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AFGHANISTAN BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

SECOND CENTURY B.C. TO 1222 A.D.

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SIX series of invaders entered Afghanistan during the historical periods with which we are concerned. The first came out of Central Asia, second the Iranian Plateau, third from India, fourth from Central Asia, the fifth had its ultimate source in the Arabian Peninsula, the last came from Mongolia.

THE EARLY MOVEMENTS OUT OF CENTRAL ASIA

SECOND CENTURY B.C. TO B.C.-A.D. BOUNDARY

The Græco-Bactrian kingdoms in Afghanistan and north-west India (now Pakistan) first felt the impact of nomadic invaders from Central Asia about 135 B.C., when the Sakas pushed them out of Bactria (northern Afghanistan). The Sakas (variously called Sacas, Sacæ, Sacarauli, or Sacarauçæ in Indo-European classical sources; Se, Se-wang, and Se-jung in Chinese sources) had been slowly pushed west by a chain reaction which had its origin in the western frontiers of Ch'in Dynasty China in the third century B.C.

In the second century B.C. the two strongest political groups in the Far East were constantly at war; the sophisticated Han Dynasty Chinese and the nomadic kingdom of the Huing-Nu or Huns. Against these marauding herdsmen the great Ch'in emperor, Shih Huang-ti, began to build the Great Wall in 214 B.C.

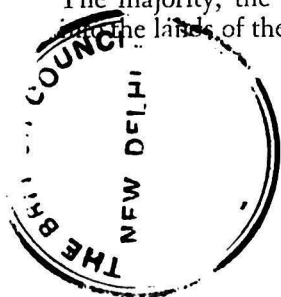
By the beginning of the second century B.C. a pattern of raid-and-retaliation had been established. The Huing-Nu invaded the Chinese borderlands at will, and the Chinese sent armies to drive them out. As a result the Huns could not permanently occupy the looted lands, but neither could the Chinese system of *limes* keep the nomads from periodically raiding the frontier.

About 165 B.C. the Huing-Nu were attacked by one of their subject kingdoms, the Yüeh-Chih, setting in motion the chain reaction mentioned earlier.

Beaten by the Huing-Nu, but still strong, the Yüeh-Chih packed up horses, flocks, tents, and baggage and moved west, the only possible route to freedom. The Huing-Nu controlled the north; the Chinese the south and east. A small group of the Yüeh-Chih (called the Little Yüeh-Chih) moved south-west and settled among the war-like Kiang tribes of Tibet. The majority, the Great Yüeh-Chih, travelled north of the Gobi Desert into the lands of the Wusun.

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The numerically inferior Wusun were defeated by the Yüeh-Chih, and subsequently moved north and attached themselves to the Huing-Nu for protection.

The Yüeh-Chih continued to move west, always searching for sufficient pasture lands. They found such lands across Lake Issik-Kul (now Lake Balkash, 43° 35' N., 76° 00' E.) in the Dzungarian Basin, but to gain possession of the land they were forced to drive out the occupants, the Śakas.

The Śakas fled in two directions, one group crossing the Oxus River into the Afghan-Greek kingdom of Bactria (Dahia or Tahia), another west to Parthian Iran. They did not remain long in Bactria, however, for once again the chain reaction had begun.

About 140 B.C. the Wusun, supported by the Huing-Nu, pushed the Yüeh-Chih from the Lake Issik-Kul region. In turn, the Yüeh-Chih drove the Śakas from Bactria.

The Śakas occupied Śakastan (modern Seistan) and founded a kingdom which for a brief moment extended from the Helmand River to the Persian Gulf and modern Iraq. Then the great Parthian soldier-king, Mithradates II (c. 124-88 B.C.), reconquered Śakastan and once again it became a Parthian satrapy.

The Śaka nobility became satraps and garrison troops in most of the eastern Parthian empire. Gradually the Śaka satraps of Gandhara (includes Peshawar and Jalalabad), Mathura (modern Muttra in India), Kaccha (Cutch), Surashthra (Kathiawar), and Arachosia (Kandahar) made themselves kings and, although still maintaining allegiance, the Parthian rulers were virtually independent.

