

Aornos.—By Lt.-Col. J. ABBOTT.

In the Asiatic Society's Journal No. 1 of 1863 I have lately perused an interesting paper by the Rev. I. Loewenthal upon the antiquities of the Peshawur district, of which I hope to see many more numbers. My object in noticing it at present, is less to support my own theory regarding the site of Aornos, which does not appear to me to be shaken, than to invite attention generally to the subject and others connected with the footsteps of the Greeks; whose coins and sculpture abound in all old sites of the Peshawur district and in a large number of those between the Jelum and Atuk. Not only is this ground classical to us Europeans; it is also the classical soil of the Hindoo—the Eusufzye and the valley of Sohaut containing many of the old sites spoken of in the heroic poems of that race.

At page 13 of Mr. Loewenthal's essay he calls in question the locality I have assigned for Aornos, upon the verdict of some great Military authority (unknown) because "the Mahabunn commands nothing, and is so much out of the way, that it could hardly ever have been a place of refuge for the people of the plains, and if it had been, a general like Alexander would not have wasted his time on the reduction of an isolated hill which was by no means impeding his passage to the Indus."

Now at first sight all this may appear to be sound argument. It is only when we find that not a single position agrees with fact, that we regret the rashness of great Military authorities, in deciding, without investigation, questions so perplexing as this.

First, it is stated, that the Mahabunn commands nothing.

I answer, that it commands the liberties of the most warlike of the tribes in the Peshawur valley; the Aspasioi, or Asupzye, as they still term themselves. So long as Aornos was free, the Aspasioi could not be conquered. And as long as the Mahabunn is free, the Asupzye can never be subdued. Their villages may be occupied at great expense by armed garrisons: but sooner or later those garrisons will be cut off, and the people will reassert their freedom. It was this certainty, (in all probability,) which led Hercules four thousand years ago to assail Aornos. And it was possibly the same assurance, that, (after an interval of 2000 years,) conspiring with his emulation of the heroes of antiquity, prompted Alexander to the same undertaking with better success.

Secondly, it is asserted that the Mahabunn "is too far out of the way to have been a refuge to the people of the plains." But this is contrary to fact; for the Mahabunn, which includes a vast tract of forest-belted mountain, ever has been, as it still is, and always must be, the retreat to which the Aspasioi (Asupzye) when invaded, drive their flocks and herds and carry their women and children: its very distance, (to an invader, for it is not very distant for them) forming one of the especial reasons for its selection. Not only did Hercules and Alexander (if the Mahabunn be Aornos) find it necessary to assail this stupendous mountain, but Nadir Shah himself could not reduce the Eusufye to submission, until he had crowned the summit with his army. Hercules (we learn from Curtius and Diodoros) made earthquakes and heavenly portents his plea for abandoning the siege. His real reason, probably, was that, less provident than the son of Philip, he found his supplies cut off and the prosecution of the siege impossible. It is *because* the Mahabunn is the immemorial retreat of the Aspasioi of the plains when overmatched, that I was first led to enquire whether it might not be Aornos.

Thirdly, it is objected, that "had the Mahabunn been the refuge of the people of the plains, a General like Alexander would not have wasted his time on the reduction of an isolated hill, which was by no means impeding his passage to the Indus."

Had it been said "a General like Napoleon or Wellington or Marlborough," the rashness of this remark had been less obvious. But Alexander differed from all other great generals in this, that his love of conquest was rivalled by his ambition to excel the heroes and demigods of antiquity. Neither Napoleon nor Marlborough nor Wellington, probably, would have headed the forlorn hope in storming like a common grenadier a mud-walled town, which any of his Captains could have reduced in a week. Yet we are obliged to believe that Alexander did this; nor can we well believe that he attacked Aornos, without crediting what all his biographers assign as his reason, that it had resisted three assaults of Hercules. We must, moreover, remember that Alexander was already in possession of the Ferry of the Indus. He awaited the construction of boats, of which the timber* must be

* Ἐπει δὲ καὶ ὅλη ἔργασίμω ἐπέτυχε παρὰ τὸν ποταμὸν, καὶ ἔστη ἕκαστ' ἀπὸ ὑπὸ τῆς στρατιᾶς καὶ ναῦς ἐποίησαν. Arrian iv. 30.

felled in the Mahabunn, ere he could cross. He was not, therefore (as our great Military authority supposed,) in any hurry to approach the Indus ; but was steadily conquering the country of the Asufzye and the valley of Swat, conquering in order to retain possession, not merely to ravage and destroy. So that although it might have flattered his pride to dispute with Hercules the prize of valour, it was quite reconcileable with his prudence to reduce *that* stronghold, without which the Asupzye could never be effectually subdued.

