

THE JESUITS IN AFGHANISTAN

By H. HERAS

SINCE the year 1747, when the provinces known to-day as Afghanistan acquired their independence under the strong rule of Ahmad Shah Durrani, there have been very few Jesuits within the boundaries of Afghanistan; but when Kabul, Ghazni, Kandahar, Badakshan, &c. belonged to the Moghul Empire, several Jesuits travelled through them, and even lived in some of the cities for a short time. The purpose of this paper is to study the sojourn of these members of the Society of Jesus in the territory now called Afghanistan.

I

The first Jesuit to set foot in Afghan territory was Father Antonio Monserrate, a Spaniard¹. He had arrived at the court of Akbar, at Fathpur, with Father Rudolfo Aquaviva in the month of February, 1580. A year later Akbar was compelled to lead an army towards the north to chastise his half-brother Mirza Muhammad Hakim, his Viceroy at Kabul, who had asserted his independence within the bounds of his Viceroyalty and even invaded the Punjab. Muhammad Hakim, at the approach of his half-brother, retreated towards Kabul and even further north, and the Emperor was forced to reach this city and take measures for the future government of that province². Since Prince Murad, the Emperor's second son, was with the expedition, Akbar ordered Fr. Monserrate, who was supposed to be the tutor of Murad, to accompany him towards the north. Such was the unique opportunity Fr. Monserrate had of traversing the passes that led to Central Asia.

In his *Mongolicae Legationis Commentarius* Fr. Monserrate gives a full description of the journey³. It is not our intention to follow him all through; but we shall briefly note what he says about the territory forming modern Afghanistan.

To enter this territory the army crossed the Khyber Pass, 'a difficult, steep and narrow pass over a high range, which is called by the natives Caybar'. The Khyber Pass is British territory. Yet we give here Monserrate's description of this famous highway, on account of its being the gateway to Afghanistan. Monserrate also learnt the ancient name of the place: The ancients', he says, 'called it Capissenian Pass.' In order to facilitate the passage of the army, 'gangs of sappers and workmen' had been used to pave the road, 'though in a hasty manner'. Yet Monserrate relates that in spite of these efforts 'the elephants, of which there were a great number, the laden camels and the flocks and herds found the pass most difficult and dangerous.' The horses passed much more easily.

¹ His name is always found spelt after this Castilian fashion, though originally it must have been spelt thus 'Montserrat', since he was a native of Vich in Catalonia and belonged to a thoroughly Catalan family.

² Cfr Smith, *Akbar*, pp. 192-202, Oxford, 1919.

³ *Mongolicae Legationis Commentarius*, *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, III, pp. 612-617, 620. For the English translation of Monserrate's work cfr Hoyland—Banerjee, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate*, 5. J., pp. 143-152, 156. Oxford, 1922.

The army encamped in the pass itself 'in a narrow plain near a spring from which flows a considerable stream of sweet water. This stream, which is large enough to water an army, later joins a brackish torrent, and thus loses its sweetness'. Fifty-six years earlier the Moghul Emperor Babar passed through the same spot when finally invading India, and also recorded in his Memoirs that he 'dismounted at the outfall of the "Ali Masjid water."⁴ ' Monserrate gives some further details by which we are able to identify the place. The royal pavilion was set up at Ahliimzit, which means the Mosque of Ahalis.' This place is called Ali Masjid, which means, as Monserrate says, the Mosque of Ali. This Ali was supposed to be Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad. Naturally the main building of this place seems to have been the mosque itself, though it did not impress Monserrate very favourably. 'You would say', he tells us, 'that it was a stable rather than a mosque. Its walls are in ruins, its courtyard small, and it has not even a roof of thatch.' Our traveller then goes on to record a local tradition about some 'prints of Ahalis' hand' on a rock near the ruins.



The description of the second portion of the Khyber Pass is very vivid. 'Advancing yet further, the army came to the narrowest part of the pass, where the high crags overhang it from either side, so that a hundred stout warriors could forbid passage to many thousands ; for a laden elephant can hardly get through the defile. Further on a slope was reached so precipitous that the beasts scarcely found foot-hold, whilst the infantry were compelled to run down the hill. The cavalry and baggage train had to make a long detour. At the bottom was a plain large enough to camp upon. In it was a spring flowing from a crag, near which a camp was measured out. The place is called Caybar. In ancient days it was named the city of Capissa.' Monserrate then gives again the reason of the denomination 'Capissenian pass', which he had mentioned before. Whatever we are to think of this, in any case Monserrate seems to state that the city of Capissa was built just at the end of the Khyber Pass. This identification is interesting, for travellers and geographers do not agree as regards the situation of this town. It is referred to by Ptolemy⁵ and by Pliny⁶ in ancient times. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang, who traversed the whole province in the first half of the seventh century, also speaks of the country and its capital, apparently known by the same name, i.e. Kia-pi-shi, or Kapisa, and gives some interesting details about the country, its inhabitants and its king who 'is a Kshatriya by caste'.⁷ But the situation of the