By the B.C.-A.D. boundary most of the Greek states south of the Hindu Kush had fallen to the Śaka-Parthian kings, the last to fall being the kingdom of Kabul under Hermæus about A.D. 50. Whether Kabul fell to the Śaka or the Yüeh-Chih is still moot.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE KUSHANS

FIRST CENTURY A.D. TO FOURTH CENTURY A.D.

Parthia's hold on her eastern empire weakened, and finally collapsed, between A.D. 45 and 64. This collapse was precipitated by the rise of the Kushans, one of the five principal Yüeh-Chih tribes (the other four were Humi, Sewangi, Hitum, and Koruto) some time between A.D. 25 and 40. The Kushans united the Yüeh-Chih into a powerful military machine. Middle Eastern, Indian, and Western sources after the first century A.D. refer to the Yüeh-Chih as the Kushans, but the Chinese continued to use the older name. Henceforth, I shall call this empire and people Kushan, but remember that Kushan and Yüeh-Chih are interchangeable.

Kujula Kadphises (Kadphises I) and his son, Vima (Kadphises II) of the First Kushan Dynasty spread Kushan control from the lower Indus Valley (minus Surashthra) to the Iranian frontier, from the Sinkiang border to the Caspian and Aral Seas.

Kanishka I founded the Second Kushan Dynasty some time after the

death of Kadphises II. "Kanishka is certainly one of the two or three really great figures in Indian history. Not only was he a great soldier, but it was undoubtedly due in no small measure to his influence that Gandhara, the seat of his government, became a potent and vital centre of literary and artistic activity. He was also a magnificent patron of religious learning, and the northern Buddhists looked upon him in the same manner as the Eastern Christians looked upon Constantine. Numerous monuments and coins dating from his reign have been reported, but so lacking are the Indians in historical tradition that we are still in some doubt as to when his reign actually took place."*

Whenever he lived and died (probably around the close of the first century A.D.) Kanishka left an indelible mark on the Indian, Afghan, Iranian, and even the Chinese cultural landscape, for it was during his reign that Buddhism rose to its apogee in Central Asia and subsequently spread to the Far East and South-East Asia.

His armies marched down the Ganges at least as far as Benares and Ghazipur, conquered Surashtra and the mouths of the Indus. Kashmir, Sinkiang, Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan, all the Chinese provinces north of Tibet and east of the Pamirs fell to Kanishka. He moved his capital from Bactria to Purushapura (Peshawar), and Kapisa (Begram) became his summer capital. The North Indian capital was Mathura.

The death of Kanishka, like his origin and much of his life, is shrouded in mystery. Tradition holds that he was assassinated by his own officers, who had tired of being military exiles from their homes and families.

The Kushan empire held its own under the last two Second Dynasty kings, Huvishka and Vasudeva (who probably died about A.D. 220) and then began to break up into independent and semi-independent states.

The first two Kushan dynasties were periods of great artistic and intellectual achievements.†

Commercially this period was also of great importance. Both land and sea routes permitted an exchange of goods from China to Rome. Overland routes were more important during the first two centuries A.D., but some sea-borne trade existed between India and Rome, as conclusively proven by excavations at Arikamedu on the south-east coast of India.‡

The major east-west land route from China was: skirting the Gobi Desert and entering Chinese Turkestan (Sinkiang) at Tun Huang, turning north-west past Turfan and Urumchi (Tiwa) and passing through the Dzungarian Gates, then continuing across the Central Asiatic Steppes south of Lake Balkash through Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bokhara. From these last-named centres the route led south to Balkh, Bamiyan, Begram, Kabul, Peshawar, Taxila, and on to the Indian Ocean.

Another route led across Parthian Iran through Merv and Ectabana (Hamadan) to Seleucia, Petra, Palmyra, or Tadmor (Syria), which were among the more important central storehouses of goods for Rome and China.

Major items of export from the Roman empire (including Syria and

* McGovern, 1939, pp. 251-252.

† Rowland, 1953, pp. 75-122 is the latest work which discusses this.

‡ Wheeler, Ghosh and Deva, 1946.

