

# Who Stole China's China? – The Legacy of Sir Aurel Stein

Harrison Haas  
Haverford College  
Advisors: Paul Smith & Lillian Li

## *Table of Contents*

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PART I: THE FIRST EXPEDITION (1900-1901)</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Flinders Petrie: A New Archaeology</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Eastern Turkestan &amp; Stein's First Steps</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>China: Friend or Foe?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Results of the First Expedition</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>PART II: THE SECOND EXPEDITION (1906-1909)</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Why Dunhuang?</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Not Exactly Abandoned</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Stein Meets a Priest: A Sacrifice of Morals?</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Stein and his Peers: Comparable Experiences at Dunhuang</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>PART III: THE FOURTH EXPEDITION &amp; DISASTER (1929-1931)</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Historical, Political, &amp; Attitudinal Shifts in China</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Stein: Same Man. Same Values?</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>The Failure of an Expedition</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>The Fourth Expeditions' Legacy</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>PART IV: DEBATING THE NARRATIVE (1943-2010)</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Stein Viewed by History: Condemnation</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Stein Viewed by History: Rehabilitation</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>China Speaks</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>51</b>

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the historical legacy of Sir (Marc) Aurel Stein, an intrepid explorer, world-famous archaeologist, and prolific author. This thesis offers an explanation as to why a world-famous figure was all but ignored by historians and how the judgment of his fellow archaeologists and Orientalists, historians, and politicians led to his dwindling importance in historical memory.

While active up to his death in Afghanistan in 1943, his most important (and famous) expeditions took place in Western China. Three of these four expeditions are discussed in the thesis, which examines Stein's impact on his fellow archaeologists, the perception of his activities at the time in the academic and popular presses, and his role in shaping the changing Chinese attitudes towards archaeology.

The first section examines Stein's own influences, particularly that of Sir Flinders Petrie, one of the founders of modern "scientific" archaeology. The section also explores Stein's motivations for conducting his research in Khotan, particularly the role that the forgeries crafted by Islam Akhun had in deceiving some of the brightest European Orientalists. Stein's relationship with and attitude towards the Chinese people and politicians who permitted him to work in their country comprise a significant section of this section. Finally it examines what Stein did with the objects he encountered in his expedition and the attitude of the Chinese people towards Stein's decision to take the objects back to London.

The second section is about Stein's second expedition to Dunhuang. Dunhuang was the site of Stein's most significant and most controversial "finds." His experiences at Dunhuang filled a gallery in the British Museum and set off a debate that continues to this day. The section will focus on what makes this expedition different from his others and how Stein used bribery to act in what he considered to be a morally justifiable manner. Stein's experience at Dunhuang is also compared to those of his rival archaeologist-explorers' experiences in order to create an understanding of how Stein both shaped and fit within the standards of his day.

The third section is about Stein's fourth expedition, which took place in the early 1930s. It examines the shift towards nationalism within China and how Stein failed to grasp the fundamental changes that the country had undergone. It documents how Stein's unchanging attitudes led to the failure of the expedition and contributed towards the tarnishing of a once sterling legacy. It also is an examination of how the fourth expedition started the historical erasure of the uncomfortable truths of Stein's archaeological legacy.

The fourth section is an attempt to examine how Stein has been regarded in the historical record. The perspectives include that of the Chinese government, the British Museum, his contemporary archaeological peers, and the historians who have written about him. It also documents how Stein and the history of his finds came to once again be the subject of academic interest and continued controversy.

## INTRODUCTION

*It seems like the irony of Fate that while I am fighting the difficulties of nature in a region of the dead for the sake of researches, which ought to appeal to Chinese historical instinct, I should be burdened with worries about the attitude of modern successors of those, whose tracks on this wind-worn desert I am tracing. – Aurel Stein in a letter to George Macartney in February 1914.<sup>1</sup>*

*This famous scroll was stolen over fifty years ago by the English-man Ssu-t'an-yin [Stein] which causes people to gnash their teeth in bitter hatred.<sup>2</sup> – Quoted from an official publication of the National Library of Peking in 1960.*

More than a hundred years ago, a British-Hungarian archaeologist named Sir (Marc) Aurel Stein set out on a mission to remake our understanding of Central Asian history. A brilliant linguist and consummate scholar, he would make history as an explorer of Central Asia with four expeditions to Western China (1900-1930) marking the pinnacle of his career. Alongside a few other archaeologists and explorers – names now mostly forgotten – he would explore the Silk Road which includes modern-day Iran, Western China, India, and Pakistan in pursuit of information and artifacts from past civilizations.

Stein kept meticulous records on his journeys and turned them into popular and scholarly accounts of his expeditions. These works, like *Ruins of Desert Cathay: Personal Narrative of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China* and *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China* were greeted as “Monumental” and as “a

---

<sup>1</sup> Shareen Brysac, “Sir Aurel Stein’s Fourth ‘American Expedition’,” In *Proceedings of the British Museum Study Day 23 March 2002*, ed. Helen Wang (London: British Museum, 2004), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 174.

major work of learning”<sup>3</sup> and as “fundamental in the disquisitions of half a dozen sciences.”<sup>4</sup>

Reviews of his works and dispatches from his expeditions were published in major newspapers including the *Times* of London and the *New York Times*. Before he died at the age of eighty, he published dozens of books, all based on his experiences and the finds from his expeditions.

Today, most people would be hard-pressed to identify him, and even the British Museum lacks a permanent exhibit dedicated to Central Asia, let alone Stein. Though his legacy has faded from popular memory, he has recently regained the attention of historians and museum curators as one of the foremost scholars of Central Asia, and as a polarizing figure responsible for either saving – or stealing – some of the world’s rarest documents.

In order to understand Stein’s prominence and impact on the archaeology of Central Asia, it is first necessary to understand how his methods revolutionized and galvanized his contemporaries. While most biographies and articles on Stein have focused on the impact his finds have had in revolutionizing our understanding of history and the importance of his objects, this thesis instead examines how Stein’s attitudes affected his work. In particular, it will focus on how Stein’s methods contributed to his greatest success at the same time that they set him up for his most spectacular failure. What makes this thesis distinct from the other research on Stein will be its examination of the narrative and debate over the possession of the artifacts Stein took on his journeys. Recent works by Susan Whitfield, Annabel Walker, and Helen Wang have brought Stein into the current scholarly discussion of the Silk Road and together their academic work forms a necessary introduction to any scholar interested in Stein. While recent research has focused on the finds made in his second expedition into Central Asia, there has been no recent

---

<sup>3</sup> Lionel Giles, Review of *Serindia* by Aurel Stein, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (January 1924): 141-146.

William Churchill, Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay* by M. Aurel Stein, *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 44, no. 7 (1912): 538.

scholarly research that looked at how Stein's research has been judged by history. This thesis, which will be divided into four sections, is the result of a yearlong effort to correct that gap in the historical record.