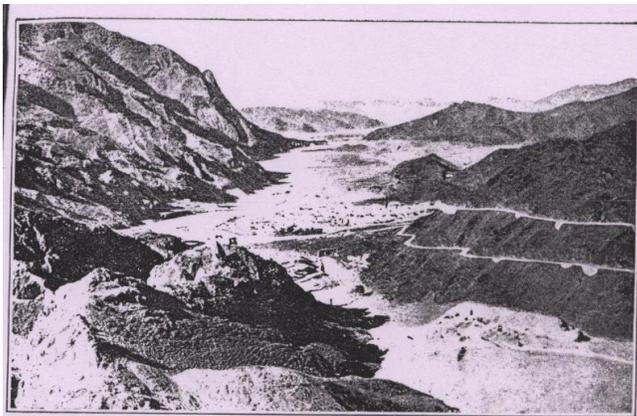
⁴ Beveridge, *Babur-Nama*, I, p. 412. London, 1922.

⁵ Ptolemy, *Geographiae*, lib. VI, C. 18, 4.

⁶ Pliny, *Historiae Naturalis*. lib. VI, C. 23, 25.

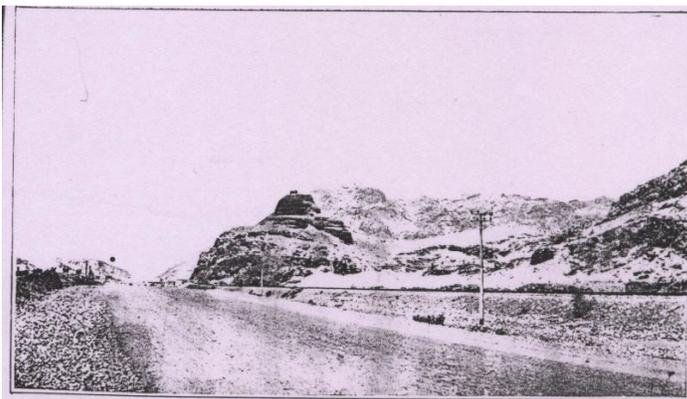
⁷ Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, pp. 54-55, London, 1906.

city is not properly described. Cunningham, following the indications of Hiuen Tsiang, identifies Capisene with Opian, too much towards the north.⁸ But Beal does not agree with him.⁹ Monserrate very likely records a local tradition, but we have not sufficient data to establish its accuracy. Yet when he passed again through the same spot some weeks later on the return journey, he seems to have been confirmed in his identification, for he once more wrote in his diary: 'It may be of interest to students of the classics if I tell them that I am convinced that the Caybar and the mountains named after it are so called from the city of Capissa (or Capissenae) which was destroyed by Cyrus. The passage of ages has caused the change in the name given to the neighbourhood. Before I pass on, I must mention that not far from the road are the ruins of a very ancient city, whose name has perished together with its buildings. Moreover, these mountains border upon the region of the Indus, as was the case also with Capissa.'



The Khyber Pass

Photos by Heras



Buddhist Stupa, Khyber Pass

⁸ Cunningham, *Ancient Geography*, pp. 21-28, Calcutta, 1924.

⁹ Beal, *op. cit.*, p. 55, note 198.

