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The Dragon Lake of Pámír.

By Major-General Sir HENRY C. RAWLINSON, K.C.B.

I DESIRE to draw attention to the excellent geographical work performed by Mr. Ney Elias in his recent journey of 360 miles across the Pámír Plateau, from the vicinity of Yengi-Hissar to Shignán. When Major Trotter, some years back, first brought this Central Pámír track to the notice of geographers, in the Appendix to Sir D. Forsyth's *Turkistan Report* (p. 457, Route XXVII.), I ventured to suggest to the Society * that it represented the famous trade-route of antiquity, by which the caravans of Rome passed from Bactria along the "Vallis Comedarum" to the famous Stone Tower on the border of the Chinese territory; and I further undertook to show from a reference to various historical notices, that it had been used as a military road in comparatively modern times; but I had not then sufficient evidence to prove that Hwang-Tsang, the Chinese traveller of the seventh century, had followed the same track, or that the famous Dragon Lake, the central point of Jambu-dwipa, and the holiest spot in the whole Buddhist cosmogony, which he had assigned to this region, was really to be identified on the line between Kashgar and Shignán. Mr. Ney Elias's journey has thrown an unexpected light on this subject. We now find that the Rang-Kul, which occurs at the seventh stage from the eastern border of the Pámír Plateau, and which, with the exception of the great Kara-Kul Lake, lying far away to the northward, is the largest expanse of water throughout this mountain region, answers very closely to the description of the Buddhist pilgrim. The Si-yu-ki says that the soil is impregnated with salt, yet that the waters of the lake are sweet. Mr. Ney Elias found that the banks of the lake were covered with efflorescent and incrustated salts, while the water was considered to be fresh. The colour is stated by both authorities to be a deep clear blue, and the multitude of wild fowl which cover its surface and swarm around its banks, attracted the special notice, both of the older and

* 'Proceedings R.G.S.,' vol. vi. p. 502.

more modern travellers. But the most curious proof of identity is to be found in the Dragon myth which attached to the lake. The Buddhists of Central Asia, confounding this northern basin with the Mánasarowar Lake of Tibet, gave it the mystical name of Anava (or Anavatatta) and supposed it to be presided over by a dragon, whence the title of Nagahrada or Rávanahráda; and Mr. Ney Elias was able to trace the same belief among the Kirghiz of Rang-Kul at the present time. The following extract from his report will show, indeed, that the Dragon King reigns supreme in Pámír to-day, just as he did in the time of Hwang-Tsang, or perhaps 1000 years previously.

"In following the track down the south shore of the Rang-Kul a rock or cliff is passed, standing about 100 yards from the water's edge, and presenting a sheer front of about 100 feet in height towards the lake. This is called the Cherágh-Tásh, or "lamp rock," famous over these regions for a light which always burns in a cave, near the top of the cliff, and is the object of a good deal of superstitious awe on the part of all Kirghiz, Shignis, and others who know the locality. To all appearance a steady white flame burns within the cave, but even with a powerful field-glass I could make out nothing more. My impression was that there must be some phosphorescent substance far back in the cave, but this, I was assured, was quite an erroneous view, the real fact being that vast treasures are stored in it, which are guarded by a dragon with a large diamond set in his forehead, and it is this diamond which shines by day and night. The cliff did not appear difficult to scale, but no native of these parts would ever venture to pry so closely into the secret of the light as to attempt to enter the cave."

In the real Buddhist cosmogony the four rivers of Paradise are supposed to issue from the Dragon Lake, but Hwang-Tsang merely notices the two principal streams, the Sita to the east and the Po-tson or Oxus to the west, and of these it is in reality only the western outlet which by an underground course of nine miles is said to communicate with the Ak-Beitál, and thus to fall into the Murghábi, which joins the Penj at Wamár, on the confines, as Hwang-Tsang says, of Ta-mo-si-tie-ti, or Darwáz. His derivation of the Sita or Kashgar river from an eastern opening in the lake, as well as the enormous dimensions which he gives to the lake (three days' journey from east to west, and five days' journey from north to south), are due to the usual proneness of Orientals to exaggeration, but do not affect the general accuracy of his notice.

I may add that Mr. Ney Elias, in two positions, on the Little Kara Kul and the Yeshil Kul, discovered memorials of the passage of the Chinese troops, who in 1759 pursued the fugitive Khojas as far as the latter point in their flight to Badakhshan, and also found a Persian inscription in Shignán, said to be 600 years old, relating to a local boundary. The improvements which his survey operations introduce into the map of Pámír, as laid down by recent Russian topographers,

are important, but cannot be duly appreciated or discussed until the Government of India finds it in conformity with the public interests to publish Mr. Ney Elias's Report for general information.

Explorations in South-Eastern New Guinea.

By REV. J. CHALMERS.

(Read at the Evening Meeting, January 17th, 1887.)

Map, p. 140.

To a Fellow of this Society, the Rev. W. G. Lawes, belongs the high honour, I think, of being called the father of New Guinea travel. Before him little had been done in penetrating into the interior of the island, and no name has been more used by after travellers, as a password to known and unknown tribes, than that of "Misi Lao," the well-known missionary. My first travel began with his influence and the frequent use of his name, and through him my first tramp was made easy by the confidence natives had in him. Under this influence they accompanied us as far as white man had then got.

You will forgive me if I run hurriedly over my first travels before giving a detailed account of a trip I made two years ago to the district around Bald Head.

I first landed in New Guinea in 1877, but it was not until 1878 that I began my travels in unknown regions. I am a missionary of the London Missionary Society, and as such, in carrying out the wishes of the Directors, it fell to my lot to seek for healthy localities for the settlement of native teachers. These native Christian teachers with their wives were introduced from the South Sea Islands. They are the true pioneers in New Guinea, and to them travellers of all kinds, scientists, and explorers, as well as Christian missionaries, owe much. Permit me to say that these South Sea Islands teachers must be credited with the greater part of the success attending the peaceable proclamation of the British Protectorate; and the gallant commodore, whose high honour it was to proclaim that protectorate, thoroughly recognised this fact. Since then, the late Major-General Sir Peter Scratchley again and again said to me how much he wished he could get such men and women to assist him. They are, though Polynesians, true Britons to the backbone, and swear by Queen Victoria and her officers; and wherever they go the Queen is one of their great subjects of conversation, a kind of fairy tale, with which to charm; and often have I seen uncouth savages listen with starting eyes and open mouth when "Victoria's" greatness and goodness have been told.

In the beginning of 1878, my wife and I, on board the mission steamer *Ellengowan*, visited the whole coast from China Straits to Hall