgeway, Major Bax, Major Rind, and myself, started on the 27th, and passing through Karukh, camped some 16 miles up the valley. Karukh is a large straggling village inhabited by all classes of Afghans, Jamshidis, and Tajiks. Our road, which led through the lower part of the village, ran along a narrow lane between the walls, sometimes of houses and sometimes of gardens. The men were noticeable as all wearing white turbans, a peculiarity which I at first set down as due to the sanctity of the place; but on further inquiry I found it is the common habit of the people here,
whether of Afghan or Aimak origin. The Jamshidis settled hereabouts
differ materially both in dress and habit from their wilder and more inde-
pendent brethren of Kushk and Bala Murghab—the result, I presume, of
two or three generations of settled life. I noticed, too, that they were
much more sparing of their salutations to us than their brethren across
the mountains.

On the 28th we made an excursion to a place called Jauz-i-kili, lying
immediately under the Dawandah range. Following up the valley of the
Malimar stream, an affluent of the Karukh, we eventually, after a ride of
some two and a half hours, found ourselves in the uplands, resting under
the shade of some fine old clumps of apricot-trees. The only available
site for a camp we found was under cultivation, not to mention the fact
that the road up was hardly passable for our baggage-camels; so we had
to decide against the place. The air was delicious, and the first thing that
brought home to us how much we had risen was the sight of the apricots
on the trees above us—little green things about the size of marbles;
whereas in the gardens at Mach Gandak and Karukh the apricot season
was all but over. The only habitations in the place were two or three
black kbitkas. An old man welcomed us pleasantly. He described him-
self as a Badghisi, or, as he pronounced it, Baighisi, though what that
was he could not say, except that they were originally of Arab descent.
Possibly they peopled Badghisi in olden times before driven out by Turko-
man raids. Now, he said, they only numbered about a thousand families
all told, and these were all scattered. He had fifteen families with him
cultivating the ground we saw, but all except two or three were away
with their flocks at their ailagh or summer-quarters, still higher up in the
hills; while in the winter they went down and pitched in the valley below.
This seems to be the life of the generality of the people in these parts.
They have no houses or settled homes, but are known everywhere by the
name of “Siah Khana,” from their tents, made of a black blanket sort of
material, in which they live both summer and winter.

On the 29th we marched across the Karukh valley, and up to our
present quarters in the Tagou Robat on the main range of the Paropamisus,
above the Zarmast pass; and here in all probability we shall remain. The
valley where we crossed it was only some 2 or 3 miles broad and quite
uncultivated, though some 4 miles higher up we could see the village of
Nourozabad; and again, near the head of the valley, where the Dawandah
and the main range meet at the Kotal-i-Aokhurak, the little village of
Badantoo was visible, with its green crops covering the lower slopes of
the Dawandah range—all apparently well watered from the still unmelted patches of snow on the heights above.

There are two passes leading up the main range on the northern side of the valley: the Armalik—from a little village of that name at its mouth—and the Zarmast, both meeting at the top. We ascended by the Armalik, a rough but pretty pass, the road following the course of a clear rippling stream, the water beautifully cool, and the banks lined with willows, hawthorn, and white brier. At the top the ascent was steep, almost too much so for the few camels we had with us, but the scenery and air were delicious. Here we came upon a flock of ibex, but they were too quick for us, and though one of our party tried a shot at them, he was fain to acknowledge that an ibex running up a hill at 400 yards was too much for him. Tagou Robat is a sort of hollow at the top of the range between the Armalik and Zarmast kotals on the south, and the Kashka kotal on the north, and so named from a small brick robat, or shelter-house, on the banks of the stream, which here runs down a gorge to the west and falls into the Kushk river below. “While the tents were being pitched I tried my luck with the rod, and soon found that the stream was full of fish—of what sort I cannot say, but they took a fly well, and were very good eating.

The Zarmast pass, which I examined the next day, was found to be much more open than the Armalik, though steeper, but without the trees, rocks, and banks of the latter so fatal to the baggage-animals; and as there appeared to be no great difficulty in getting the baggage up, it was soon decided to make this our summer-quarters—at any rate for the present—and orders were sent for the camp to march up accordingly.