The first section of the thesis will look at the influences on Sir Aurel Stein and how they affected his first expedition into Central Asia. Among the influences the section will focus on is that of Sir Flinders Petrie, one of the fathers of modern archaeology. It will examine how his personal and professional work made an impact on the comparatively inexperienced Stein. It will also explore the reactions towards Stein's first mission. In particular, it will focus on the political response from the Qing government and the attitude of the local population. Stein, as one of the first Western archaeologists, encountered a society that would change dramatically over the next thirty years. Finally, this section will focus on the backers of Stein's mission. Who paid for it? And why? What did they hope to get out of Stein's expedition, and how were they rewarded? The financiers of Stein's expeditions wanted more than just artifacts from past civilizations. Stein's backers pressured him towards a certain set of results, and that pressure unquestionably influenced his behavior.

The second section of the thesis will focus on Stein's second expedition to Western China, particularly at the site known variously as Mogao, Dunhuang, and the Cave of a Thousand Buddhas in modern day Xinjiang. Stein's fateful decision to make a detour to the caves would solidify his place in archaeological history and cause a sensation amongst his fellow Orientalists. His decision to take the manuscripts from an inhabited site and active shrine was either the epitome or the antithesis of Petrie's scientific archaeology. His fateful decision to pay a pittance for one of the richest trove of documents in human history set off a controversy that continues to the present day. His place in history is best examined by the actions of his

contemporaries and his successors and so the final section focuses on Stein's actions as compared to those of his fellow archaeologists.

The third section is about failure. China had changed dramatically in the time between Stein's first and fourth Central Asian expeditions. This section's primary emphasis is on change. How had attitudes in China and the Occident (Europe and America) changed? How had Stein changed? Was he the same man with the same principles thirty years later, or had his experiences colored his behavior towards the Chinese people and its government? Equally important was Stein's impact on China. How had Stein changed Chinese attitudes towards archaeology? His impact cannot be underestimated. For six decades, the historical record remained nearly silent on the fourth expedition's stunning failure. The lacuna in knowledge is detrimental, as several recent scholars have argued that understanding the fourth expedition is central to understanding Stein. This position, to which I adhere, will also be critically examined by understanding how Stein's choices differed from those of his fellow archaeologists.

The fourth and final section will look at the narrative that has arisen around Stein since his death in 1943. It will look at Stein's defenders and detractors and how they justified and attacked his actions. It will examine the attitudes in Stein's adopted homeland of Great Britain as well as China, the country from which he excavated his most spectacular finds. The thesis will also examine how scholarship on Stein has markedly increased since the mid 1990s and what factors might have played into his rehabilitation as a flawed but worthy archaeologist. Finally, the thesis will examine how Stein fits into the current debate over ownership of cultural property and the often-contradictory attitudes that the Chinese and British authorities hold with regard to the Stein collections.

## PART I: THE FIRST EXPEDITION

The plans for Stein's first journey began nearly two years before he actually made it to Chinese Turkestan, the region that had, since 1820, been referred to in translated copies of Chinese records as Khotan.<sup>5</sup> According to the popular account of his expedition, he first became interested in the region after the "remarkable antiquarian acquisitions," including what was "recognized as the oldest Indian manuscript then known," made their way to Europe as treasure seekers sold the objects to explorers and other representatives of empire.<sup>6</sup> This was Stein's chance to establish himself as an archaeologist and put his academic experience, survey skills, and prodigious language abilities to use. Stein went in order to uncover more about the civilization that had produced the manuscript, but he was also after the truth behind "fragments of paper manuscripts, pieces of ancient pottery, and similar relics" that had made their way to Western Europe he considered suspect. Though they had aroused Stein's suspicions, they had made their way into collections in Russia and Britain and aroused considerable respectable scholarly curiosity.<sup>7</sup>

### Flinders Petrie: A New Archaeology

Stein entered into archaeology at a heady time for archaeologists of Central Asia. He was one of the first to truly explore the region's ruins, and he brought with him a newly systematized and scientific method of archaeology. While other explorers had traveled through the region, they resembled more closely the "treasure-seekers" he repeatedly denigrated in his reports and books on his experiences in Khotan. Stein saw himself as a representative of a new kind of archaeology distinct from the treasure-seekers who privileged the value of an object over understanding its context and its history. He was directly influenced by W.M. Flinders Petrie, "a

---

<sup>5</sup> Sir Marc Aurel Stein, *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), 151.

<sup>6</sup> Stein, *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan*, viii.

<sup>7</sup> Stein, *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan*, viii.

figure familiar to all archaeologists as one of the founders of their science,”<sup>8</sup> who had conducted work on Stonehenge and the Pyramids, was a professor at the University College, London, and who had founded what would become the British School of Archaeology.

While Petrie’s most famous work, *Methods and Aims in Archaeology*, would not be published until 1904, his scholarship and impact on Stein are indisputable. Stein cited *Methods* in the introduction to his own academic work on the expedition to Khotan: *Ancient Khotan: detailed reports of archaeological exploration in Chinese Turkestan*. Petrie’s thinking arguably had an influence on the way that Stein conducted his research. Like Petrie, he had a disdain for those who engaged in “digging merely for profitable spoil, or to yield a new excitement to the jaded....”<sup>9</sup> While Petrie admonished the archaeologist out in pursuit of his own pleasure, he was hardly a paragon of moral virtue. Casual racism, and a sense of Western superiority over the Middle East, can be found throughout his book. In *Methods & Aims in Archaeology*’s section on “The Labourers” for example, the advice on the kind of man to choose as a laborer was based almost entirely upon physical appearance: “The ornamental man with a good beard is quite useless and lazy... the qualities to be considered are... the sturdiness, and freedom from nervous weakness and hysterical tendency to squabble.”<sup>10</sup> He saw the Egyptians he used at his sites as useful tools rather than as human beings who might have a stake in the finds.

Still, it is in Petrie’s discussion of “the ethics of archaeology” that his influence on Stein is most readily apparent. The justification of archaeology for Petrie lies in the future:

Do we not even now spend ungrudgingly for the great future of our colonies? In every direction we unquestioningly assume that the future has its rights... that the knowledge, the possessions, the aims, and that we have inherited are but a trust to be passed on to the nation yet to be.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Dower, *Flinders Petrie: A Life in Archaeology*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985): xv.

<sup>9</sup> Petrie, W.M. Flinders, *Methods & Aims in Archaeology*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1904), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Petrie, *Methods & Aims in Archaeology*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Petrie, *Methods & Aims in Archaeology*, 176.

According to Petrie archaeology was a nationalistic endeavor, done for the benefit of England and her colonies. It was the archaeologist's mission to rescue and preserve history for the glory of the home country and the colonies dependent on it. For both Petrie and Stein, proper archaeology meant removing the artifacts and sending them off to the British Museum where they could be studied and displayed for all to appreciate.

For Petrie, it was not the present inhabitants of the country that had a justifiable right to the object. Geographical overlap with a modern nation state was not a particular concern for Petrie. The only person who had a moral justification for ownership was the contemporary excavator and archaeologist who worked both for the benefit of future generations and out of academic concern the past. For while "the past has its rights,"<sup>12</sup> the present offers only "cultivation, and once cultivated no one would ever know more..."<sup>13</sup> The present offered only the danger of destruction as the inexorable march of economic progress led an areas' native inhabitants to loot long-buried sites for profit. Nationalist greed or desire to emulate the West only led nations to destroy pristine archaeological sites for farming or other projects intended for financial gain.

