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Three Years' Exploration in Central Asia, 1899-1902: Discussion

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After that we skirted along the northern shore of Panggong-tso. This lake formerly belonged to the basin of the Indus, but is now cut off and divided from it by a low pass, which acts as a threshold. Consequently its water is at the present time slightly saline, and the lake free from ice. Its fresh-water molluscs are on the high-road to extinction. Its former beach-lines are, however, wonderfully well defined.

On the frontier of Ladak we found a large relief caravan, sent from Leh to meet us, and here the last of our Tibetan escort turned back home, after having performed their mission in a more than satisfactory way. Then, with two of the Cossacks to bear me company, I pushed on to Leh by forced marches over the passes of Dugub and Jimreh. The temple of Jimreh stands on a shelf, or high cliff, overlooking the valley of the Indus. Here the lamas had no secrets to preserve, but showed me everything, and even took me into the very holiest nooks of their shrines.

I spent my Christmas with the hospitable Herrnhut missionaries in Leh, and on January 1 I was on the road to Calcutta, in response to an invitation from Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, whose acquaintance I made several years ago. This meant a journey of over 260 miles on horseback to Srinagar in Kashmir, and of another 200 by rail to Rawal Pindi. It was a hard ride, being the depth of winter, and led over the pass of Zoji-la, which is always dangerous, and at that season of the year generally quite impassable. My only companion was the Cossack Shagdur. We crossed the pass on foot, and all went well. The danger lies in the fact that the road leads through a sort of gorge, which is apt to be partly choked with falling avalanches. The tramp through the pass took us four days, and I had a hundred coolies to carry my baggage. It is really a great wonder we came out alive, considering how many of the native Ladakis lose their lives on this pass every year. Fortunately we managed to get over before it was definitely closed by the snow. When I returned from India the gorge contained a far greater quantity of snow. Then from Leh I journeyed on over the nasty pass of Kara-korum, some 19,200 feet above sea-level, where Dagleish was murdered some years ago, and then struck down to Yarkand and Kashgar. Arrived there, I dissolved what remained of my caravan, and its members, Christian, Buddhist, and Mussulman, scattered to the four winds, each to his home in various parts of Europe and Asia.

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Before the paper the PRESIDENT said: We have amongst us this evening our old friend and colleague, Dr. Sven Hedin. It is now five years since he was with us, and during that time he has done an amount of work as a traveller by which he has equalled himself—we cannot say more than that—in his former expedition, for which he received the Royal gold medal of our Society. But I consider that he has done much more than that. He has shown himself to be a scientific geographer of the very highest merit—as a linguist, an observer, and a historian. Our Council this

afternoon has considered the very great merits of Dr. Sven Hedin, and has decided to award him at once our Victoria medal instituted for the highest record in geographical research. I am glad to be able to announce this to Dr. Sven Hedin and to the meeting. I will say no more now, but will call upon Dr. Sven Hedin to address the meeting.

Dr. SVEN HEDIN: I have to begin by expressing my deep and sincere thanks for the very kind words which Sir Clements Markham has addressed to me, and for the great honour I am receiving in the Victoria medal, of which I am very proud, and of which I will try to be worthy in the future. I think it a great honour, also, to be invited to the Royal Geographical Society to address you once more; and I am very glad to hear Sir Clements Markham call me an old friend. I feel as an old friend here; not as a foreigner, but as an old colleague of the Royal Geographical Society. I have been in Central Asia for several years—it is a long time. I have not had much practice with your beautiful and charming language. If I am not able, during the description of my journey, to find the right words in the right places, perhaps somebody will help me, so that you may know what I mean. It is certainly not possible to give a detailed description of a journey which has taken three years and three days in an hour and a half; and I shall not be able to give the contents of the paper which is to be published in one of the next numbers of the *Journal*. I may tell you that I am writing a book about the journey, and this book will be published next year. The scientific results will be published three or four years afterwards.