The 1st of July we devoted to a trip to Naratu, a curious old fort on a scarped hill some 12 miles to the north. Our road led over the Band-i-Kashka, and then wound along the hillsides for some miles, finally descending into a sort of valley or plateau to the old fort called Kilah-i-Aman Beg, after the Dehzingeh Hazarah who built it, not far from the ziarat of Kwajah Dehistan. Dehistan is one of the cities of Badghis mentioned by Ebn Haukel, the Arab geographer of the tenth century, but I did not notice any particularly ancient-looking remains about. Naratu itself is a scarped hill, precipitous on all sides except at one narrow point on the east, connecting it with a long low ridge, which forms the only entrance. The sides are everywhere so steep that it is most difficult to get up; and although the path to the one entrance wound all round the south-eastern side of the hill, even then it was too steep for our horses, and we
had to dismount and lead them up. The old gateway forming the eastern end of the hill must have been a massive bit of masonry in its day; but now it is all in ruins, and we had some difficulty in picking our way through to the old stone archway that once formed the inner gate. The scarp is surmounted with the ruins of a massive wall of stone and mortar all round, but even without this wall the precipitous face of rock must have made the place well nigh impregnable. The western and southern faces were the strongest, owing to the unbroken nature of the scarp. The north side has two scarps, and each of these was fortified. At the north-west corner is a second small fortification on the lower scarp, called the Kilah-i-Dukhtar, and the wall was continued eastwards along the top of this lower scarp nearly up to the gateway at the eastern end. On this lower ledge there is a spring of water issuing from under the limestone rock of the upper scarp—the only natural supply of water that we saw in the place. There are several reservoirs on the face of the hill, some even now holding water; and in addition to these, we saw several wells cut down through the solid rock which may have touched some hidden spring below. In one we could just distinguish some arches, evidently betokening a large reservoir 20 or 30 feet below, but apparently now dry. As this shaft was sunk in a great mass of rock without any apparent drainage to it, it could not have been intended for the storage of rain-water, and probably tapped the sources of the spring on the northern face. No one here can tell us the origin of the fort. The only tradition concerning it is that it was built by Naraiman; but who Naraiman was is not known, nor even the history of his daughter, who gave her name to the fortification on the north-west corner.

The great attraction of the place in these days is the ziarat or shrine of Imam Ali Asgar, the grandson of Hazrat Ali. This ziarat occupies the centre of the hill, and is enclosed by walls some 15 or 20 yards square, and overshadowed by pear-trees, the fruit of which, I noticed, was only just formed. These trees are covered with bits of rags, the offerings of thousands of pilgrims, and one old trunk bristles with pegs of wood stuck into it in all directions, as well as with bits of stone. Above the grove are the usual poles with red and white flags, surmounted with tin hands, the meaning of which, as a symbol, I have never been able to fathom. At the ziarat we found a curious unkempt old Fakir or religious mendicant, who, when we entered, was busy ladling a bowl of milk into a skin; but directly he saw us, he rushed out and insisted on shaking hands in the warmest manner, and eventually produced his store of bread and divided
Chapter One

It amongst us. The view from the top of the hill was very fine: on every side vast grassy uplands covered with clusters of kibitkas, the summer homes of the Kilah-i-Nau Hazarahs. The country was covered with their flocks and herds grazing in all directions; and as every hollow has its spring or rill of water, there are plenty of places for the owners to camp at. The hill tops and sides have a sprinkling of juniper-trees, though we looked in vain for those forests of pine which we had been led to expect.

The country to the west of our camp along the road to Kushk is much the same. The road runs along the stream for some distance, and then turns up across the hills amongst beautiful scenery, passing close to a hamlet of Hazarahs. Imagine some eight or ten kibitkas clustered on a little plateau above the stream; a short distance off, gradually working their way home for the night, a couple of flocks averaging a thousand head or more apiece; on another hill a lot of black cattle, and above them again a herd of camels—all wandering where they like. The great peculiarity of the camels of these parts is, that they always seem to affect the highest points of the hills, and one often sees them in the distance on the sky-line roaming about far above all other domestic animals.

