

lying well to the east of the usual high road, through Turbat-i-Haidari, Kāin, and Birjand. It appeared to combine the attraction of traversing ground that was comparatively little known with that of passing some places of probable antiquarian interest.

At Meshed I learned to my special satisfaction that the projected route, though leading fairly close to the Afghān border, would owing to its unfrequented character probably make it easier for my little party to escape unwelcome attention and reduce the risk of unpleasant encounters to a matter of ill luck. Any doubt about keeping to my original plan was removed when I found that the dispatch of a small body of Hazāra Levies, newly raised for service in Sīstān from among old Sepoys living to the south-east of Meshed, would presently offer an opportunity of forwarding under safe military escort my travel-notes, photographic records, and reserve funds in gold to Sīstān. It was equally gratifying to find from the cartographical materials in the possession of the Military Attaché of the Consulate General that the ground which my proposed route would cross had never been systematically surveyed, and that consequently a traverse carried along it with the plane-table would eventually prove of use for possible future operations.

Route along
Perso-
Afghān
border.

During these busy days at Meshed I was rejoined by Surveyor and camp and much relieved by telegraphic news that my collection of antiques had safely reached its temporary place of deposit at Srinagar. Constant toil on much-delayed accounts and other writing work left me, unfortunately, little time for glimpses of the interesting city outside. But under the hospitable roof of the Consulate and within its fine large garden I had felt as if brought back to some English country house, and much refreshed by all the kindness and help enjoyed there I started on November 11th for Sīstān. Considering the great distance to be travelled and the critical state that political affairs in Persia had reached at the time, I had special reason to feel deeply grateful for the care which Sir Wolseley Haig had taken to facilitate, by all available means, my rapid journey onward. Nor can I omit to mention the excellent services rendered by the hardy Persian muleteers and their beasts, which allowed me to cover the 500 odd miles of the route, mostly through barren hills or across desert country, in twenty-one days without a single break-down or delay.

Start from
Meshed for
Sīstān.

SECTION II.—PAST THE PERSO-AFGHĀN BORDER

The three weeks spent on the journey from Meshed to Sīstān afforded me a welcome opportunity of gaining general impressions of the physical features and conditions of life in the hills and valleys that we passed through. These form the eastern marches of present-day Khorāsān towards the Herī-rūd tract in the north and the drainageless desert depressions crossed by the Perso-Afghān border line in the south. But my unavoidably rapid passage would not allow of any close study either of ground or people, and the systematic survey of the former carried out by parties of the Survey of India, during the operations of the Eastern Persia Force in the later years of the war, has rendered any detailed reference to topographical features unnecessary. Nor have I since had time for the study of any historical data bearing on the past of those tracts. These facts, together with present limitations both of time and space, will suffice to explain why the record of this portion of my journey must be restricted to bare indications of the route followed and to brief notes on such points of antiquarian and ethnographic interest as attracted my attention while passing along it.

Eastern
marches
of Sīstān.

The first two marches brought me to Farīmān along the main road connecting Meshed with Herāt. The half-way halt at the walled village of Sang-bast allowed me to visit the site of the adjacent ruined town, which tradition asserts to have been founded by Ayāz, a Wazīr of Maḥmūd of Ghazna. The massive domed building and high Mīnār with fine carved brickwork, which are the only structural remains still standing, are both ascribed to the founder, and thus rank among the earliest extant Muhammadan monuments of Irān. But as these interesting ruins have been

Ruins at
Sang-bast.