

ABOUT THE WAYS TO AFGHANISTAN IN THE "TURKISTAN COLLECTION"

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Abstract: This article provides a scientific analysis of the materials of the "Turkestan Collection" about Afghanistan and the land and water routes leading to it. The issues related to the interest in these routes by representatives of the British and Russian governments are discussed.

Keywords: Afghanistan, water routes, land routes, "Turkestan Collection", Kabul, Sheralikhan, British, Herat, Afghans, Amu Darya.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Amir of Kabul nominally ruled over a vast territory with a population of 14,000,000; he considered as his subjects all the countries extending from Herat in the west to the eastern border of Kashmir, and from the mouth of the Indus in the south to the Oxus (Amu Darya) in the north. Kashmir, the left bank of the Indus, Seistan, Khorasan, and part of Makran were included among his possessions. Since then political events have considerably reduced the Amir's territory. Not only has Sindh, the Punjab, Kashmir, and part of Baluchistan been completely separated from him, but the countries of the Yusufzais, Kafiristan, Chitral lands, the Afridis, and the Waziris, as well as the Hezaraj, are very poorly subject to his orders, and, according to the description of some English writers, occupy about 10,000 square geographical miles, and through which the most important highways of the Asian continent pass. Afghanistan is nothing more than a country located between the lines of advance of India and Russia[1].

The boundaries of Afghanistan, as well as the geography and ethnography of this country in general, are still very incomplete and not always reliable. This mountainous country extends from the north-west of India to the north-east of India. Persia forms its bad border with the Oxus, from its source at Lake Victor to its crossing at Khojasal; in the south it borders on Baluchistan. Within these borders there are entire countries that no European has ever been able to penetrate. The number of European travelers in Afghanistan is very limited; most of them have passed through it only in two or three directions; none of them has stayed in the country for even a little while.

In the east, Afghanistan borders on the British and Tang possessions, but, despite this circumstance, it seems that this should have enriched our geographical knowledge of this territory, information about the eastern Afghan valley is as scanty and inconsistent as news about the southern, western and northern outskirts of Afghanistan. The Swat River valley has never been properly explored; almost nothing is known to this day about the valleys of the Chigarsaray, Alingar, and Alishan rivers in the land of the infidels. There are many rivers on the slopes of the Hindu Kush leading to the Kabul basin; along their valleys, they say, there are roads and passages leading to the Oxus basin; but they are known to us by name or only by inquiry[1].

The mountainous eastern edge of Afghanistan is inhabited by various Afghan tribes; it is bordered by the Hindu Kush, the Himalayas, the Safed Koh ranges, and the Sulaiman Range runs from north to south. Several important rivers flow through it, and many passes and roads are known from the Punjab to Afghanistan. The Safed Koh mountains form the southern boundary of the Kabul River basin. For 100 English miles they run along the 34th parallel; approaching Peshawar, the mountains turn northeast, and on the Kabul River they end opposite the Mohmandeh and Bajaur mountains. Their highest peak, Mount Sikaram, reaches 15,622 feet above sea level. From there the mountains are of the same height everywhere, never below 12,500 feet; they terminate in a double peak about 14,800 feet high.



North of Peshawar mountains and valleys, on both sides of the British frontier, and even in parts of the Peshawar plain, live the Yusufzai tribe; they number about 400,000. Those who live beyond the British frontier consider themselves independent.

Several branches branch off from the main range of Safetkoh; they run from west to east, parallel to the main range. One of these branches runs towards Attock, and separates the Peshawar plain from the system of valleys which form the Kohat district. In the narrow strip of mountainous country, not more than twelve miles wide, which cuts through the British dominions between Kohat and Peshawar, are inhabited by the Afridis. To the north of them live the Mamands, to the west the Shinwariya, to the south the Urukzai and Bangash, and to the east the Khachaks and Khalels, who are British subjects.[1]