All the hillsides here have at some time or other been terraced out with enormous labour, but who the labourers were who can tell? The Hazarahs and Jamshidis who now divide the northern slopes of these hills between them, seem to use them solely as summer grazing-grounds; and I have seen few signs of cultivation. No one lives up here in the winter now; but I cannot help thinking that at some time these hills had their regular population, else whence all these signs of former cultivation? Our camp here now stands at a height of some 6000 feet above sea-level, in the most perfect climate, clear, dry, and cool, and unequalled, so far as I know, by any hill station in India. No fogs, no rains, and sheltered from the wind; the thermometer in my tent, as I write now at noon, marking only 70°, and the hills, or rather downs, around covered with grass, and rideable in almost any direction. A perfect sanitarium, some will say, for our troops when we garrison Herat. Others, alas! say, Too late! too late. The Russians will have Herat, and we cannot prevent them. Not so, I trust. Not content with the admission that Afghanistan is beyond the sphere of Russian influence, we shall soon, I hope, lay down the dictum that not only is Afghanistan within the sphere of British influence, but that it is an integral portion of the British Indian Empire, and that we mean to maintain that empire in its integrity.
The main camp arrived this morning at the foot of the hills, and we expect them up here to-morrow. The situation is central, being about equidistant from Herat and Bala Murghab, so that we get all news of importance without loss of time, and we are also within easy reach of both Kushk and Kilah-i-Nau. It is a great comfort to be away from villages and cultivation, where there is always the danger of some quarrel over a restless grass-cutter or a stray mule; whereas here not only is the supply of grass inexhaustible, the hills for miles around being covered knee-deep with a luxuriant crop of pure rye-grass, but whatever population there is, is exceedingly friendly to us—indeed so much so, that the Hazarah chief of Kilah-i-Nau sent a message to Colonel Ridgeway asking him to take up his residence amongst them.

The chief news from the frontier relates to the sickness of the Russian troops at Panjdeh, and to the arrival of some new Russian General, who was received at Panjdeh with a salute and much distinction. The Sarik Turkomans at Panjdeh are said to be much dissatisfied with Russian rule, and to talk of migrating south en masse to escape it. The Afghan troops have not advanced beyond Bala Murghab, as any fresh occupation of Maruchak might only lead to fresh excitement. Sirdar Mahomed Aslam Khan is with the Afghans at Bala Murghab. Mr. Merk and Dr Owen returned a few days ago from a trip to Kushk, which they found nearly empty, almost the entire population having moved off to their summer-quarters in the hills. Captain Gore and Dr Aitchison are still in the neighbourhood of Mashhad, while Dr Weir is with Mr. Finn on a tour along the Perso-Russian frontier. Captains Maitland and the Hon. M. G. Talbot leave shortly for Obeh, and Captain Peacocke and myself for Kilah-i-Nau, whence we hope to have the chance of exploring and surveying some of the hitherto unknown Firozkohi and Taimani country. The heat and want of water in the desert will be so great for the next two months, that it is not considered probable that we shall commence the demarcation of the frontier before September, supposing that the negotiations are brought to a successful conclusion in the meantime.
CHAPTER TWO
PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

CAMP, ROZABBIGH, 21st July 1885.

When last I wrote, the main camp was just arriving at Tagou Robat, and we were all congratulating ourselves on the prospect of spending our hot weather in that glorious climate, little thinking that ten days hence would see us all on the march down again. But so it was. The cavalry arrived up on the 4th, and the infantry and remainder of the camp on the 5th, and we all settled down to what we thought were to be our summer-quarters. So difficulty was experienced in bringing the heavy baggage up the Zarmast pass, despite its steep ascent and the fact that the Zarmast is the most difficult pass in the whole of the Paropamisus range. There will be no difficulty, therefore, in turning the place into the sanitarium it is evidently meant for, when the proper time comes. Our time at Tagou Robat was pleasantly occupied, by some in long afternoon rides over the hills, and by others in fishing and in proposals for picnics to Naratu and other places in the neighbourhood, never destined to come off. One party, consisting of Major Meiklejohn, Captain Durand, and Dr Charles, did indeed make good their visit to Naratu on the 10th, but others put off the trip till the morrow, and when the morrow came, half the camp was wending its way down the hill. I must not forget to mention the cordial welcome we always received in the Hazarah hamlets when riding about the hills. Whenever I felt doubtful about the road and went up to the nearest cluster of kibitkas to ask my way, the whole hamlet, young and old, generally turned out with words of welcome and desire to be of service. The Hazarahs were much more genial in this respect than the Ghilzai and Mishwani Nomads, who were interspersed and scattered about amongst them. Curiously enough, these people live all about the hills, within hail almost of each other, and yet neither can talk the other’s language, and, so far as one can judge, they have little or no intercourse with each other.
All the Afghans in the Herat valley talk Persian fluently, but these Nomads seem to stick to their native Pushtoo despite all surroundings. We always found them civil, but all their energies were generally devoted to selling us a pair of old kurjins or some bit of carpet; in fact, wherever you meet a Mishwani, he is pretty sure to have something to sell you.