Our traveller presently describes this plain. 'On the plain stood an obelisk very similar in size, age and workmanship to the one of which I have already given some account. They say it is the other boundary of the kingdom of Rhamxandus.' The obelisk spoken of in this passage was a Buddhist stupa or relic mound, as is clearly seen from the description of the first obelisk. 'This obelisk stands on a square base seven feet high and ten feet broad from the edge to the foot of the obelisk itself. The ascent from the base is by means of steps at the sides; and these steps are set into the base, so as to be enclosed on each side by walls. The height of the obelisk is twenty feet and its diameter ten. It is perpendicular for about seven feet, this portion being distinguished from that above by its massive circular shape. At the top it slopes to a blunt point, which is rounded off, and very cleverly executed. The whole is built of large hewn stones, without cement or bitumen to unite them¹⁰. Such was the stupa of Manikyala, usually called Manikyala Tope. That seen by Monserrate at the end of the Khyber Pass was similar to this.¹¹ Perhaps, as the traveller says of the first, it was also 'in ruins on account of its great age; but some parts of it are perfect and show elegant and artistic workmanship'.¹² Hiuen Tsiang had seen many stupas all over this portion of the country. 'The stupas and sangharamas', he writes, 'are of an imposing height, and are built on high level spots, from which they may be seen on every side, shining in their grandeur'¹³. The stupa seen by Monserrate is known as Shpola Stupa or Khyber Tope. Though its present condition is more ruinous than at the time of Monserrate's journey, yet one of the corners of the stupa is still standing to a height of about twenty-five feet.¹⁴ The reference to the kingdom of Rhamxandus is totally preposterous. Rhamxandus stands for Ramachandra, or simply Rama, the hero of the famous epic *Ramayana*. Monserrate, who had no occasion to study Buddhist archaeology at Fathpur, could not realise that this construction was a Buddhist monument. His explanation undoubtedly echoes the statements of some Hindu soldiers of Akbar's army, even at present one sometimes comes across ancient constructions which are popularly attributed to Ramachandra.

The final information Monserrate gives about the Khyber Pass is purely geographical. 'The Pass is about sixteen miles long. Its middle point lies approximately in Latitude 34 North and Longitude 110 East. Its direction is roughly east and west.'

Monserrate continues the description of his route. 'The plain is overhung from the west by a crag, on which the ruins of a town can be seen. It is locally called Landighana, i.e., the house of women.' This word seems to be Landi Khana; *landi*

¹⁰ Hoyland—Banerjee, *op. cit.* I, pp. 116-117.

¹¹ See Illustration.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹³ Beal 1, *op. crt.*, p. 55.

¹⁴ Saida Khan, *The Khybar*, p. 10, Peshawar, 1926.

means a wicked woman¹⁵. He relates a local legend to explain this denomination. 'Stories are told about its ancient inhabitants, resembling those which are told about the Amazons. It is said that the stronghold used to be occupied by women who waged war on the surrounding tribes. In order to keep up their numbers they attacked and carried off travellers. Boy-babies were killed or exposed; girls were brought up and trained to arms. They were finally conquered and driven out, but they have left their name in their ruins.' After narrating this story our traveller remarks critically, 'In reality, fables apart, a band of wicked women must have lived there and given their name to the place.' Yet, Monserrate was misinformed on this occasion, or perhaps he misunderstood what they were telling him. Landi Khana seems to be on the plain, not far from Landi Kotal, the terminus of the Khyber Railway. The ruins on the crag mentioned by the Father mark an old fort called Kafir Kot. As its name seems to suggest, this *kotta* or fort had very likely been owned by the Kafirs; perhaps their memory in the course of time may have been confused in the imagination of the people with that of the wicked women referred to in the name of Landi Khana.

Another abandoned city was found in the neighbourhood of the preceding one. 'Near Landighana are the ruins of a town named Xaregolanum, i. e. the city of slaves. The name of the place is Shahr-Gulam.' Monserrate was very inquisitive about the names of the different places which they passed on their way to Kabul, and here he relates what he heard about this one. It was founded by run-away slaves, as a means of preserving their liberty. They lived by brigandage, and were driven from their stronghold, it is said, with great difficulty. For the whole region is rough and mountainous, with forests in which the slaves hid when chased by the neighbouring chiefs. They were wont to make raids from these forests against the nearby settled districts, and to waylay travellers. Having obtained their booty they would retreat to their stronghold. In order to prevent drought in summer they dug for themselves four tanks of remarkable size and depth, in which all the rain water from the surrounding hills used to be collected.'

Shortly after passing in front of Shahr-Gulam, Monserrate records that 'the prince encamped on the bank of the Coas near the town of Bissaurum in the neighbourhood of Mount Beedaulatus.' The topographical position of this town is sufficiently described by Monserrate, though its name cannot now be identified. A town on the banks of the Coas, i. e. the river Kabul, in the neighbourhood of a high mountain when coming from Landi Kotal and Shahr-Gulam, cannot but be the present Dakka, at the junction of the two roads, the one that meanders along the river from the north of Peshawar to Jalalabad, and the other from the Khyber Pass. However, without paying attention to the town, Monserrate goes on to describe the mountain next to which the city is built. 'It is two thousand feet high, four thousand