Egypt) were: gold and silver plates, woollen and linen textiles, topaz, coral, amber, frankincense, glass vessels, and wine.

From India came cotton cloth, indigo, spices, semi-precious stones, pearls, ivory, Kashmir wool, steel swords, and furs.

Central Asia (including Afghanistan) contributed rubies, lapis lazuli silver, turquoise, various gums and drugs.

China sent raw silk to Rome, fancy embroidered silks to Central Asia and India, furs (from Siberia and Manchuria), and many spices to both India and Rome.

The "ultimate markets are indicated by the discoveries of Roman glass in China, of Indian pottery at Pompeii in Italy, of Chinese pottery in Roman tombs in the European Rhineland."*

THE KUSHANO-SASSANIAN PERIOD OF SMALL, SEMI-INDEPENDENT STATES

FOURTH-FIFTH CENTURIES A.D.

While the Kushan empire was slowly breaking up into independent fragments, a powerful new dynasty, the Sassanian, was rising in Iran. The Sassanians, under the founder Ardashir-i-Bahegan (A.D. 226-240) quickly overthrew the Parthians, and a violent reaction against Greek, Roman, and Central Asiatic influences began in Iran.

Ardashir overran the Kushan states from Sogdia to the Punjab, but by the time of his death, most Kushan states were again semi-independent, and only nominally recognized Sassanian overlordship.

From the beginning the Sassanians considered Byzantium, against whom they fought many wars, their main foe. This was one of the first periods of sustained East-West conflict and it lasted from A.D. 229, when Ardashir first marched against the Roman Empire, until the final defeat of the Sassanians by the Arabs in the seventh century A.D.

The effects of this struggle for the control of the Levantine coast, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia were far-reaching economically as well as politically. The overland east-west trade routes were more and more replaced by sea-borne trade across the Indian Ocean.

This upsurge in the sea trade did not mean that the overland trade was dead, or even dying, for as the Romans and Sassanians wore each other down militarily, the land routes were re-opened, and the Sassanians themselves became the land-trade middlemen, with Balkh, Samarkand, Bokhara, Merv, and Nishapur serving as their headquarters.

THE GUPTA WARS

FOURTH-SIXTH CENTURIES A.D.

Minor invasions from contemporary India must be mentioned briefly. A native Indian dynasty, the Gupta (c. A.D. 320-535) had established itself from the west to the east coast of India. The Guptas were as pro-Indian as the Sassanians were pro-Iranian. They tried to throw the Śakas and

* Wheeler, 1950, p. 52.

and Kushans out of western and north-western India, succeeding with the former, but only partially defeating the Kushans, who retained control of the upper Indus valley.

THE EPHTHALITE HUNS (WHITE HUNS)

FIFTH-SEVENTH CENTURIES A.D.

The small Kushan states were not united, and thus could not meet the sudden threat which emptied into Bactria in the fifth century A.D.

The Epthalite (or Hephthalite) Huns, as these new Central Asiatic invaders were called, are as much a mystery people as the earlier Śakas and Kushans, and the date of their invasion is difficult to determine.

History first records the Epthalites as clients of the Avar Mongolian Empire, about the end of the fourth century A.D. Probably wishing to be free of their overlords, the Epthalites moved through Chinese Turkestan and Sogdia, extorting tribute as they went.

Crossing the Oxus, the Epthalites drove out the Kushans, ruled by Kidara, a Fourth Kushan Dynasty king. The military aristocracy of the Bactrian Kushans fled south over the Hindu Kush, and being forced east by the Sassanians, passed through Kandahar and eventually conquered parts of Gandhara. The Kidarites (as the Fourth Dynasty kings are sometimes called) ruled north-west India, the Punjab, and south-west Afghanistan from c. A.D. 390 to 460, when they were again displaced by the Epthalites.

The Epthalite empire in Afghanistan and north-west India lasted about 150 years (c. A.D. 400 to 565) and extended from Chinese Sinkiang to Sassanian Iran, from Sogdia to the Punjab. More than thirty separate semi-independent or independent kingdoms had been conquered. The Epthalites did not have a peaceful reign, however, and the Sassanians were their chief antagonists. Several Sassanian monarchs, frustrated in wars with Byzantium, turned to the east. After being initially successful, they were ultimately defeated by the more militarily adroit Epthalites.