### **Eastern Turkestan & Stein's First Steps**

As one of the first serious archaeologists to enter Central Asia, Stein witnessed firsthand the impact of the profit-seeking natives' attempts to make money by looting relics from ancient sites. It was initially the arrival of several Buddhist texts in Paris, St. Petersburg, and Calcutta that excited Stein's interest. While fulfilling his primary goal of uncovering the archaeological history of Khotan, Stein also succeeded in the other half of his mission – to uncover the truth behind the fragments of paper manuscripts that had arrived in Calcutta and so intrigued his

---

<sup>12</sup> Petrie, *Methods & Aims in Archaeology*, 176.

<sup>13</sup> Petrie, *Methods & Aims in Archaeology*, 174.

fellow Orientalists. He recognized the “operations of native ‘treasure-seekers’ at ancient sites were necessarily accompanied with much destruction of valuable evidence” which was a source of great pain for Stein.<sup>14</sup> His journey was a rescue effort for the future, the same kind of expedition that Petrie had glorified in his *Methods and Aims of Archaeology*.

Stein saw himself as more than just a collector of ancient artifacts. He was a scientist whose mission it was to rescue the ancient past from the clutches of the present. His work in Eastern Turkestan was a noble effort to secure for the West (and the right part of the West) a history that belonged to everyone. Stein was in competition with other explorers and archaeologists funded by their respective countries to lay claim to Eastern Turkestan and it was imperative that the British Empire, his adopted homeland, have the honor. While later generations of scholars might question his motivations, Stein saw himself as unquestionably in the right. He was there first, he made the discoveries, and so, by rights, he could claim what he found in Khotan. The controversy that would later spring from this cavalier attitude toward ownership was nowhere to be found on his first expedition.

Stein’s proposal for the work in Khotan echoed the nationalist competitive spirit of the day. He wrote, “In return for the material assistance... all proceeds of my search will be handed over to the Government of India for the British Museum.” The only exception was not for items to be left in to the ownership of the local government or interested scholars, but for other “learned societies” that might sponsor his expedition.<sup>15</sup> Archaeology was also a nationalistic endeavor; the recipient of Stein’s proposal was reminded that Dr. Sven Hedin (of Germany) and Russian expeditions were almost certainly being planned to the same region. Britain could not be bested in any way. Perish the thought of the Imperial Russian Academy of Sciences having a

---

<sup>14</sup> Sir Marc Aurel Stein, *Preliminary Report on a Journey of Archaeological and Topographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1901), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Jeanette Mirsky, *Sir Aurel Stein* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 81.

better collection than the British Museum in its collection of ancient Buddhist artifacts from Western China.

Stein's journey was a colonial expedition through and through. An inhabitant of British India, he held a post at Punjab University. Before starting out on his expedition, he gained the necessary "sanction and support of the Indian Government."<sup>16</sup> He went even further than just gaining his employer's approval; he asked them to pay for the proposed mission. He estimated his expenditures at 6,800 Rupees, which was to have been initially financed jointly by the Supreme Government and the Government of the Punjab region. After he had successfully squared away his finances, he was appointed Principal at a school in Calcutta, a promotion that both delayed his departure and extended his time for travel. Instead of the original six months allotted, he was given a year and granted further funding by the Government of Bengal.<sup>17</sup>

The Indian Government also aided Stein after they managed to convince the Tsung-li Yámen (Department of Foreign Affairs) to grant him a passport for "purposes of exploration."<sup>18</sup> The Chinese government displayed no apparent problem with his intention to explore and excavate ancient ruins in the Taklamakan Desert and the city of Khotan. Not only were they comfortable with his exploration; there was no apparent problem with the Indian Government attaching a sub-surveyor whose chief purpose would be to map Chinese lands. This was clearly an infringement on Chinese sovereignty – the Great Game was being fought elsewhere on the subcontinent but the Qing government had more pressing issues.

---

<sup>16</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 5.

### **China: Friend or Foe?**

On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, not long after he started his expedition, Stein received the news of what he referred to as the “great events which were convulsing the capital in the distant east.”<sup>19</sup> He was referring to the siege of the foreign legations in Beijing during the Boxer Rebellion. He added in his report on the expedition: “Luckily neither here nor during my subsequent travels could I discern any cogent reason to change my plans on account of these political troubles.”<sup>20</sup> From Stein’s perspective, the political turmoil that roiled the capital was utterly unrelated to whatever he might do in Far Western China. While he was right in 1900, his disregard of politics would, in the future, come back to haunt him. Part three of this paper covers Stein’s ill-fated return to China in the early 1930s. The ardent nationalism that he was to encounter was, in many ways, a rebuke of his behavior on the earlier expeditions. The expression of Chinese nationalism and anger at foreign encroachment during the Boxer Rebellion tied directly into the outrage and hostility leveled at Stein nearly thirty years later.

The Boxer Rebellion was put down by a multinational force that included an alliance of both western interests and a newly powerful Japan. In a quirk of fate, at the same time Stein was launching his expedition, his future French rival, Paul Pelliot, was trapped in the Foreign Legations in Beijing.<sup>21</sup> In a striking contrast to the drama in Beijing, Stein’s first expedition was met with willing support from the local officials. After two months spent surveying, he arrived in Kashgar, home of George Macartney the British Consul General. There, “after a series of interviews and a lengthy correspondence with the *Tao-tai*, or Provincial Governor, this high official agreed to issue... instructions likely to assure me all needed assistance in regard to

---

<sup>19</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Diana Preston, *The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China's War on Foreigners that Shook the World in the Summer of 1900* (New York: Berkley, 1999), 159.

transport, supplies, and labour, as well as full freedom for my movements and researches.”<sup>22</sup> The Chinese administrators not only granted Stein free reign to travel where he wanted and to take what he wished, but they also did everything they could to help him in the process. The instructions of the provincial governor gave Stein “a party of 30 labourers for [his] intended excavations.” Without these instructions, “it would otherwise have been difficult to obtain sufficient labour especially in view of the expected rigours of the winter.”<sup>23</sup> When excavating the ancient city of Dandan-Uiliq, Stein went out of his way to visit Keriya, “the headquarters of the district to the east of Khotan... in order to secure personally the assistance of the local *Amban* [government official as the indispensable condition for successful work.”<sup>24</sup> By now Stein knew to count on the local Chinese administrators – properly persuaded they provided resources and access that would otherwise be unavailable. Stein worked in tandem with local government, and the local officials were always happy to oblige.