Unless greatly mistaken, we have fully answered all the objections of the unknown Military authority. We now come to Mr. Loewenthal's reasons for thinking that the castle of Hodi near Atuk on the farther brink of the Indus is the veritable Aornos.

The unknown authority already quoted goes on to say, "The hill above Khyrabad is not only a most conspicuous point for friend and foe, but also one that must be taken before a passage of the Indus at Atuk would be attempted by an invading force."

The castle of Hodi is conspicuous enough ; it occupies the summit of a hill about 600 feet high, standing on the river's brink about a mile below the crossing. But as, according to Mr. Loewenthal's account, it could be entered only from the river side, a very small force would have sufficed to keep its garrison prisoners to their castle. And I must deny that any garrison, armed with spear, sword, shield, bow and arrow, could have impeded the crossing of such an army as Alexander's from Hodi's castle. Supposing, however, that this castle was then in existence, (of which there is not the slightest probability,) and that the Asupzye had fled thither from Bazira, Ora and the rest of the cities of the plains, Alexander might probably have deputed Ptolemy or one of his other Captains to reduce it. But we can see nothing in the castle itself, nor in the paltry hill on which it stands, to justify either the repulse of Hercules or the ambition of Alexander to be its captor.

The next supposed point of resemblance is its name. Its veritable name is Raja Hodi ki killa, the castle of Raja Hodi, and it has no other. But as Atuk is often called Benares Atuk, just as Chuch is called Chuch Benares, Mr. Loewenthal assumes that Raja Hodi's castle may have been called Benares, in order that it may be reduced, first to Varanas and from thence to Aornos. We think that such a chain of suppositions will scarcely answer to identify the contemptible hill

in question with the magnificent mountain described as Aornos. That the ancient name of the purgunna or tract on which Atuk rests was Benares is probable enough; but it seems to me that this Benares (whether city or tract) must have been on the same side of the river as Chuch, which to this day is called Chuch Benares. For the breadth of the Indus there, (upwards of two miles,) completely severs Chuch from the Eusufzye, and when Alexander visited them, he found them subject to two distinct sovereigns.

The name is variously pronounced as Bunnarr, Bunares, Bunass, the latter signifying "destruction."

We think it may serve an important end in the elucidation of this knotty question to record all the different accounts now extant of Aornos. Persons who do not possess the ancient authors treating upon the subject, may then visit the various possible sites and judge for themselves which was the tremendous rock that repulsed three attacks of Hercules, the greatest General of his age.

To begin with Arrian, who, in spite of Mr. Loewenthal's disparaging remarks, has left us one of the most succinct and detailed accounts ever penned, of this campaign, Aornos was a table mountain 14 miles in circuit at base, 4125 feet in height, extremely steep, having abundant water at the summit and numerous welling springs, plenty of wood, and soil for 1000 ploughs (should it be tilled). It was the refuge of all the cities of the plains, but especially of Bazira (Bajra) and Ora, (perhaps Ooud or Owra). The ascent to it was from Umb, Balima, (sites retaining this name at the foot of the Mahabunn). Although so steep, Alexander led up it a squadron of the companion horse, 20 mounted archers and his engines of war. Though the rock held by the enemy was so lofty, yet the mountain had still higher ground, which Ptolemy got possession of by the aid of a spy, attacking thence the enemy in rear. Alexander met none but natural obstacles, until he had ascended the mountain after 6 days' toil and incessant hand-to-hand combat. He then apparently reached a table summit, having soil, in which he dug his trench and raised his parapet of approach. Near the rock was a mound of equal height, which the Macedonians carried by assault. After which the garrison lost heart, and when Alexander withdrew his pickets, vacated the place by night. The rock on the table summit must of course have had parapets, or the enemy could not have held it an hour after Alexander's attainment of the table summit. But it was

not in itself very formidable, for Alexander and his companions scrambled up it without waiting for ladders.