About A.D. 565 the Epthalites were attacked by the combined forces of the Sassanians and Western Turks, who had made their appearance in the political arena about A.D. 552 when they rebelled against and crushed the Central Asian Avar empire.

As a result of the victory the Turks become masters of all the White Hun territories north of the Oxus; the Sassanians ruled south of the Oxus.

Thus, at the beginning of the seventh century A.D. most of Afghanistan was under Sassanid control, divided into provinces governed by White Hun satraps in the north and Kushan (and/or Śaka) satraps in the south and south-west. While the Sassanian empire was slowly melting before the attacks of the Arabs in the second quarter of the seventh century, anarchy and minor invasions swept Afghanistan. Each new satrap had to fight for his position.

To further complicate the picture, the Hindus and Western Turks kept pushing the frontiers of the petty states, absorbing a few, accepting tribute from others.

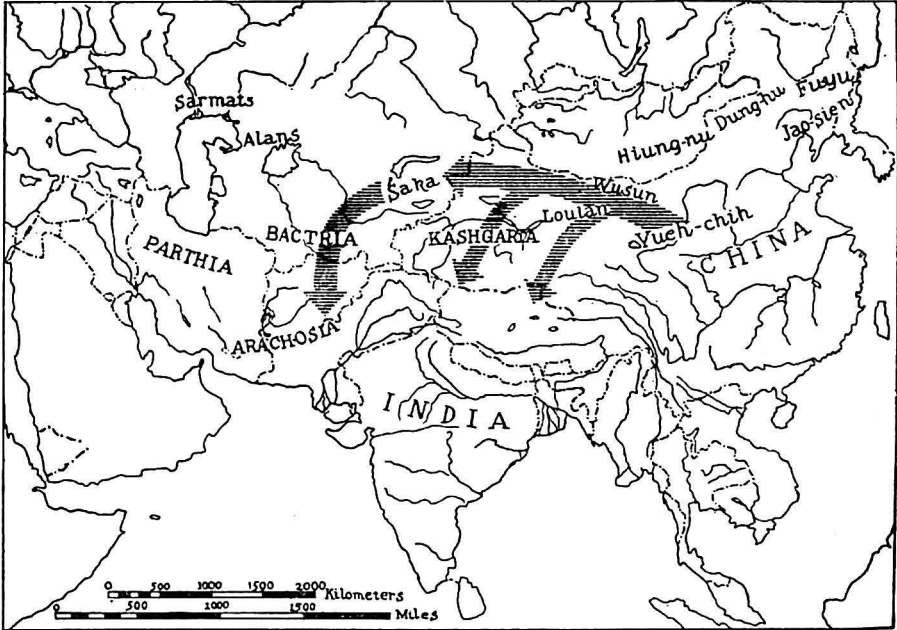


FIG. I.—EAST ASIA IN THE SECOND CENTURY B.C., SHOWING THE ROUTE BY WHICH THE SAKA AND YUEH-CHIH (KUSHANS) REACHED BACTRIA AND ARACHOSIA.

(Drawn by Prof. F. K. Morris).

