

My ancestors, whose record is in this book, came to Sistan from Persia a thousand and forty-three years ago (A. D. 860). At that time all the villages were around Zahidan, where the ruins now are. The site of this village, Deh Abbas Khan, was under water, and only became habitable ninety years ago. It is now but very little above high-water level, and in the phenomenal flood of May, 1903, it was under water for a time.

Later I visited the ruins on the mesa of Kuh-i-Khoja with Mehemet Bey of Afzelabad, the "arbab" or chief of the antique race of Sayids, who told me the same story with less detail. He added a few points which are worth recording. In his boyhood, sixty years ago, the water about Kuh-i-Khoja was more abundant than now, and came from the south from the Shila instead of from the north, as it does to-day. The ruins of Kuh-i-Khoja are those of structures built by a king called Kaha-Kaha, by whose name they are still called. They belong to the same period as the ruins of Sabari, which are built of burned brick and lie at the bottom of what is now the main northwest bay of the lake. At that time, before the building of Zahidan, there was no water in the lake of Sistan.

As we approached the top of Kuh-i-Khoja the "arbab" stopped me and, pointing to two small holes in the rock beside the path, remarked, "There was a spring here once, but it was closed by the Holy Man, Hazret Mehemet Ali (one of the immediate successors of Mohammed). He stepped on the spring and caused it to dry up. His heels made these holes." When I asked if there were other springs of the same sort, the "arbab" replied that he knew of another on the north side of Kuh-i-Khoja, a second at Bendan, called Sum-i-Duldul, and a third at Malik-Siah-Kuh, in the corner where Persia, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan meet. All three were closed in the same way by Hazret Mehemet Ali or by his horse. At Malik-Siah-Kuh, the "arbab" added, there was formerly a kanat or underground water channel, but now it is dry.

From what has just been related it appears that the history of the lake of Sistan, as preserved in the traditions and written records of the ancient race of Sayids, consists of the following periods: (1) A time when water covered the area now occupied by the lake, the swamp, and the cultivated plain. (2) A time when the lake diminished in size and its shores were occupied by man. Meanwhile the size of the rivers decreased and springs dried up. At last the lake had so entirely disappeared that the town of Sabari was built in one of the lowest parts of its bed, and Kaha-Kaha was built on what is now an island, but was then dry land. (3) Then the water returned to the lake, although the springs still continued to dry up. The city of Zahidan was built. During the days of its prosperity the lake was larger than now, and probably received its water via the Shila. (4) Last comes the modern period, the last few centuries, during which the lake has shrunk to its present size and receives all its water-supply via the delta of the Helmund.

AGREEMENT OF LEGEND, HISTORY, AND PHYSIOGRAPHY.

The manner in which this traditional history agrees with the history already inferred from physiographic evidence deserves careful attention. That inferred history may be recapitulated as follows:

(1) During one of later fluvial epochs the upper or 25-foot beach was formed and the lake probably covered the whole of the swamp and plain of Sistan and also the God-i-Zirrah.