It is astonishing what a number of these Nomads are supported in these hills at this time of the year. To the west of the Hazarahs come the Jamshidis—the Tagou-i-Jawal at the head of the Kushk river being the recognized boundary between the lands occupied by the two races; while Sirdar Sher Ahmed Khan, who went along the foot of the hills exploring the direct road above Kushk to the Ardewan pass, reports that the whole country to the west of the Jamshidis, again, is covered with the black tents of Nomads from the Herat valley, while almost all the Afghan cavalry are grazing their horses opposite the Baba pass, and yet the pasturage is so luxuriant that there is room for thousands more. However, we were not to add to the number for long. On the 10th the fiat went forth that we were to march down to the Tunian ford, some 20 miles east of Herat, cross the Hari Rud there, and march round to the south-west of the city. Application was received from the Afghan authorities for the services of officers to advise the governor regarding the fortifications of Herat, and next morning Captain Peacocke and myself were on our way there. Rumour at the same time was busy with the report of fresh Russian reinforcements at Zulfikar, and as the papers all tell us that this and Maruchak are the two points that the Amir insists upon, and that we therefore insist upon for him, we can hardly suppose that the Russians would bring down fresh troops to Zulfikar if they had any intention of evacuating it again shortly after. However, nothing further has been heard of the reinforcements, and we can only trust, for their sake, that they are not having the same unhealthy and uncomfortable time of it as their brethren at Pul-i-Khishiti. We certainly have had the pull of the Russians in the way of climate and health. While they have been sweltering in the heat of the desert and decimated by sickness, we have been revelling in a climate where the thermometer rarely exceeded 75° in our tents by day, and where we sat down to dinner at night in our cardigans, or greatcoats, with hardly a man sick in hospital. Even here in the plains of the Herat valley the heat is nothing to complain of. If the thermometer does go up to 95°, and sometimes even to 100°, in our tents, still the breeze is always cool and the night just pleasant. In fact, we find a greatcoat most comforting before marching in the early dawn. Yet this is the hottest month in the
Certainly no climate that I know of in India can hold a candle to that of Herat at this season of the year, and were the latter a British station with regular houses, etc., it would be one of the healthiest and pleasantest of our possessions.

It had been intended, on leaving Tagou Robat, to march the camp across the Karukh valley, and cross over the Bund-i-Khinjak at the southern end of the Dawandah range on to Tunian, thereby avoiding the dense cultivation near Karukh. Ressaldar-Major Muhammad Husain, of the 7th Bengal Cavalry, who was sent on ahead to reconnoitre, however, reported the road unfit for camels, and so we stuck to our old road via Karukh and Mach Gandak. Karukh is the seat of the Shaikh-ul-Islam, one of the most powerful divines of the Herat district. Here we found the reverend old gentleman passing the last weary days of the Ramzan fast under the cool shade of a huge grove of pine-trees. Despite the heat in the rays of the sun outside, the soughing of the pine-branches overhead tended of itself to minimise the pangs of any unassuageable thirst; and I must say the pine-grove looked as pleasant a place to pass the Ramzan in as any that I have seen in the country about. In the absence of Dr Aitchison at Turbat-i-Shaikh Jam, I did not ascertain what species of pine these were; but they were fine strong trees, some 70 or 80 feet in height—a living proof of how much might be done in the way of arboriculture in this country under proper supervision. The trees are said to be 120 years old, having been planted by the present Shaikh-ul-Islam’s father, who was the first to acquire possession of this plot of land, in the midst of which his remains now lie entombed in a huge ziarat. The camp halted a day on purpose to allow Dr Owen to operate on the eye of the Shaikh-ul-Islam. But professional jealousy, or political intrigue, or something, intervened; and before the appointed time, the private hakim of Kazi Saad-ud-Din, the Amir’s representative, had carried the day and persuaded the old gentleman not to undergo the operation.

At Tunian the Hari Rud was found to be easily fordable, the water less than 2 feet in depth with a good bottom. The right bank is scarped by the water when in flood, and is some 20 feet in height; but the left bank lies low, with a wide expanse of grassy sward, where the cavalry fed themselves with ease for some days.