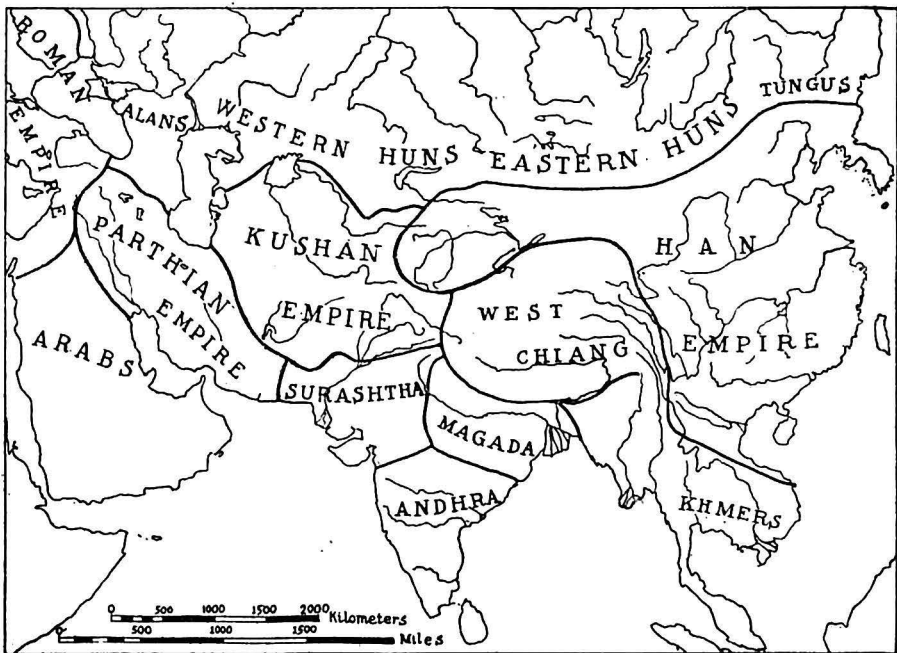


FIG. II.—POLITICAL BOUNDARIES OF EAST ASIA: FIRST CENTURY A.D.

(Drawn by Prof. F. K. Morris).

FROM THE ISLAMIC TO THE MONGOL INVASION

SEVENTH CENTURY—A.D. 1222

Sassanian power was broken by the Arabs at Qadisiya in A.D. 637. The *coup de grâce* was delivered at Nihawand (near Hamadân) in A.D. 641, and all eastern Iran fell into Arab hands.

The first big Arab raid through Kandahar and central Afghanistan took place in A.D. 699-700, when the Arab governor of Seistan was sent to chastise the Kushan (now called Shahiya) king of Kabul, who had refused to pay tribute. Even though defeated, the Kushans continued to rule Kabul as vassals of the Umayyad caliphs.

T'ang Dynasty China, which had defeated the Eastern Turks about A.D. 630, was also covetously eyeing Afghanistan at this time. Unable to fight actively for control of Afghanistan because of internal difficulties, the Chinese helplessly watched Arab raids for booty give way to permanent military garrisons during the period from A.D. 665-715. Native rulers were permitted to stay on their thrones, assisted by Arab military governors and tax collectors.

When the Abbasid caliphs came into power (A.D. 750-1258) revolts occurred all over the Islamic world, but al-Mansur, the second caliph of this dynasty, secured the empire. By 850, however, the Abbasids were beginning to crumble, and many petty independent Muslim states were formed in North Africa and Western Asia.

The first three semi-independent eastern dynasties were of Iranian origin: Tahirid (A.D. 820-872), which penetrated Afghanistan only in the extreme west, bordering Khurasan; Saffarid (A.D. 869 to c. 900), which broke the power of the Buddhist Kushans (Turki Shahs) of Kabul, Zamin-dar, Bust, Ghor, and Kandahar; Samanids (c. A.D. 900-999), ruling Seistan, Kandahar, all of modern Iran, and Transoxiana. All these semi-independent dynasties professed outward loyalty to the caliphs in Baghdad. Although the intellectual centre of Islam was still Baghdad, the Samanid capital, Bokhara, and its chief city, Samarkand, saw the rise of Persian scholarship. By the end of the Samanid Dynasty, both these cities ranked with Baghdad as centres of learning and art.

During the Samanid period, the Turks from the north, who had been gathering strength since the beginning of the Chinese Sung Dynasty (960) thrust themselves into the Islamic limelight for the first time. In 990, the Ilek (Ilaq) Khan (Kara Khanids or Toquz-Oghuz Turks) of Turkestan captured Bokhara, and nine years later finished off the Samanids, dividing the Samanid domains with the Ghaznavids, who under Subuktigin had seized Khurasan south of the Oxus in 994.