¹⁵ The translators of his *Commentarius*, in a foot-note, say that Landi does not mean a woman but a stream (p. 146, note 221). I do not know on what this correction is founded. 'Landi' is a common word always used in the meaning suggested by Monserrate.

feet long and about eight thousand feet in circumference! A single enormous rock, whole and without cracks or interstices, projecting towards the east from the neighbouring ranges, from which it is divided by deep gullies, for about two miles. On this mountain, they say, the most eyeful examination has never discovered any tree, grass or other vegetation, not even moss. For this reason Emaunus (Humayun), father of Zelaldinus (Jalal-ud-din Akbar), having halted here and observing the mountain's barrenness gave it the name of Beedaulat, i. e. "graceless". Then coming down to more minute details our traveller describes the entrances of some caves carved in this mountain. 'On its western side may be seen the openings of many triangular stone cells, which are entered from the top, and in which they say hermits used to live. The place is indeed bleak and rough, well suited to a life of austerity, hardship and mourning.' The question as to who these ascetics were puzzled Fr. Monserrate's curiosity a great deal. He discarded the idea of their being Hindu ascetics, first because these 'only desire to attract popular notice by a show of piety', and then because 'the cells are now deserted, though there are in our times great numbers of these worthless ascetics.' This conclusion led him to suppose that those caves had been the dwellings of some Christian ascetics. 'I should rather say that they were built and inhabited by Christian solitaries, or hermits, especially since the Fathers of the Church have recorded that St. Bartholomew preached the gospel in these regions, which were reckoned by the ancients to belong to India, as also were Aria, Aracosia and Gedrosia. These provinces made up indeed what was then called Hither India. It is generally agreed that Christians once inhabited this region. The ancient Fathers were also greatly devoted to this sort of asceticism, and preferred to live near streams and rivers.' Here the conclusion of Monserrate is totally wrong, for there was also another sort of ascetics besides the Hindu ascetics and the Christian hermits; and those were the Buddhist monks. It is also not correct to say that all this country had been Christian. It is true that this part of Asia witnessed the evangelization of at least one of the Apostles, for these mountains formed part of the kingdom of Gondofares whose name is always associated with that of St. Thomas.¹⁶ But we have no positive data as regards his success. On the other hand it is well known that all this country was once Buddhist. The whole of Afghanistan is covered with Buddhist relics. The mountains of Bamiyan—well known in archaeological circles—are honey-combed with similar cells. In his journey through this part of the country, the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang saw several of these cells and caves hewn out of the rocks. 'Above a mountain pass', he says, 'to the north of this convent there are several stone chambers; it was in these the hostages practised religious meditation.'¹⁷

Monserrate goes on to inform us that 'three miles further on is the fort of Beoxpalangum ('mad lynx)'), the real name of which is Behosh-palang ; and then 'two days later Gelabada ('fervour in worship') was reached.' This is the city of Jalalabad, about which our traveller gives much information, for he spent a number of days there. 'Camp was pitched on the bank of the Coas (Kabul), a mile from the

¹⁶ Farquhar, *The Apostle St. Thomas in North India. Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, X, pp. 80-111.

¹⁷ Beal, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

town, where the prince awaited his father's return in accordance with orders, the priest (Fr. Monserrate himself) also stopped there, for the king was unwilling that a man unused to war, devoted to religious and literary studies, and above all of a delicate constitution, should undertake so arduous and rapid a march.'

Monserrate gives a general description of the city. 'Gelalabadum stands on a hill surrounded by a plain, from the borders of which rise mountains, extending all the way to Chabulum (Kabul).' He then briefly describes the citadel of Jalalabad, which according to him 'has been fortified by nature rather than by the art of man. For on the east the high and precipitous crag on which it stands overhangs the Coas.' He also gives us a geographical account of the surrounding country 'which is very mountainous and covered with forest. The peaks are snow-capped all the year round. Even in July the Bocalanum range, twelve miles south of the city, cools with its snows the surrounding air. Another snowy height extends to within a mile of the city, and bends round so as to enclose within its numerous folds the plain on which the army was encamped.' Our traveller informs us that on account of this magnificent situation, 'even in the hottest part of summer the climate of Gelalabadum is cool'. He moreover gives an idea of the riches of the country. 'God the Creator', he says, Vouchsafed that the inhabitants of this region should not suffer from want of the necessities of life; for He has arranged that certain plots of ground in the recesses of the snowy mountains should receive enough heat from the sun to enable them to produce fruits as abundantly as other regions far distant from the snows. Moreover the country round Gelalabadum has many vineyards and gardens, in which grow the pear, the vine, the pomegranate, the peach, the mulberry, the fig and other fruit trees.' This abundance remains to our day, the whole of northern India profiting by it. Afghan fruit trains daily cross the Indian frontiers.