This is the account of Arrian, generally the most faithful of historians. It has all the appearance of having been copied from the journal of an eye-witness : perhaps Ptolemy, perhaps Beton, Alexander's quartermaster, whose journal was published. According to him the difficulty of the enterprize was the exceeding courage of the defenders opposing Alexander on a very steep acclivity, which he was 6 days in surmounting. But walls or ditches are no where mentioned. The fidelity of the people in concealing from him the path by which such a wilderness of mountain might be safely entered, was amongst the foremost difficulties. A foreigner who had long resided there was his guide, bribed by a large sum* of money. This is Arrian's account, and should any one have to attack the Mahabunn, Arrian would serve him as a guide step by step.

We next come to Strabo's very meagre notice of Aornos. "Alexander had taken, in the first assault, a certain rock called Aornos, whose roots the Indus, not far from its springs, washes."

Next follows Curtius, whose account is so diametrically opposite to that of Arrian, that it is necessary to choose the one and reject the other. I am not singular in siding with Arrian, whose detailed narrative is as sober as Curtius' is wild and inflated. Curtius describes the rock Aornos as having the figure of a goal, terminating above in a sharp pinnacle, its roots being entered by the river Indus, scarped on both sides by lofty rocks. On the other hand were interposed gulfs and quagmires, which Alexander filled, by felling and casting in a forest; a work of 7 days. The assailants who were repulsed, fell into the Indus, as the garrison rolled down upon them rocky fragments. The repulse was signal, but as Alexander showed no symptom of abandoning the siege, the Indians after a while evacuated the rock. This rock was near Ora and one march from Ek-bolima, beyond which was a defile : after which he reached the Indus in 16 marches, and found all prepared for crossing.

No mention is made of walls to this Fort. In fact, supposing it to have had the figure of a Roman goal as above described, walls had been utterly superfluous, and its name of Aornos had been well deserved.

* 80 Talents.

Diodoros' account is as follows. Aornos was the refuge of the people of the plains. (The loss of a portion of the narrative prevents our knowing the names of the cities from which the garrison had fled.) It was excessively steep; and Hercules had desisted from the siege, owing to earthquakes and heavenly portents. This rock had a circuit of $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles, an elevation of 10,560 feet and its surface was every where smooth and taper; being washed at the South by the river Indus. Elsewhere it was girt with deep ravines and was difficult with precipices. A foreigner of destitute circumstances led him to a post which gave him the upper hand of the garrison, and commanded its only outlet. Alexander therefore, having blockaded the rock, filled with earth its chasm and roots and pressed the siege incessantly 7 days and 7 nights: when, conjecturing that the garrison had lost heart, he withdrew his guard from the outlet, and the barbarians evacuated the rock by night.

Several points in this account agree with that of Curtius, who probably took much of his narrative from Diodoros. All three agree in one fact, however they may differ in others; viz. that Aornos was fortified by nature alone and not by human art. Whatever therefore the site to be considered, it must be one, almost impregnable by nature if well defended, and destitute of artificial defences, excepting of course that rude parapet of loose stones or earth, which barbarous nations from the earliest days have employed. Diodoros makes no mention of the assailants being hurled into the Indus. This appears to be a pure invention of Curtius, deduced from the fact that the Indus washes the roots of the mountain. Arrian's and Diodoros's accounts do not differ very materially, if we consider the six days' ascent of the mountain (so circumstantially described by Arrian,) and the ambush of Ptolemy to be embraced by Diodoros in his brief statement, that a foreigner for reward led Alexander where he commanded the only access to the rock. To Curtius, generalship was nothing: courage and dash every thing. The mountain up which Alexander, with consummate skill, fought step by step for six days, was far too prosaic for his page. He makes it rise out of the river like a Roman goal and then he makes Alexander fell forests to build a ramp up to the summit. All of a sudden we stumble upon Diodoros, who estimates its perpendicular height at 10,000 feet or 2 miles; and then we wonder whence forests could be had sufficient for the work, or hands to fell and pile them up in six days.

We know of no other ancient accounts of Aornos beside those just now quoted. When Plutarch wrote, there were 16 different histories of Alexander's exploits, every one of which has perished. Plutarch himself offers no account of this siege, excepting the words of encouragement which Alexander offered to a leader of one of the storming parties of his own name. We have therefore, I believe, collated together all that is authentic relating to Aornos.