### **Results of the First Expedition**

By late April, Stein returned to Khotan for an eight-day stay to pack up his boxes and head home. However, he was not ready to leave China until he discovered the mystery behind the artifacts that had inspired his journey in the first place. Stein wanted to get at the truth behind the suspicious artifacts that were keeping some of the brightest European Orientalists busy with their indecipherable text. These were manuscripts and pieces of pottery and other objects that had been found by locals and sold to European non-expert government officials who had, in turn, passed them on to experts in Europe. While some of the objects were unquestionably genuine, Stein expressed curiosity about what he called “a large proportion of texts displaying a strange

---

<sup>22</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 41.

variety of entirely ‘unknown scripts,’ which could not fail to arouse suspicion.”<sup>25</sup> In addition to the lack of information regarding the strange language found on the relics, “no reliable information was ever forthcoming as to the exact origin of the finds or the true character of the ruined sites which were supposed to have furnished them.”<sup>26</sup> Stein’s hunch would prove correct and establish his reputation while nearly undoing that of a giant in the field. It should also have served as a challenge to the cavalierly assumed Western intellectual superiority. In reality, these objects, which had been half the reason that Stein went to Khotan in the first place, were nothing more than elaborate forgeries. According to Stein’s biographer, Jeanette Mirsky, these artifacts should never have aroused the attention they received. However, these fakes had merited attention from no less of an authority than Dr. Augustus Hoernle of Oxford University. His reputation stemmed from the translation of the Bower Manuscript, an Indian Buddhist document from the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. which started the flood of European archaeologists into Eastern Turkestan.<sup>27</sup> He was also, ironically enough, responsible for seeing that Stein received the financing for his initial expedition.

He had taken an interest in the objects that were being found in Eastern Turkestan and published a widely circulated report that explicitly defended their authenticity in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*.<sup>28</sup> On his expedition Stein investigated the authenticity of the various objects by contacting Islam Akhun, a villager, who according to Hoernle’s report had found most of the objects. Stein confronted Islam Akhun and was able to catch him in a series of contradictions that ultimately led to him admitting that he had manufactured the objects.<sup>29</sup> At the time of Stein’s expedition Hoernle was working on a follow-up to that report and so it fell to

---

<sup>25</sup> Stein, *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan*, viii.

<sup>26</sup> Stein, *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan*, viii.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 48.

<sup>28</sup> Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, 45-46.

<sup>29</sup> Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, 100.

Stein to break the news to his mentor, the pre-eminent and skilled Orientalist, that he had fallen victim to a hoax perpetrated by a villager in rural China. Hoernle corrected for his original claims in the second report by making no mention of his original argument that the objects were authentic. For Hoernle it was better to ignore the affair than to admit to being taken in.

According to Mirsky, Hoernle's original conclusion was based in simple prejudice: "Perhaps scholars could not imagine anything as sophisticated as forged manuscripts coming from a region which they considered a cultural vacuum."<sup>30</sup>

This idea, that Eastern Turkestan was a cultural vacuum incapable of producing anyone of intelligence, was one that Stein shared even while he admired the forger's handiwork. He wrote: "Islam Akhun was a man of exceptional intelligence *for these parts* [italics mine]."<sup>31</sup> While Stein was able to admire a man who had outwitted some of the smartest minds in European Orientalism, he was only willing to acknowledge Islam Akhun as an aberration. The assumption that the inhabitants of Eastern Turkestan were somehow less intelligent, and therefore less capable of safeguarding their archaeological history than the Europeans, played a large role in the justification underlying Stein's decision to remove the artifacts from Eastern Turkestan. Stein's estimation of the inhabitants of Eastern Turkestan, like his blithe attitude towards political issues, would present a problem on future expeditions.

During his eight days in Khotan, Stein spent much of his time arranging the finds of the previous four months.<sup>32</sup> They filled "twelve large boxes" and traveled with him over the next several months until all arrived in London in July, where Stein was "able to deposit my collection in the British Museum."<sup>33</sup> While their placement in the British Museum was supposed

---

<sup>30</sup> Mirsky, *Sir Aurel Stein*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> Stein, *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan*, 458.

<sup>32</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 64.

<sup>33</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 64.

to be temporary, most of his finds remained in their collection so that Stein and others could begin research into their history and translation. Stein had other pressing obligations as well, including the job to which he had recently been promoted. In addition, an expectant public, which had been eagerly following his expedition in the *Times*, awaited a fuller account of his journey. Stein was returning from no ordinary trip, and the general public wanted to hear more about Stein's experiences.

While Stein was able to file his preliminary report which outlined "the character and scope of my explorations as well as their historical and topographical interest"<sup>34</sup> with the India Office in 1901, it was another two years before he found the time to publish his personal narrative. Readers of the *New York Times* were apparently so impatient to get a hold of a copy that the paper published a short article stating: "After a long delay the book on the "Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan," by Dr. M Aurel Stein will soon be published in London... [H]is book, which has been frequently announced, is already more than a year overdue."<sup>35</sup> Stein successfully managed to publish the personal narrative in 1903 as the newspaper article promised, and he later released a two-volume academic account of his journey in 1907.

He received several reviews for that work: *Ancient Khotan: Detailed Report of Archaeological Explorations in Chinese Turkestan*. In 1902, Stein was granted leave to write up the results of his expedition. By 1903, after having written for 17 months – 10 more than he had originally anticipated, Stein returned to India and continued to work on the report that would become *Ancient Khotan*. He finished in 1906, hastened only by the promise of another expedition upon its publication.<sup>36</sup> The volumes themselves compose an academic work unlike the popular account released four years earlier. Each volume was divided into chapters with

---

<sup>34</sup> Stein, *Preliminary Report*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> *New York Times*, July 18, 1903.

<sup>36</sup> Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, xi.

subsections focusing on the history, geography, and finds and purchases made near the sites that Stein visited. The volumes also contained plates ranging from images of the Khotan countryside to exiled criminals. He made references throughout the text to Hsuan-Tsang, a Buddhist monk who centuries earlier had traveled the same route. Hsuan-Tsang serves almost as a narrative anchor throughout the text. He was a figure of significant importance to Stein whose knowledge of Hsuan-Tsang would prove invaluable in his next expedition.

*Ancient Khotan*, published in 1907, was well received within the academic community. A reviewer for *The Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies* wrote, “These magnificent volumes contain the detailed report...carried out by Dr. Stein.”<sup>37</sup> The review described Stein’s excavated artifacts as “striking, outstanding, and celebrated.”<sup>38</sup> The *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* was only somewhat less effusive in its praise; the reviewer wrote, “His detailed report describes, perhaps too minutely, but with evidence and scrupulous accuracy how these [relics] were obtained.”<sup>39</sup> The best critique that the premier publication in geography and exploration could come up with for Stein was that his report was too thorough.

The 1903 popular account contains only one admission of guilt by Stein over his decision to remove the artifacts from China. When confronted by an *Amban* named Pan-Darin, Stein felt embarrassed: “He dwelt on the fact of all those old records being carried away to the Far West. What could he show to the Fu-tai or Governor-General at Urumchi who had been so inquisitive about the object of my excavations and who undoubtedly would wish to hear of their results?”<sup>40</sup> Happily for Stein he came upon an easy solution; a copy of the 77 page preliminary report and photographs of the ancient artifacts he was shipping back to London placated the *Amban*. Stein

---

<sup>37</sup> Review of *Ancient Khotan* by Aurel Stein, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 27 (1907): 306.

<sup>38</sup> Review of *Ancient Khotan* by Aurel Stein, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 306.

<sup>39</sup> W. Broadfoot, review of *Ancient Khotan* by Aurel Stein, *The Geographical Journal* 31, no. 2 (Feb., 1908): 202.