Dr. Sven Hedin then proceeded to give a *résumé* of his paper, illustrated by over a hundred lantern-slides.

After the lecture, the PRESIDENT called upon Prince Kropotkin to speak.

PRINCE KROPOTKIN: It gives me great pleasure to comply with Sir Clements Markham's request to speak on the description of the journey which was made by Dr. Hedin in Central Asia. I can only say that I am delighted to add my voice to the many voices of praise which Dr. Sven Hedin must have heard all over Europe—viz. in Russia (where he lectured in Russian before a very large audience); in Germany; in his own mother country; and at last in England. This journey covered certainly ground that had been explored to a very great extent by Russian, French, and English travellers, and the journey which he undertook for reaching Lhasa he could not continue till its end. Like all other explorers, he was compelled, when he was almost, so to say, in sight of Lhasa, to return; whereupon he took the route to Ladakh, which had been followed once by Littledale. But the interest of his journey has not been lessened by the fact that he did not reach Lhasa. He was but a very few days' journey from that capital of Tibet, and he had crossed, during his attempts to penetrate as far as this capital, the most interesting parts of Northern Tibet. He crossed the great border ridge, Altyn-tagh, and also those immense chains of mountains where we find, as he remarks, almost the highest mountains of the world, at least as high as the Himalayas. Very probably Sven Hedin will change the direction of these mountains, which are shown on this large map (of the German General Staff) running west and east, and his surveys will surely very much alter the whole aspect of the country represented on this map. They will surely show to us that the mountains are running in directions from the north-west to the south-east, and when his determinations of altitudes are calculated, we shall see what tremendous plateaus he had to cross between the border range and the spot where he was turned back. As to his levelling in the Lob-nor desert, and the archaeological discoveries which he has made in the country of Lob-nor, they will certainly throw new light on the changes which have been going on in the basin of this great Central

Asian lake. With regard to Lob-nor, I will permit myself to remark that I do not think that the lake Kara Koshun—that is, the Lob-nor of Prjevalsky—can be considered as anything else but the present remainder from the great lake Lob-nor. But what appears to me almost quite certain, after Sven Hedin's surveys, levellings, and discoveries, is that there was first a time when Lake Lob-nor covered the whole of the triangular space which is limited on the west by the southward course of the Tarim, on the south-east by the Lake Kara Koshun, and on the north-east by the escarpment of the Kuruk-tagh, which runs in a north-west to south-east direction. The place of the Sixty Springs, Altimish-bulak, which had been visited previously by the Russian explorers, and lies, according to their determinations, at an altitude of 3600 feet, stands on the border of the escarpment, and the triangular space between the escarpment, the Tarim river, and the plains which spread at the foot of the Altyn-tagh, must have been occupied some time by a large basin, upon the shores of which stood that spot of the Lau-lan region, in which Dr. Hedin has found such interesting manuscripts. Later on, the lake occupied the eastern part only of that triangular basin; and now the Lake Kara Koshun, or the Lob-nor of Prjevalsky, represents the southern trough of that depression, which continues still to be occupied by what has survived of the Lob-nor. At any rate, when the full reports and the levellings of Dr. Hedin are published, and the whole region is better explored, it will certainly appear that within this triangular depression ("Lob Nor desert" on Stieler's Atlas map) the lake was changing its position in proportion as it decreased, and it may change it several times more before the general desiccation of Central Asia, which is going on at great speed, will finally move the Tarim lake further south-westwards to meet the Cherchen, and finally reduce what will remain of the Lob-nor to the little lake Kara buran, which we see at the junction of the Yarkand-daria with the Cherchen. The journeys which Sven Hedin has made are certainly an event in the exploration of Central Asia; and we must only congratulate him, and express to him our warmest thanks, and the thanks of all the geographers of the world, for the remarkable journeys which he has made, for the accuracy of the description which he has given, and for the mass of information which we can expect from the publication of the full scientific report of this journey, and which will even surpass what we have found in the reports of his former journey published a few years ago.