From these it appears that in our search for Aornos the following particulars must absolutely be borne in mind ; two of the three authorities agreeing together in all.

That Aornos was on the right bank of the Indus, near the cities Masaga, Oora, Bazira and Em-bolima.

That it was the place of refuge of the dense population of the plains, including that of the cities aforesaid.

That its defences were not artificial but natural.

That its perpendicular height was very considerable, being rated by one historian at 10,000 feet, by the other at 4,000.

That it abounded in forest.

That, high as stood the rock itself, the mountain which it crowned had yet higher ground.

That when the mountain summit had been won, and the rock confronted, the extraordinary danger to the besiegers was past.

Now, in considering Hodi's hill,—if it be the Aornos we are seeking, all the fortifications which now render it formidable must have been built since Alexander's day ; and therefore we must imagine the hill stript of them before asking whether this be Aornos. Would Mr. Loewenthal really believe that one born and nurtured amongst the wild mountains of Macedonia, who had stormed Tyre, carried some tremendous natural strongholds in Bactria and in the Buktari mountains, and had just crossed twice the Hindu Koosh, with all his engines of war, would have felt much piqued by the fame of a hill some six or seven hundred feet high, little differing from thousands around him,—a hill, too, which from the river side at least (for I have a faithful sketch of it from Attok) is perfectly accessible from base to summit.

If this hill be Aornos, we have also to discover south of the Loondi or Cabul river, sites answering to the cities Bazira, Oora, Masaga and Embolima. For fugitives from the Eusufzye could not have fled to

the hill of Hodi's castle ; being intercepted by the strong column under Craterus, marching from Peshawur direct to Atuk, to prepare boats for the transit across the Indus. This column, on its way, took and fortified the city Orobatis on the Northern side of the Loondi. This city I discovered in ruins, under the name Arabutt. The sites Bajra, Ooria, Moosagurh, Umb-balimah near the roots of Mahabunn answer well to the sites that must be found near Aornos, but I have heard of none such being discovered* near Atuk.

Thus then stands the case, Raja Hodi's hill is recommended as being near the main ferry of the Indus, and on the river's brink where scarp'd with abrupt rocks, although no man struck down in ascending it, could possibly fall into the Indus as Curtius supposes they fell from Aornos.

It is liable to objection, as not being near Embolima, Oora, Bazira, or Massaga. As not being suited to shelter the people of the plains or their cattle, having no grass and little water, and being within an hour's march of the main road. Its only known name cannot by any ingenuity be converted into Aornos. It does not in the slightest degree resemble a Roman goal, being perfectly accessible from base to summit on the river face. Its height is not a fourth of that reckoned by Arrian, nor a tenth of the height assigned to Aornos by Diodorus. Being visible from base to summit from Atuk, Alexander could never have required a guide at an expenditure of 80 talents, to show him the road up. It has at summit no ground on which the 220 Horse which accompanied Alexander up Aornos could act. Nor can we imagine any reason why it should be called the Rock, being no more formidable, no *less* accessible than thousands of scrubby hills of like figure scattered all over Asia.

When (according to Arrian,) the fortified hill city Bazira had been evacuated by its defenders, who fled with others of the plains for refuge to Aornos, and when Alexander, fired with emulation of his great ancestor Hercules, had determined upon attacking that rock; he established garrisons in the cities Ora and Massaga, and secured with a wall the city Bazira. Meanwhile Hephaistioon and Perdikkas, whom he had despatched from Nikaia, (Jullalabad,) direct to Peshawur and the river Indus, walled and garrisoned Orobatis (Arabutt on north bank of Loondi) and reached the Indus to prepare boats for

* There is a Bazaar, not very far from the Loondi river, but it is on a flat and Bajira was built on a hill, &c.

the passage across. Alexander, who had come through the country of the Aspasioi (Issupzye) and Gouraioi and Assakanoi,* (people of Punjgour and Swaut,) to Bazira, leaving this town, and subduing some others on the Indus, came to Embolima at the foot of Aornos.