Here Captain Peacocke and myself rejoined from our visit to Herat. We had had a busy time of it there, thoroughly examining the works inside and outside the city, and were most civilly and hospitably received and entertained. We were met on arrival some 4 miles outside the city by
Rustam Khan, the brother of the Sipah Salar, or commander-in-chief, and escorted by him and a regiment of Kabul cavalry to the quarters assigned to us in the garden of Shahzadah Kasim, on the north-east side of the city. The morning of the next day was spent in an inspection of the outside of the city; and the evening of the inside. Visits were also paid to the governor and the commander-in-chief; at the latter’s house the Naib Salar and General Ghaus-ud-Din Khan were both present. The names of both these officers will be remembered as the commanders of the Afghan troops at Panjdeh, and their cordial greeting was proof of itself that all rumour of any ill feeling against the British officers there on account of the Afghan defeat was devoid of foundation. The Naib Salar was looking thin and ill, having only just recovered from the effects of his wound—a bullet through the thigh; but General Ghaus-ud-Din was as hale and hearty and ready for a fight as ever, and came down to the garden with Rustam Khan on purpose to escort us over the fortifications.

Of these works I can enter into no detail here. Suffice it to say that we spent five days in Herat, and met with the greatest civility throughout. The population of the place are only too anxious for the British to come; while as for the soldiers, so far from entertaining any ill feeling against the British, they are only longing for their aid in the coming struggle, and would be the first to welcome their advent. The religious element, too, is notoriously in favour of the British alliance; so much so, that it is said that when the Governor some short time ago referred the question as to whether the alliance and cooperation of the British would in any way detract from the lent of an Afghan ghaza, or crusade, against the Russians, the question was met by a most decided negative—and not only by a negative, but by strong advice in addition to secure British co-operation. This dictum, too, was given by Umar Jan Sahibzadah, now without doubt the most influential priest in Herat. I well remember this man at the time he came to Kandahar with Sirdar Abdullah Khan Nasiri as the envoy of Sirdar Ayub Khan from Herat—an austere, thin-featured man, who had more to do in raising Zemindawar against us at the time of Maiwand than any other person, and who even then was one of the most influential and fanatical priests of the day. To have him on our side is indeed a change of the cards.

From Tunian the Mission marched quietly down the Herat valley, which here is seen in its greatest fertility. I shall not easily forget the view I had of it on the evening of the 19th, when I rode out with Major Bax and Captain Griesbach to a small mound near our camp at Kurt, called...
Tepe Ghar, or the cave-mound. Standing on the top of the mound, we could not but admire the beauty and fertility of the scene. Away on the other side of the valley the walls of Herat stood out, backed by the tall minarets of the Musalla—the latter, alas! destined soon to be demolished. The Amir’s orders for the demolition of both the Musalla and the still older Madrasah close by are being rapidly carried into effect, and a few days, or at most weeks, will see the last of this famous relic of bygone grandeur. The rooms and habitations have mostly disappeared, but the massive arches, some 80 feet in height, the still higher minarets, and the large dome, all of which bear traces of the beautiful tile-work with which they were covered, attest its former magnificence.

In the centre of the valley the waters of the Hari Rud glistened in the setting sun; while on every side, interspersed amongst the numerous villages and orchards, were lying the heaps of freshly cut corn, waiting to be threshed. The irrigation-works are certainly one of the wonders of this country. The valley here is a perfect network of canals and _juis_, as they are called, varying in size from some 30 feet in breadth and 2 in depth to the smallest cut of barely a foot in breadth. The annual labour expended in the repair alone of the canals is very great; but for all that, the people apparently prefer canals to any system of well irrigation, which is here unknown.

To-day the main camp is halting at Chahgazak, some 20 miles to the south of Herat; while Colonel Sir West Ridgeway, with Major Holdich, Captains Durand, Peacocke, Heath, and Griesbach, Dr Owen, Kazi Mahomed Aslam, and myself are at Rozabagh, a large village about 6 miles south of the city, where Sir West Ridgeway meets the governor of Herat to discuss the situation.

Captain Cotton and Captain de Laessoe, with Ressaldar-Major Muhammad Husain, have just returned from a trip farther up the valley, where they have been prospecting for sites for a camp to which to move the Mission when the present arrangements with the governor of Herat have been concluded. Captains Maitland and the Hon. M. G. Talbot are still away exploring and surveying the upper waters of the Hari Rud, somewhere about Daulatyar. Captain Gore is on his way back from Mashhad, and Mr. Finn, Lieutenant Yate, and Dr Weir are still travelling along the Persian frontier. The native _attachés_ are nearly all away too. Sirdar Muhammad Aslam Khan is still at Bala Murghab, doing capital work in controlling the relations of the Afghan troops there with the Russians at Pul-i-Khishti. Subadar Muhammad Husain, of the 2d Sikhs,
is similarly employed on the western portion of the frontier. Ressaldar-
Major Bahawaldin Khan, of the Central India Horse, is away on trea-
sure-convoy duty at Mashhad; while Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and Khan
Baba Khan are located at Mashhad and Turbat-i-Shaikh Jam respectively.