<sup>40</sup> Stein, *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan*, 448.

wrote, “[O]f the copies of my ‘Preliminary Report’ subsequently transmitted by the Indian Government for presentation to Chinese officials, his at least was duly appreciated.”<sup>41</sup> It was hardly a fair trade. The Chinese officials offered Stein unrestricted access, manpower, and aid. In return they received a chronicle of Stein’s experiences and a description of all the artifacts that had left their country forever.

His relatively uncontroversial experience in China would soon be followed by one of the most controversial archaeological expeditions in history. Stein’s return, and his experiences at the caves in Dunhuang, would kindle a truly international interest in Central Asia as well as demonstrate the depths to which he would sink in the pursuit of obtaining priceless artifacts for his sponsors. Unlike his experiences in Khotan, Stein’s actions in 1907 and 1908 would earn the Qing government’s ire and create two conflicting narratives of the impact of European archaeology in China.

## **PART II: THE SECOND EXPEDITION**

Stein’s second expedition to the “Cave of the Thousand Buddhas” at Dunhuang would be the high point of his archaeological career. He returned with finds that would cement his reputation and his legacy and contributed to the understanding of the arrival of Buddhism via India into China. The “finds” would, among other priceless treasures, include the Diamond Sutra, the world’s oldest dated printed book. Stein’s methods of gaining access to the documents, his methods of persuasion to spirit them out of the caves, and his decision to remove them have come under increasing scrutiny and discussion in the hundred years since his 1907 expedition. This section will explain what was different about Stein’s expedition to Dunhuang and why his actions over a century ago incited a debate that would affect his later expeditions and would continue on to the present day.

---

<sup>41</sup> Stein, *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan*, 448.

### Why Dunhuang?

After Stein's first expedition, he returned to life as an administrator in British India. His interests remained in archaeology, and after he completed his multi-volume report on his experiences in Khotan, he sought permission and funding to return to China. This expedition was financed in part by the Indian Survey Department and the Comptroller of India Treasuries. Ever a stickler for details, Stein complained bitterly of dealing with the "incubus" of charging the right expense to the right account so that he could later be repaid in full.<sup>42</sup> He was quite keen on getting the accounts right and making sure that the expedition was a financial and archaeological success for his backers.

Since this was his second major expedition, he now had the benefit of experience to guide him. In addition to experience, he also had heard rumors of a vast treasure trove of documents to be found at a complex of caves known as Dunhuang.<sup>43</sup> However, the rumors of the vast manuscript collection were not the impetus for Stein's journey. In fact by the time they began circulating amongst the European archaeologists, Stein's expedition had already begun.<sup>44</sup> Stein was not the first European to explore Dunhuang, nor was he the first person to encounter the treasure trove that had lain untouched for centuries. The first honor belonged to Stein's friend, Professor de Lóczy, a geographer, who, "without being himself an antiquarian student... had rightly recognized the artistic and archeological interest of the fine fresco paintings and stucco sculptures," at Dunhuang and whose impressions had "greatly impressed" Stein.<sup>45</sup> Lilla Russell-Smith, in her article on Stein's motivations for traveling to Dunhuang, states that that de

---

<sup>42</sup> M. Aurel. Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay: Personal Narrative of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 19.

<sup>43</sup> Lilla Russell-Smith. "Hungarian Explorers in Dunhuang," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 10, no. 3 (November 2000): 343-344.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, "Hungarian Explorers in Dunhuang," 345.

<sup>45</sup> Aurel Stein, *On Central Asian Tracks* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 169.

Lóczy's expedition in 1879 was responsible for Stein's expedition. Unlike other biographers of Stein, she showed that it was de Lóczy himself, and not just his research, that encouraged Stein – who spoke no Chinese – to take his expedition well beyond its original plan. The two men's close friendship and academic correspondence were instrumental in Stein's decision to be the leader of the second major European expedition to visit Dunhuang.<sup>46</sup>

Dunhuang was markedly different from Stein's previous expeditions. Unlike his expedition to Khotan he was not the first European explorer to visit the sites. The Hungarian expedition led by de Lóczy had visited the site nearly thirty years prior, and at the time Stein planned his trip he had no reason to believe his expedition would uncover anything beyond what had been described by de Lóczy. However, unlike the geographer, Stein was an archaeologist whose expedition would do more than simply scratch the surface of the caves. Stein was not hoping to stun the world with his finds, but merely to conduct a more thorough investigation of the site, whose existence at the time he set out on his journey was already known to a mostly uninterested West.

The second characteristic that differentiated Stein's experience at Dunhuang from the first expedition was that he was applying his archaeological skills in a place that was still inhabited and very much in use. In the paper that initially inspired Stein's interest in the region, de Lóczy wrote:

In front of the caves there are several Chinese temples; These are being elaborately restored by the wealthy Chinese, who also have had the clay statues of the caves repaired. Moreover instead of the fine old frescoes they are having new ones painted which appeal to them. At the time of our visit only two Buddhist monks were guarding the caves...<sup>47</sup>

Unlike the deserted ruins of Khotan, the caves at Dunhuang served as a site for Buddhist pilgrims. It was not only well-traveled, but the local residents had taken an interest in its care as

---

<sup>46</sup> Smith, "Hungarian Explorers in Dunhuang," 343.

<sup>47</sup> Lilla Russell-Smith, "Hungarian Explorers in Dunhuang," 354.

well. There were even monks in residence. Stein certainly did not intend to visit the site with the intention of engaging in major excavations.

By the time he arrived, things had changed. On his journey, Stein heard of the rumors that were exciting his fellow archaeologists across Europe. In his account of the expedition, *Serindia*, he wrote that there “was a real foundation for the vague rumours I had first heard at Tun-huang... about the accidental discovery of a great deposit of ancient manuscripts hidden in one of the cave-temples.”<sup>48</sup> This was no longer simply a mission to explore the significance of a few cave paintings. Stein now faced the possibility of uncovering a significant find that might even overshadow the other parts of his journey. At the same time, he knew that other Western expeditions were being mounted to explore Chinese Turkestan, and the possibility that his French and German rivals might beat him to the finds almost certainly pushed him further and harder than he might otherwise have dared.<sup>49</sup>

Stein entered the caves at Dunhuang fully prepared for whatever he might find. The rumors had pushed him to figure out how to gain access at nearly any cost. He was aware that the manuscripts might have been locked away by official order, so “In secret council Chiang [Stein’s native aid] and myself had discussed long before how best to get access to the find, and how to break down if necessary any priestly obstruction.”<sup>50</sup> Stein was willing to violate an official decree made by the same Chinese government who had so graciously permitted him into the region in the first place. He was also willing to violate a sacred place of worship if it meant gaining access to the manuscripts. Most interesting was the fact that his Chinese aid and interpreter was willing to work with him to make that happen.

---

<sup>48</sup> M. Aurel Stein, *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China* Vol. 1. (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 586.

<sup>49</sup> Mirksy, *Aurel Stein*, 227.

<sup>50</sup> M. Aurel Stein, *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China* Vol. 2, (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 28.