Had Alexander marched towards Atuk where Hodi's hill is sited, he had not sent half his army† with Hephaistioon and Perdikkas, as he would have been himself close in rear to support them. But he had gone through the countries of the Punjgour, the Assazye and Asup or Issupzye, and rejoined Hephaistioon after the siege of Aornos by a march of‡ 16 stages: proving manifestly that Aornos was no where near the crossing of the Indus.

Were Raja Hodi's hill, when divested of its fortifications, a stronghold calculated to have thrice foiled the greatest General of his age, and to be regarded as the greatest capture of Alexander; it would be time enough I think, to enquire whether its name had ever been Benares or any thing else convertible by etymologists into Aornos.

Mountains quite worthy of Hercules and of Alexander overshadow the Indus above the plain of the Aspasioi. Whether Mount Wunj (Aonj) the most difficult of these, and which, according to tradition, was not violated even by Alexander, be Aornos, or whether it be the Mahabunn, which more exactly suits Arrian's description, I must leave to be determined by after research. In the case of the Mahabunn the name alone differs. Its title of "The Rock" it well deserves, as seen from the river side, being scarped by tremendous precipices at summit: and its name of "Mahabunn" or the mighty forest, may very possibly be a corruption of "Mahabutt," the mighty rock; even as we know from Jehangir's autobiography, the neighbouring mountain of Gundgurh, to have been called in his day§ Gurrjgurh or "the house of Thunder," and Huzara to have been called "Abisara."

Persons who first visit Atuk, look up at once to Hodi's castle and if they have not Arrian beside them, naturally ask, may not that be Aornos? But after considering the contemptible nature of the hill,

* Assakanoi are no doubt the Assazye or sons of Assa who inhabit Swaut.

† εχοντας την τε Γοργίου ταξιν και Κλειτου και Μελεαγρου και των εταιρων ιππων τους ημισεας, και τους μισθοφορους ιππεις συμπαντας. Arrian iv. 22.

‡ Inde processit Ekbolima, &c. Hinc ad flumen Indum sextis decimis castris pervenit. Curtius VIII. 12, i. e., to the crossing of the Indus. For he had just descended Aornos which is on the Indus.

§ From the thunderous sound which seems at times to proceed from its summit, but is probably the reflection of a sound generated high up in the river channel.

and comparing it with the stupendous mountains overshadowing the Indus, forty miles higher, they wonder that they should ever have entertained the idea.

Those who would wish to see the subject discussed at length, I beg to refer to my paper in the XXIII Vol. of the Asiatic Society's Journal, entitled "Gradus ad Aornos."*

I beg to take this opportunity of correcting the following note which occurs in the paper aforesaid. It relates to my rendering of a passage of Curtius.

"*Note.* This passage 'Hanc (i. e. petram) ab Hercule frustra obsessam esse, terræque motu coactum absistere fama vulgaverat' is obscure: the word *coactum* agreeing neither with *Hercule*, nor with *petram*. I would suggest its being read '*coactam*,' which reconciles the difficulty: and after consideration I have adopted this reading. Our respect for *Hercules* would not improve, could we think him one to have been terrified by an earthquake."

When the above was written I had not consulted *Diodoros*, which now lies before me. He repeats the tradition in better grammar.

λέγεται γὰρ τον παλαιὸν Ἡρακλέα ταύτην τὴν πέτραν ἐπιβαλόντων πολιορκεῖν ἀποστῆναι διὰ τινος ἐπιγενομένου μεγάλου σεισμοῦ καὶ διοσημείας. Lib. XVII. πε.

Now *Hercules* might have been a very stout fellow and have knocked out other men's brains without boasting any of his own. But he could not have been the great conqueror which his deeds attest, had not his wit been in proportion to his strength and courage. We think he was far too shrewd a fellow to be outwitted or bullied by an earthquake. And therefore, if he made this his plea for raising the siege of *Aornos*, it was, in all probability, because his supplies had been cut off, (an easy matter in the *Mahabunn*), and he was ashamed to own his improvidence. *Alexander*, (see *Arrian*), did not attempt the siege until he had appointed *Krateros* to collect corn for the army into the town *Embolima*.