The PRESIDENT: There are several other authorities present who might have addressed the meeting, but it is too late, I am afraid, to continue the discussion; therefore it only remains for us to acknowledge to Dr. Sven Hedin the great pleasure that we have derived from his admirable descriptions of the country he has traversed. He has, however, given us no adequate idea of the perils and hardships through which he went in collecting this information; nor has he given us any adequate idea of the diligence and care with which, day by day, he mapped the country and took regular and most valuable observations. He did not mention whether he suffered from being at great heights. I now gather from him that he never felt the sickness often experienced in the ascent of mountains. I asked him because I have just received a letter from Mr. Douglas Freshfield, who maintains that this feeling of sickness at great heights differs with individuals in the same way as sea-sickness differs with individuals. While some suffer very seriously, others at heights up to 20,000 feet do not feel the sickness at all. I gather from Dr. Sven Hedin that he is one of those who never suffered at all at great heights. Prince Kropotkin has so fully described to you the great importance of the work that has been done by Dr. Sven Hedin, that it is only necessary to allude to his discovery of ruins, and of the interesting manuscripts that were found in them; and to the care he took in levelling on the plain where the great lake once existed, to show you the vast geographical

and historical importance of the work that he has done. And those are only two instances out of many. I am sure, therefore, that the meeting will unanimously pass a vote of thanks to Dr. Sven Hedin for his most interesting communication.

Dr. SVEN HEDIN: I may once more express my hearty thanks for the great kindness shown to me this evening by the Council of the Royal Geographical Society, for the great honour bestowed upon me in the Victoria medal, which will be a great and precious souvenir of this evening. And I am very glad, also, to have almost heard how silent it has been in the hall during my lecture. I have got encouragement in the silence and the attention of the audience, and that is a most agreeable feeling for a lecturer. I hope I shall be able in the future to give more details about this journey. It was a very poor and short description I could give you now. I am very glad and happy to hear the kind and eloquent words addressed to me to-day by Sir Clements Markham, and the extremely kind opinion by Prince Kropotkin. I shall be very glad from this evening to keep those words in memory. I am sorry that any other Asiatic specialists who are present here did not get time to speak. It is probably too late, but I hope another time they will get an opportunity of talking about Central Asia.

The PRESIDENT: I may mention to the meeting that Dr. Sven Hedin is publishing his atlas, which will consist of two volumes of maps besides text, and I trust that the wealthier portion of our Fellows will subscribe to this most valuable and important geographical work.

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## NOTICES, FROM CHINESE SOURCES, ON THE ANCIENT KINGDOM OF LAU-LAN, OR SHEN-SHEN.

By GEORGE MACARTNEY, C.I.E.

IN his lecture delivered before the Royal Geographical Society on December 8 last, on his "Three Years' Exploration in Central Asia," Dr. Sven Hedin gave us a graphic description of the ruins of an ancient town on the border of the old Lob-nor. Amongst the finds brought home by him from this site were many Chinese manuscripts, which have been identified to be of the second and third centuries A.D. Some of these manuscripts bear not only the dates, but the name also of the locality where they were written. This name is Lau-lan, and the knowledge of this fact is one of special interest. The actual name of Lau-lan is well known to modern Chinese geographers, but hitherto, apparently, neither they nor savants in Europe have been able to fix with anything like accuracy the position of the country anciently called by that name. Mr. A. Wylie, a Chinese scholar of eminence, in 1880 had computed this position to be  $39^{\circ} 40'$  N. lat. and  $94^{\circ} 50'$  E. long. Now, this would show an error approximately of 250 miles if we are right in understanding that the place where Dr. Hedin found the Chinese manuscripts bearing the name of Lau-lan was in about  $40^{\circ} 40'$  N. lat. and  $90^{\circ}$  E. long. The more accurate localization of Lau-lan, now apparently possible, may, it is hoped, lead to some useful results in the identification of other neighbouring countries whose ancient names are known, but whose positions are still a puzzle to modern geographers.