Beyond the British border, the above-mentioned range of mountains now forms the southern boundary of the Tir Valley, inhabited by the Afghan tribe of Urukzai. Between the Tir and Khyber valleys lies the Bara Valley. Neither the Tir nor the Khyber valleys have been visited by Europeans. The Tir Valley is said to be very fertile and beautiful. The Bara Valley is not as important as its predecessor. To the south of the Tir Valley lies the Alisheredai Valley, which is separated by the Samana Range from the British valleys of Miranzai and Hangu, inhabited by the Bangash. South of this lies the Kurram District; along its northern and western edges stretch the Safetkoh Mountains, and in its centre is the settlement of Kurram, where the district governor lives. The Kurram District is inhabited by the Kuru and Jagi tribes; both tribes are considered to be of Mongol origin. In the south-south-east of this district, in the mountains, along the borders of the Kurram river valley, live the Afghan tribes of Zapnuht and Bangash; south of them begins the country of the ministers. The ministers are divided into Dervesh and Mahsud; the first division lives in the north, the second division in the south; each of them is divided into two. It is divided into numerous klaps or khels. Between the country of the ministers and the plain of Deraj are low sandstone hills, in which a large number of Afghan captives live.

The high south-eastern outskirts of Afghanistan are occupied by the Kakars; this country is cut off by the ranges of the Solomon Mountains and is generally unknown to Europeans.

We have here named only the most important Afghan tribes, those located along the Punjab frontier from the Peshawar region to the north. This is the famous north-western frontier of India, where the British have fought 29 wars since 1849. The warlike and robber tribes who guard the passes and roads leading to Afghanistan have been the main obstacle to the study of this part of Afghanistan. Despite the abundance of tribal and local names scattered on the best maps of this part of Afghanistan, there are, strictly speaking, few geographical facts here that can be called completely reliable.[2]

In the west, Afghanistan borders on Seistan and Khorasan. Sistan once belonged to the monarchy of Ahmad Shah of Durrani, and until his successors, the whole province, gradually and almost imperceptibly to the Afghans themselves, passed to Persia. After Sher Ali Khan became the Afghan emir, he laid claim to the whole of Sistan. Persia, in turn, considered Sistan to be its original province, but during the reign of Lord Mayo, it was temporarily separated from its dominion.

A commission was sent to the borders of Afghanistan to clarify and establish the Afghan-Persian border. This commission was headed by Generals Goldsmid and Pollock, and its members consisted of several experienced geographers. However, the results of the expedition cannot be considered entirely satisfactory from the English point of view. The various members' journeys to Eastern Persia undoubtedly enriched the science of geography with much information, but the main question of why the expedition was equipped in the way it was is not resolved: the British were unable to establish a clear border between Afghanistan and Persia, and the mediation, satisfying neither the Afghans nor the Persians, only angered both sides against the British[3].



While the Emir of Kabul was being celebrated at Ambala, Lord Clarendon in Europe began diplomatic correspondence with Russia on the formation of a "neutral zone" between the Russian possessions and British India. In his bulletin (March 27, 1869), Lord Clarendon expressed very clearly what he feared and what he should avoid: he wanted to take strong precautions and feared that "in a very short time some ambitious Russian general might enter into relations with the discontented and restless Indian king; and then a conspiracy might arise along the frontiers which might excite the Indian population." As a precautionary measure, it was first proposed to recognize certain territories lying between Russia and British India as neutral; this neutral line was to mark the borders of the two states, and neither side would be allowed to cross it. Russia, with its famous leniency, agreed to the agreement and even presented Afghanistan as such a neutral.

The Hindu Kush runs in a north-westerly direction for 370 miles, then turns sharply to the west, and in this direction extends for 80 miles under the name of Kuhnababa; then it divides into three parallel ranges, from which the sources of the Gerarud and Murghab begin.

The northern range is lost in the sands of the Turkman steppe; the middle range, called Safednok, runs westward north of Herat, and then, turning into a square, is absorbed into the wall. The southern range of Sianok runs parallel to the latter, and, according to some geographers, joins the range south of Mashhad. The Khashnurud, Gerarud rivers, and many tributaries of the Helmand originate from it.

At the point where the Hindu Kush turns southwest to the west, it is joined by the Pagmon range, which forms the watershed of the Argendab and Helmand rivers, and ends at the confluence of the two rivers. One of the ranges of the Pag'mon Mountains begins to the south, bypassing the Ghazni Plateau and ending north of Kandahar. The southern border of the Kabul Basin is formed by the Safedkoh Mountains. They, like the Sulayman Mountains, were mentioned above when considering the borders.

In conclusion, the materials of the "Turkestan Collection" provide a lot of interesting information about Afghanistan and the roads to it, and this information is one of the most important for studying the history of Afghanistan. Because in the history of Uzbekistan, the neighboring country Afghanistan has always been considered important, and as a region where the interests of great powers clashed, Afghanistan and the roads to it were considered important information.

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