Of the name *Aornos*, I do not think it certain, as does *Mr. Loewenthal*, that it is Sanscrit. It was the second rock of that name and description which *Alexander* had taken: the first being in *Bactria* beyond the *Hindoo Koosh* and out of reach of the Sanscrit tongue. Its meaning in Greek is "unwinged" as if challeng-

[* The map there given will be found useful for the present article.—Ed.]

ing all unwinged things. If, however, it be not Greek, it is not necessarily Sanscrit, for we have undoubted proof that the Pushtoo language was in use at that time in that region, and that the Afghan race held the region to which Aornos appertains. It might therefore be either a Pushtoo, or a Sanscrit, or an Aboriginal, or a Persian word.

There are several Hindi names of Forts which would have been rendered by the Greeks Aornos,—Urniya or the unapproachable, Woorna, Awur, Aonj or Wunj. The first of these, (now called Kotta,) stands at Umb Balimah (Embolimah,) and so overhangs the Indus on its eastern face, that water is ordinarily drawn up from the Indus by the garrison. But this rock, like Hodi's hill, is too contemptible to be the Aornos of history.

When first I approached the Indus at Torbaila, I felt that I was in presence of the veritable Aornos. And on discovering that the mountain rising like a green wall to the height of 3000 feet above the water, bore the name of Wunj or Aonj which the Greeks would have written Aornos, I deemed it almost certain that this particular rock was the stronghold in request. It was only when I learnt that Mount Aonj has no arable land and little water, so that although quite inaccessible against sudden invasion, it cannot hold out long; and that the Mahabunn, which has abundance of water, grass, firewood and arable land, is the ordinary refuge of the Eusufzyes of the plains with their families and cattle, that I was obliged to prefer the Mahabunn, a spur of which falls sheer into the Indus.

The Mahabunn itself, however, is invisible from the western brink of the Indus, being concealed behind Mount Aonj. The Greeks therefore might easily have confounded the two and have thought they were ascending the mountain pointed out to them as Aonj or Aornos.

From the junction of the Burrendor torrent (flowing out of Boonair) with the Indus, down to Atuk, the river margin has been most carefully searched, but although it seems improbable that Aornos should be below Atuk, this should not be left in doubt. The river's bank should be explored, as opportunity offers, down to Neeláb at least, bearing in mind that it is not a castle we must seek for, but a stupendous rock or mountain to which the people of the plains flee for refuge.

It is difficult to understand why Mr. Loewenthal supposes the author of the "Gradus ad Aornon" to have followed Curtius rather

than Arrian, in spite of the contrary assurance, given at the outset of that paper and carefully maintained throughout.

Although ourselves satisfied that the Mahabunn is the Aornos of history, we think the question quite open to discussion. We believe that the epithet of "rock" given to what Arrian's account clearly defines to have been an immense table mountain, has been the great difficulty hitherto in the search. Curtius' imagination immediately depicted it, as an obelisk of rock rising out of the Indus: and being more popular than Arrian, he has led many astray. But Arrian's account so distinctly lays down which part of the river to search for Aornos, viz., the neighbourhood of Umb Balimah, Bajra, Oora and Moosagurh, that the mountain in their neighbourhood forming the ordinary refuge of the Eusufzye, abounding in springs, grass, wood, and arable land, must needs be Aornos. And excepting the Mahabunn, which can turn out 12,000 matchlockmen, there is no such mountain on the right bank of the Indus.

Hitherto no British traveller has passed up the Indus higher than Umb, and to search higher for Aornos would be to no purpose, because no mountain higher up could have been the refuge of the Asuprye. But in cross-questioning native travellers, I discovered that there exists a white rock, (perhaps of milky quartz) on the right bank of the Indus, in the river basin, about fifty miles above Umb, called to this day "Tehitta Butt Kephale Bous." The first two words in the Punjaub dialect signifying "the white rock" and the two latter being manifestly Greek, signifying the "Bull's Head," which was also the name of Alexander's celebrated charger. So far as I can learn, there is no longer any carving on the rock; but it seems not improbable that there may have been a basso-relievo of Boukephalon in former days. The bigotry of the Muhummadans causes them to deface all sculptured figures of men or animals. It is the only instance I have discovered of a Greek name in a country abounding in coins bearing Greek Inscriptions. I mention this not as connected with Aornos but in order that it may be borne in mind by persons making enquiries in that corner of the Punjaub. During the eight years I was employed in Huzara, I was too much overworked to take even one week's leave of absence for the purpose of exploring.
