

SIR THOMAS EDWARD GORDON

(Aberdeen 1832 - 1914)

Lake Victoria, Great Pamir, May 2nd, 1874

signed with initials 'T.E.G.' (lower left)

watercolour on paper

15.2 x 24.1 cm (6 x 9 ½ in)

Literature: Lieut. Col. T.E. Gordon, C.S.I., *The Roof of the World, being the Narrative of a Journey over the high plateau of Tibet to the Russian frontier and the Oxus sources on Pamir*, 1876, p. 155, ['Great Pamir (Victoria) Lake - Eastern End'].

THE PRESENT WORK DEPICTS A WAKHI GUIDE AND horse resting at Great Pamir, and was sketched by Sir Thomas Edward Gordon during his expedition to Central Asia with John Moubray Trotter (1842-1924) and John Biddulph (1840-1921) in 1873-1874. *Lake Victoria, Great Pamir, May 2nd, 1874* shows an expansive landscape on the shores of a lake, with a snow-capped mountain range undulating across the background. In the foreground, a bearded Wakhi, or Khik, rests while holding a tethered horse. The Wakhi people originate from Wakhan - now part of Afghanistan- though they also live in adjacent areas of Tajikistan, Xinjiang and the Hunza Valley of Pakistan. The Pamir Mountains are a Central Asian mountain range known since the Victorian period as the 'roof of the world' in reference to its great height. Lake Victoria, now known as Lake Zorkul, is located within the Pamir Mountain range and the Afghan-Tajik border runs along the lake from east to west, with the northern half belonging to Tajikistan (fig. 1).

Gordon's expedition travelled from Leh on the Indus, across the Karakoram to the little explored region of eastern Turkestan, carrying out map-making for the army and playing a vital role in what would become known as 'The Great Game', in the High Asian buffer zones between the British and Russian empires. Gordon wrote, 'my book... makes no pretension to be in any way a record of scientific exploration: it merely relates to what fell under "every-day" observation... The idea of writing it was suggested by my sketches forming such a complete series "from the Indus to the Oxus" as to merit publication simply on the ground of representing to a very great extent life and scenery never before pictured... The whole of the illustrations (with the exception of four coloured plates) are facsimile copies of my sketches made on the spot.'¹

Gordon was born on 12th January 1832 in Aberdeen and was a twin son of Captain William Gordon (1788-1834) of the 2nd Queen's Royal Regiment. His father served in the Peninsular War in Spain, and was



Photograph of Lake Victoria surrounded by the Pamir Mountains (Figure 1)

married at Santarem, in 1818, to Marianna Carlotta Loi, daughter of Lois Congalvea de Mello, a government official in the province of Estremadura. Alongside his twin brother, Sir John James Hood Gordon, Thomas entered the army, joining the 29th Regiment of Foot on 21st August, 1849, and served in the Indian Mutiny campaign of 1857-1858. He subsequently became Military Attaché and Oriental Secretary to Her Majesty's Legation in Tehran. During his visits to Persia he decided to publish an account of his journey with the intention of displaying, through his observations and illustrations, evidence of the 'progress and improvement' he found. In 1896 his work, *Persia Revisited*, was published. He died in 1914.

¹ Lieut. Col. T.E. Gordon, (see Literature), pp. v-vi.