### Not Exactly Abandoned

In one paragraph, which is well worth reprinting in full, he summarized the entire ethical dilemma he faced as a Western archaeologist. He showed that he was well aware that the activities he was about to undertake were not entirely morally sound, even within his own archaeological framework. He wrote:

It was a novel experience for me to find these shrines notwithstanding all apparent decay, still frequented as places of actual worship. But quite apart from the damage done by well-meant restorations, I reflected with some apprehension upon the difficulties which this continued sanctity of the site might raise against archaeological exploitation. Would the resident priests be sufficiently good-natured—and mindful of material interests—to close their eyes to the removal of any sacred objects? And, so, could we rely on their spiritual influence to allay the scruples which might arise among the more superstitious laity patronizing their pilgrimage place or Tirtha to use the familiar Indian term? Only experience and time could show.<sup>51</sup>

The paragraph reveals Stein's mental state and shows that he was fully aware of the difference between the shrines at Dunhuang and his previous work. This was a new experience, an archaeological exploitation in which he was attempting to take back objects from a place that was still inhabited. The very first manuscript that Stein saw was shown to him by a young priest who had set it aside for use in his prayers. Stein did not see a moral dilemma in his own actions, instead it was a dilemma for others, the priests, to deal with. Their objections would hopefully be overcome through Stein's favorite coercive method – bribery.

Stein recognized that in order to gain access to the manuscripts he was not engaged in the scientific pursuit of archaeology. He was engaged in an activity that, if successfully carried out, was much closer to theft. He was considering taking objects that were in use, locked behind a door on order from a government official that outranked anyone stationed at Dunhuang. He was willing to do so by appealing to a priest's greed and placing a hope in the priests' willingness to placate a possibly outraged local community. His self-confidence in his own superiority

---

<sup>51</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 30.

demonstrated the depths to which he was willing to sink in order to gain access to archaeological treasures.

Stein's actual experiences in gaining access to the manuscripts would unfortunately live up to the extremely low standards he had set for himself. His actions would also set the standard for the other archaeologists that would come to Dunhuang, including his future backer, Langdon Warner. Warner's behavior would, in turn, so upset the Chinese government that it would sink their joint expedition in 1930. It was Stein's decision to proceed by nearly any means necessary that would gain him fame, cement his reputation, and destroy the old way of archaeology in China forever.

While the head priest was out looking for donations, Stein left the site and conducted the type of archaeology that he had originally planned for. Upon his return he saw, "the annual pilgrimage to the shrine," whose "great fete, a sort of religious fair, was said to have drawn thither fully ten thousands of the pious Tun-huang people."<sup>52</sup> There is absolutely no question that Stein knew he was taking objects from a shrine that was fully in use by the same "queer set of slum-dwelling coolies"<sup>53</sup> that had assisted him on his journey into the region outside of Khotan.

### **Stein Meets a Priest: A Sacrifice of Morals?**

When the Tao-Shih, also known as Abbot Wang, returned to the caves, Stein followed suit in the hope of gaining further access to the hidden storeroom. While Stein was fully aware that he could not touch the temple proper, he still had high hopes for the library that was behind the wooden door. He was to be disappointed as, on first glance, the cave was more inaccessible than ever. Where before a wooden gate had blocked off access, he now faced a solid brick wall.

---

<sup>52</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 159.

<sup>53</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 160.

Stein, though, was not to be deterred and sent his Chinese-speaking secretary off to discuss access with the Tao-shih. Once again, discussion of removing even a single manuscript led to extreme concern on the part of the Tao-shih, prompted both by religious scruples and the possibility of popular resentment.<sup>54</sup>

The worst news of all was yet to come. Stein was about to face a threat more serious than violation of religious obligation. The politicians who had threatened his ability to be the first Western archaeologist to uncover the manuscripts had beaten him to the trove.

Statements heard at Tun-huang seemed to indicate that the great find of manuscripts had been reported at the time to the Tao-t'ai at Su-chou and thence to the Viceroy of Kan-su. Expression had been given also to a belief, of which we had no means of testing the foundation, that the latter had given orders for the transmission of specimens and for the safe keeping of the whole collection.<sup>55</sup>

Stein admitted that if this were true, "things would necessarily, from my point of view, become far more complicated."<sup>56</sup> Here was the counterpart to the religious obligation that Stein had already decided to ignore. The Chinese government had apparently given orders to the effect that the manuscript collection was now the property of the state. This should have been the end for Stein. There were both religious and political prohibitions that should have prevented him from pursuing his attempts to take the manuscripts, yet Stein persisted.

He asked the Tao-Shih for a tour of the place and though he cringed at the sight of the gaudily restored temple he "could not help feeling something akin to respect for the queer little figure by [his] side"<sup>57</sup> whose dedication had made the restoration possible. There was no doubt in Stein's mind of the dedication that the Tao-shih had to the temple, and he wrote condescendingly of the tour the Tao-Shi gave him. "Gladly I let my delightfully credulous cicerone expound in

---

<sup>54</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 166.

<sup>55</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 166-167.

<sup>56</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 166-167.

<sup>57</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 169.

voluble talk the wonderful stories of travel which each fresco panel depicted.”<sup>58</sup> Upon discovering that they each respected the same saint, Hsuan-tsang who had brought Buddhism to China and who had influenced Stein’s first expedition, the Tao-shih opened up the store of manuscripts to Stein. After he gained access to the storeroom, Stein was determined to make off with whatever he could. Among other objects, Stein was impressed by both the condition and beauty of silk paintings, which had, in previous centuries been used as flags. He was surprised to discover that the priest attached “little value to these beautiful relics of pictorial art in the T-ang times. So I made bold to put aside rapidly for ‘further inspection’ [quotes in the original] the best of the pictures on silk linen or paper I could lay my hands on...”<sup>59</sup> Soon, “with the help of Chiang-ssu-yeh’s [his Chinese aid] genial persuasion, and what reassuring display I could of my devotion to Buddhist lore in general and the memory of my patron saint in particular, we succeeded better I had ventured to hope.”<sup>60</sup> It was the priests’ willing attitude, incomprehension of the treasures he was in charge of, and Stein’s cupidity that led to the coup de grace that would establish Stein’s legacy.

Stein and his Chinese aid Chiang worked as a team to wear down the Tao-shih. The account of his triumph is almost gleeful:

Was it evident, so Chiang pleaded with all the force of his soft reasoning, that by allowing me, a faithful disciple Hsüan-tsang, to render accessible to Western students literary and other relics which a providential discovery placed so abundantly in his keeping, he would do an act of real religious merit? That this pious concession also be rewarded by an ample donation for the benefit of the shrine he had laboured to restore to its old glory, a secondary consideration merely to be hinted at.<sup>61</sup>

Stein’s plan worked and resulted in an agreement that saw that the objects he selected during the day were transported to his campsite at night. Stein justified his decision by writing that “I had

---

<sup>58</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 170.

<sup>59</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 178.

<sup>60</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 179.