As regards the inhabitants of the country, Monserrate tells us that they are 'the Patanaei (Pathans), whom the Mongols (Mughals) call 'Aufghan' (Afghans). They live by agriculture. They are miserably off for lack of draught animals and ferry boats. On land they carry their goods themselves, slung on their backs by means of looped ropes through which they put their arms, just as a breastplate is worn. They walk upright in this fashion even under heavy burdens. On the rivers their loads are carried by means of ox-skins daubed with liquid pitch. Corn or vegetables are enclosed in these skins and the steersman binds himself on the top. They launch themselves thus downstream on the rapid current of the river, and endeavour to keep a fairly good course. They wear a short garment coming down to the knee.' Monserrate extols the musical achievements of these Pathans. 'They are devoted to music and sing sweetly to the pipe or lyre in rich high tones in the European manner, not in low quavering notes as the Asiatics.'

After spending a little over two weeks at Jalalabad, the main army, under the Emperor himself, returned from Kabul, and after a short halt all returned to India proper. Monserrate, therefore, had no chance to see Kabul, but gives a few details of what he heard about it. 'Kabulum itself', he says, 'is built in a lofty position' and 'is

remarkable chiefly for two things; firstly it is the capital, secondly it is crowded with merchants, who resort thither from India, Persia and Tartary; for it is situated in the very heart of the mountains, which stretch out their arms, as it were, to touch the surrounding countries—India, Sogdiana (Bokhara), Bactriana (Balkh), and Tartary.' Our traveller also speaks of the climate of Kabul. He says that the city 'is so cold in winter that the king is compelled to descend to Gelalabadum, together with his guards and attendants and the whole court. But in summer the climate is so cool that even midsummer—the worst part of the year—is passed without feeling the heat of the sun ; and for that reason the king removes from Gelalabad to Chabulum.' Monserrate here uses the word king for the Viceroy of the Moghul Emperor at Kabul. It is interesting to notice that the same change of capital takes place now, according to seasons. Jalalabad is the winter capital of Afghanistan.

Monserrate made an extensive study of the system of mountains in Afghanistan which, on account of the very numerous ranges, is extremely intricate. 'I have taken great pains', he says, 'to determine the exact localities, or those that are approximately exact, corresponding to names. In many cases I have the best of all authority—the testimony of my own eyes.' These last words show that Monserrate did not spend all the time at Jalalabad, but moved about and climbed some of the mountains in order to have a better view of the country. He was himself born in a very mountainous country, and those mountains most likely reminded him of his native environments. The result of his study is as follows:

“These mountains form the Caucasian Imaus, which is the same as the Caspian Paharopanisus and the Paharvetus. The Caucasius lies in the middle of these. On a spur of these mountains stands Chabulum which was anciently Carura (such was the name given by Ptolemy, at least so they say). The Paharvetus, in which is the pass mentioned above (Khyber Pass), continues the Caucasius to the south, whilst to the north it is defended by Paharopanisus (Hindu Kush). Eastwards lies the Indus (Pamirs), and westwards an extension of the Paharvetus, of equal dimensions, which bends to the north to join the Paharopanisus¹⁸”.

After describing the mountain system, our traveller gives some advice to the student of Afghan geography. 'In order to prevent confusion in the names of these mountains two points must be borne in mind. First, that all this far-spread mass of mountains belongs to one main chain, but has various and ill-defined names; for instance, geographers sometimes give the name Imaus to what is really the Caspius, and the name Caucasius to what is really the Paharopanisus, and vice versa. Secondly, that in our time the names are entirely different from those given in ancient times.' Finally Monserrate explains some of the names he has given to the mountains. 'I have written Paharopanisus and Paharvetus because in the vernacular "pahar" means mountain. Thus Paharopanisus met at "Mount Panisus" and Paharvetus "Mount Vetus". Such is

¹⁸ How accurate Fr. Monserrate is in this description may be seen by consulting the geographical description of the country in a modern work. Cfr Tate, *The Kingdom of Afghanistan*, pp. 2-5., Bombay-Calcutta, 1911.

the end of Monserrate's references to Afghanistan. He was a keen observer, and an industrious student of the country through which he was passing. Nothing escaped his attention. Geography, History, Archaeology, Social Life, Agriculture and Folk-lore are indebted to him for his researches and his writings.

To be continued...