Tomorrow morning Major Holdich, Captains Durand and Peacocke,
and Kazi Muhammad Aslam Khan proceed to Herat to set the works on
the fortification going without further loss of time, rejoining Sir West
Ridgeway at Rozabagh a day or two hence. It is now hoped that the
Amir’s local officials will cease all petty obstruction and put their shoul-
ders to the wheel, recognising at last that the Amir’s interests are in real-
ity bound up with those of the British Government.

The Amir’s proclamation with the salute of 101 guns and general
illumination of the city in honour of his appointment as a G.C.S.I. seems
to have occasioned an extraordinary and most unexpected excitement
amongst the Heratis. The rumour has gone abroad that the British Gov-
ernment has given Hindustan to the Amir in exchange for Kandahar and
Herat, and nothing will persuade the villagers that the British are not
shortly to take possession of Herat. The wish is evidently the father of
the thought, and the eager manner in which the rumour has been credited
and insisted upon may of itself very possibly have frightened the Amir’s
officials, who are probably the only people in the province to whom a
British occupation would be unpalatable.

There is no particular news of any Russian advance, with the excep-
tion of the move forward of 100 Cossacks from Pul-i-Khishti up the
Kushk valley to Chaman-i-Bed. Various Panjdeh Turkomans who were
arrested by the Russians a short time ago, on the charge of being sup-
posed to be friendly to the British, have, it is said, been released again,
but the Sariks are still groaning under Russian rule. We have no very
recent news from Turkistan, but everything is supposed to be quite quiet
there, despite the rumours current some little time ago regarding the im-
prisonment of Abdullah Khan Tohki, the governor of Badakshan, by Sirdar
Ishak Khan.

10th August 1885.

Our camp at Rozabagh was broken up on the 28th ult., when Sir West
Ridgeway returned to the main camp at Chah Gazak, but only for a couple
of days. On the 30th, with the cavalry escort, and accompanied by Cap-
tain Peacocke, Mr. Merk, Captain Griesbach, Dr Owen, and myself, he
marched northwards again, while the Heavy camp and the Infantry Es-
cort at the same time moved westwards to a more elevated site in the Doshakh range, conveniently situated in case of any emergency. Here Dr Aitchison and Captain Gore rejoined after their long absence in Persia, the former having completed and carefully stored his botanical collections in the Mission House at Mashhad, out of harm’s way, and the latter having not only fixed the longitude of Mashhad telegraphically with Teheran, but having completed the survey of a great portion of North-Eastern Khorasan in addition. Mr. Finn not being at all in good health, Captain de Laessoe was sent off to assist or relieve him of his work along the Persian frontier. When last heard of, the party were at Kuchan, whence Lieutenant Yate was starting for Astrabad on return to India, crossing the Caspian to Baku, and thence visiting Batoum, Sebastopol, Constantinople, Athens, and Cairo en route. In the meantime Captain Cotton had been out on a trip with Ressaldar-Major Muhammad Husain, of the 7th Bengal Cavalry, across the Persian frontier, round by Charakhs and Yezdan, both Persian frontier stations. The country in that direction is very arid and the water often brackish.

On the 2nd August, Major Bax, Captain Peacocke, and myself started on a fresh visit to Herat to report progress on the fortification works. On nearing the city on the morning of the 3rd, we were met by Rustam Khan, the brother of the Sipah Salar, and learned that we had been expected by another road, and that the old Khalifah of Awalwali, a large shrine some 2 miles north-west of the city, had prepared tea and sweetmeats all ready for us, which unfortunately we had thus missed, and the good priest consequently had all his trouble for nothing. Three days were spent in the city in a thorough superintendence of all the works, which were being pushed on as rapidly as possible. Everything was thrown open for our inspection without the slightest hesitation—store-houses, magazines, and all. The Amir’s letter informing the people that he was sending his own son with reinforcements had considerably inspirited the Afghan troops; and were the Amir really to send his son, or even any member of his family, to Herat, the troops would know that he was in earnest in the defence, and that is the one thing they require to know. The present Sipah Salar, being only the son of a Kafir slave-girl, is a man of no position or influence, and the men can hardly be expected to fight so loyally for him as they would for a member of their own Royal Family. I can only hope that the Amir will carry out his promise, and that without the least loss of time.