<sup>61</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 180.

recognized long before that it was my duty towards research to try my utmost to rescue, if possible, the whole of the collection from the risk of slow dispersion and loss with which it was threatened in such keeping.”<sup>62</sup> After brief attacks of conscience on the part of the Tao-Shih threatened the entire mission, and after further negotiations had taken place, Stein took his leave of the Cave of a Thousand Buddhas. In Stein’s last reflection on the Tao-Shih, he reflected on the priests’ mental state, in a sentence that seems to say more about Stein than it does about the priest: “The good Tao-shih now seemed to breathe freely again, and almost ready to recognize that I was performing a pious act in rescuing for Western scholarship those relics of ancient Buddhist literature and art which local ignorance would allow to lie here neglected or to be lost in the end.”<sup>63</sup> He walked out of Dunhuang with 29 cases filled with manuscripts of paintings and walked into historical controversy.

### **Stein and his Peers: Comparable Experiences at Dunhuang**

Stein had pulled off the archaeological expedition of his career and one that would make him famous. The objects he recovered from the Cave of a Thousand Buddhas would take longer to make an impact in purely academic circles in part due to the sheer number of artifacts. In the press and amongst his peers, however, the impact would be immeasurable. In the years between his second and third expedition he would be awarded the status of a Knight of the Indian Empire and the Founders Medal of the Royal Geographical Society, and he would cement his already impressive international acclaim.

The contemporaneous newspaper accounts that summarized Stein’s expedition for readers made no mention of Stein’s experiences in the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas. Even the article printed on his return made no mention of the treasure trove of manuscripts that

---

<sup>62</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 191.

<sup>63</sup> Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 194.

accompanied him back to Britain. The emphasis was purely on the more traditional archaeological finds; it was only in 1909 when Stein was safely back in Britain that the *Times* covered a lecture that stressed the importance of his find, and, of course, made Stein appear the righteous hero who “rescued” the manuscripts from the “jealously guarded” temples.<sup>64</sup> The article was met by an approving letter to the editor from none other than the former Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon who was impressed by the “dramatic” and “fruitful” “chaffering” (haggling) undertaken by Stein.<sup>65</sup> Stein’s duplicity and maneuvering were met with approval by his fellow archaeologists, the press, and the administrators who made his research possible in the first place.

Stein himself was met with rousing public approval upon his return to Europe. According to Annabel Walker’s biography of Stein, he was “met at the railway station by what he described as a ‘grand reception’. Tickets for his lecture sold out ten days before the event...”<sup>66</sup> Stein was the archaeological equivalent of a rock star; he gave lectures to interested audiences across Europe. Though Stein faced initial disappointment at what he considered “third-rate accommodations in the British Museum...”<sup>67</sup> his finds were soon awarded the respect they deserved. By 1914 he surely would have been pleased with the Museum’s accommodations as the *Times* announced the King and Queen would be there for the inauguration of the King Edward galleries, among whose exhibits included the Sir Aurel Stein collection the “most exciting part of the display.”<sup>68</sup> This was the last time for nearly a century that Stein’s artifacts would have a place of prominence in the British Museum.

---

<sup>64</sup> “Dr. Stein’s Travels in Central Asia: Archaeological Discoveries,” *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*. Helen Wang ed., (London: Saffron Books, 2002): 50.

<sup>65</sup> “Dr. Stein’s Travels in Central Asia,” *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*, Wang ed., 51.

<sup>66</sup> Annabel Walker, *Sir Aurel Stein: Pioneer of the Silk Road* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 188.

<sup>67</sup> Walker, *Sir Aurel Stein*, 195.

<sup>68</sup> “Wonders of the East. Exhibits in the British Museum Extension. Royal Opening To-day,” *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*, Wang ed., 4-65.

In the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, William Churchill wrote an approving review of Stein's *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, which described the journey. He specifically praised Stein's work at the Cave of a Thousand Buddhas, writing that it would "engage special students for yet many a year of enthusiastic research."<sup>69</sup> There was no mention of any controversy over its provenance excepting that they came from "a temple library..." and amounted to "in barbarian measure 'seven cartloads.'"<sup>70</sup> The *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* review mentioned Stein's experience at the Cave of a Thousand Buddhas as a "fascinating archaeological romance."<sup>71</sup> The *Journal of Hellenic Studies* review stated that the priest was "prevailed upon to part with many of its treasures on the assurance that they would be much appreciated in the West."<sup>72</sup> The closest that a contemporary reviewer came to criticism of Stein is found in the *American Historical Review* in which the reviewer stated, "his real feat at the Caves lay in discovering and rifling the great Caves library."<sup>73</sup> The rest of the review undercuts the accusation of stealing by describing Stein's actions as "clever" and making for "very good reading."<sup>74</sup> Contemporary reaction to Stein saw nothing controversial in Stein's behavior.

Stein had also set up a path for his competitors to follow. As the tale at the caves at Dunhuang grew more and more outsized, nearly everyone who was anyone in Central Asian archaeology visited Dunhuang and made off with what he could. The French archaeologist Paul

---

<sup>69</sup> Churchill, Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 538.

<sup>70</sup> Churchill, Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 538.

<sup>71</sup> R. E. F., Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay* by M. Aurel Stein, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 21 no. 111 (June 1912): 174.

<sup>72</sup> A. E. Taylor, Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay* by M. Aurel Stein, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 32 (1912): 411.

<sup>73</sup> Maurice Bloomfield, Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay* by M. Aurel Stein, *The American Historical Review* 18, no. 1 (October 1912): 115.

<sup>74</sup> Bloomfield, Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, 116.

Pelliot was the first to arrive after Stein and he managed to “dazzle”<sup>75</sup> the Tao-Shih with his ability in Chinese. He was left literally in Stein’s dust as he worked in the “tiny space resulting (though he did not realize it) from the removal of Stein’s great haul.”<sup>76</sup> By that time, the priest had shed any vestiges of conscience and ended up selling the two piles of documents that Pelliot had set aside for 500 *taels* or approximately 90 British pounds.<sup>77</sup> Pelliot in turn inspired Langdon Warner’s interest in Dunhuang. In 1916, Warner traveled throughout China, and on a stopover in Peking, he ran into Pelliot. “Hearing of Warner’s frustration regarding Turkestan he proposed that they go there together after the war. ‘That would be an immense feather in our caps as he is the one who collected all the Tun-huang mss. and brought back the great T’ang paintings.’”<sup>78</sup> Eight years later, Warner went to the caves only to discover that “400 Russians prisoners who were quartered here for six months two years ago have done an enormous job of irreparable damage to the walls. No such photographs as those of Stein and Pelliot can be taken now.”<sup>79</sup> In spite of the new technique that would enable him to remove frescoes from the wall, his reputation could not be established in the same way that Stein’s and Pelliot’s were. He left with twelve fragments of the frescoes, hardly the haul he would have hoped for. He also made off with a T’ang sculpture. He justified his decision by writing that, “I had no hesitation in taking it as soon as I got permission because everything will be gone in another twenty years.”<sup>80</sup> He fully considered the ethics of what he was doing and like Pelliot and Stein judged himself to be on the right side of history.

As for the morals of such vandalism I would strip the place bare without a flicker. Who knows when Chinese troops may be quartered here as the Russians were? And worse

---

<sup>75</sup> Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, 178.

<sup>76</sup> Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, 183.

<sup>77</sup> Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, 184.

<sup>78</sup> Langdon Warner, *Langdon Warner Through His Letters*, Edited by Theodore Bowie, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), 87.