With the Ghaznavids or Yamini Dynasty (962-1186), the Turks made themselves a power in Iran, Afghanistan, and India. The founder of the dynasty, Alptigin, had been a Turkish slave in the bodyguard of the Samanid ruler. As had happened before and would happen again many times, the "slaves" of the Western Asian ruling families slowly and subtly (and at times not so subtly) changed roles with their masters. Gibb and Bowen (1951) give a brilliant study of this "ruling slave" phenomenon in the late Ottoman Empire (A.D. 1299-1923).

Alptigin had gained the confidence of his master and was made governor of Khurasan (capital, Nishapur), but he quickly found himself in disfavour for exceeding his authority and was forced to flee for his life. With a few loyal Turk followers, Alptigin established an independent dynasty at Ghazni. The real founder of the Ghaznavid Empire was Subuktigin (976-997), son-in-law and one-time slave of Alptigin. The succeeding sixteen Ghaznavid rulers, the most famous of whom was Mahmud (999-1030), were all lineal descendants of Subuktigin.

Mahmud was one of the greatest generals in history, conducting at least seventeen successful campaigns against India, adding north-west India and the Punjab to his empire, and adding riches to his treasury by looting rich Hindu temples. He overthrew the ruler of Ghur (Ghor), an independent mountain kingdom in central Afghanistan, in 1002. The Ghurid ruler was of "East Persian" descent, probably one of the last of the Kushans.*

At this time, the Sunni Caliph was virtually a prisoner of the Shi'ite Buwayhid ruler of western Iran. Sunni Mahmud invaded Iran and sliced Isfahan, Rayy, and the Makran coast from Buwayhid control. The Caliph, al-Qadir (991-1031), showed his appreciation by titling Mahmud *Yamin-al-Dawlah* (the right arm of the state).

Despite his military reputation, Mahmud filled his capital and other cities with men of learning and became a patron of the arts. Among these learned men were the scientist and historian al-Biruni, the poet Firdawsi, and the historian al-Utbi.

At the death of Mahmud, the familiar pattern of the breakdown of central authority occurred. Small independent states sprang up in the Indian provinces, while the Kara Khanids to the north and the Seljuks (who had replaced the Buwayhids in 1055) from Iran nibbled away at the frontiers. The death blow came from the Ghurids in 1186, when they defeated the last Ghaznavid prince at Lahore.

Thus in the last half of the twelfth century A.D. Turkish dynasties controlled all of the Eastern Caliphate: Afghanistan, eastern Iran, and West Pakistan were all under the Turkish Ghurids; central and western Iran were in the hands of the Seljuk Turks, until the Turkish Khwarizm Shahs came out of Transoxiana to overthrow them by 1194.

The Abbasid Caliph was Caliph in name only; the Arabs no longer controlled Western Asia as the year A.D. 1200 approached. The Turks were invincible, but there were rumours coming out of Central Asia that a saviour was on the way. The Christians believed Prester John was coming to save them from the Muslims; the Caliph hoped the new invader would re-establish the glory of a centrally powerful Caliphate.

The man who came out of Asia in 1220 was not a noble saviour on a white horse; he was a brutal, brilliant, military technician on a scraggly Mongol pony, leading an army of men who seemed to be part horse.

Temujin or Chingis Khan (1155-1227) made history by destroying the finest civilizations of the thirteenth century. He carved an empire from the China Sea to the Adriatic, but it was a transient empire, and the emperor slept in a tent instead of a palace.

* Sykes, 1940, p. 189.

The results were not transient: Western Asia still bears the scars, still suffers from the economic impact. The atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki may have destroyed much and killed many, but now the cities are rebuilt, even if the dead cannot be returned; the silent ruins, silted canals, and destroyed cities in Western Asia are still Chingis Khan's monument in world history.

But Islam did not die in the rubble. "In the darkest hour of political Islam, religious Islam has been able to achieve some of its brilliant successes."* For "less than half a century after Hugalú's (a grandson of Chingis Khan) merciless attempt at the destruction of Islamic culture, his great grandson Ghazan, as a devout Muslim, was concentrating much time and energy to the reunification of the same culture."†

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* Hitti, 1949, p. 475.

† Hitti, *Ibid.*, p. 488.

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21 JUN 2014