<sup>79</sup> Warner, *Langdon Warner Through His Letters*, 115.

<sup>80</sup> Warner, *Langdon Warner Through His Letters*, 117.

still, how long before the Mohameddan rebellion that everyone expects? In 20 years this place won't be worth a visit... What Stein and Pelliot and Peking and the Kansu Viceroy and the Japanese failed to get has been carried off piecemeal by the magistrates who stay only a year or so in office.<sup>81</sup>

Warner saw himself as a preservationist, against the trend of destruction that had been wrought in the approximately fifteen years since Stein had first been there. Unlike Stein, he may have a point. While Stein never mentioned the possibilities of a marauding Russian Army and could not (and did not) predict the piecemeal theft that depleted the collection, Warner could easily see what the consequences of unchecked avarice had done to the caves. Whether he was justified in taking objects from the already ravaged collection out of China, the motivation behind his taking of the frescoes was based on a more solid understanding of the historical situation.

The legacy of the objects taken would have repercussions beyond the caves at Dunhuang, and the archaeologists who had most benefited from their removal would be the first to see that. Stein, who had made his name at Dunhuang, would soon be undone by the consequences of his actions there. Langdon Warner's decision to remove the frescoes would not be so charitably smiled upon by the government when he attempted a return only six years later. Together their actions would play a large part in ending the old way of archaeology and end up ushering in a new era of collaboration and nationalism. Before that could happen, however, Stein would set out on his forgotten and disastrous fourth Central Asian expedition.

### **PART III: THE FOURTH EXPEDITION & DISASTER**

*The Fourth has a different libretto; it adds nothing to the exploration of Asia and its complex Pre-Muslim history, but rather it is an excursion into Stein himself: it locates where he*

---

<sup>81</sup> Warner, *Langdon Warner Through His Letters*, 118.

*stood in his career and the inflexibility of his innermost attitudes and habits.*<sup>82</sup> - Jeanette Mirsky on Stein's failed fourth expedition.

Stein's fourth "American" expedition to China marked a pivotal moment both for Stein and for Central Asian archaeology. It left Stein so embittered that unlike every previous expedition, he wrote nothing about it. His autobiography, "On Ancient Central Asian Tracks" is subtitled "Brief Narrative of Three Expeditions in Innermost Asia and Northwestern China" in spite of the fact it was published three years *after* the fourth expedition. This section will be an investigation into what led to the failure of the expedition and will explain how Stein's practices came to be outmoded as nationalism and a new understanding of archaeology dramatically shifted even as Stein's methods and understandings did not.

### **Historical, Political, & Attitudinal Shifts in China**

China had changed dramatically since Aurel Stein set out on his first expedition in 1900. The Qing Dynasty had collapsed not long after Stein's expedition into Dunhuang, and a new government based on republican nationalism rather than Imperial rule had risen in its place. The new nationalist government was formed after the Imperial Court was forced to sign onto unequal treaties with European powers who repeatedly exercised the threat of force to keep the government in line. The Boxer Rebellion, mentioned in section one, was only one example amongst many of friction and fighting between the Chinese people and the Western powers. Other examples of encroachment included the Unequal Treaties which were "harsh concessions" forced on the Chinese by foreign powers starting after the first Opium War. They included among other indignities: unfair trade agreements, the cession of land to foreign nations, and the right of citizens of the signatory countries to be tried in their own courts.<sup>83</sup> Stein, as an

---

<sup>82</sup> Mirsky, *Sir Aurel Stein*, 461.

<sup>83</sup> Wakeman, *The Fall of Imperial China* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 137-138.

archaeologist who appropriated artifacts of cultural or historical significance fit in with the established tradition of taking advantage of China. He was in good company - foreign armies had sacked and destroyed the Yuan Ming Yuan (the Old Summer Palace), and many of the valuable objects seized by the soldiers ended up in collections across Europe.<sup>84</sup> The cultural theft in particular would earn greater recognition in post-Imperial China, a marked and important shift in the development of China's national identity. The people grew tired of the increasingly greedy Western powers who encroached on China's sovereignty and the ineffective Manchu government was finally removed in 1911 after a period of mass civil unrest. It was replaced with a nationalist government led by a president rather than an emperor.

Only a year after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the Chinese government was already beginning to assert itself. Over the following years the government would be able to bring greater and greater pressure to bear, leveraging a new Chinese identity to impair, block, and even co-opt archaeological expeditions led by European explorers. In addition, they would force one of the few people to seriously rival Stein as a surveyor and explorer, Sven Hedin, to run a joint Sino-Swedish expedition, a decision that earned him derision from his European and American colleagues.<sup>85</sup> This meant that China not only saw a need to stop European archaeologists from exploiting its archaeological resources, but also an opportunity to build a nationalist understanding of its own history.

The field and understanding of archaeology would change in China as well. In 1909, after the extent of the thefts from Dunhuang became apparent, the Chinese government decided that the manuscripts were no longer safe in the care of the universally derided Abbot Wang, the priest

---

<sup>84</sup> In one of those historical ironies, the order to destroy the Summer Palace was given by the 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Elgin whose father, the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Elgin is most famous for the removal of the Elgin Marbles from the Parthenon another great controversy in archaeological ethics.

<sup>85</sup> Brysac, "Sir Aurel Stein's Fourth 'American' Expedition," 18.

who had proven so susceptible to Stein's bribes. In their transport back to Beijing, however, many of the manuscripts were rumored to have disappeared much to the chagrin of the archaeological community.<sup>86</sup> Modern scholars have questioned the truthfulness of that account, but there is little doubt that the European explorers lacked faith in the Chinese people to protect their own heritage.<sup>87</sup> The China of 1909 was politically different from the China of 1930, and similarly, a transformation had taken place in archaeology. The repeated incursions of European explorers, including Stein, led people within and outside the government to work to modernize their attitudes. By 1925, the first Western trained Chinese archaeologist had begun work in his home country, and by 1928, the "establishment of the Chinese National Commission for the Preservation of Cultural Objects" led to the perception that "Western expeditions were legalized plunder."<sup>88</sup>

According to John Fitzgerald's book *Awakening China*, the "state itself came to assume major responsibility for establishing museums after the founding of the Republic."<sup>89</sup> His book, which cites Stein specifically, states that the original Chinese museums were set up in response to Western museums in China that displayed supposed superiority in European science and technology. They were set up to "preserve the store of national treasures before they were all smuggled out of the country..."<sup>90</sup> The Chinese people and their government had learned from Stein's earlier expeditions and wanted to preserve for themselves some of their own cultural history.

---

<sup>86</sup> Balachandran Sanchita, "Object Lessons: The Politics of Preservation and Museum Building in Western China in the Early Twentieth Century," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 14 (2007): 12.

<sup>87</sup> The International Dunhuang Project, "IDB News Issue No. 12," [http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news12/idpnews\\_12.a4d](http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news12/idpnews_12.a4d).

<sup>88</sup> Balachandran, "Object Lessons," 8.

<sup>89</sup> John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996), 53.

<sup>90</sup> Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, 52.

### Stein. Same Man. Same Values?

After his trip to Central Asia in the mid-1910s Stein stayed clear of China for the next fourteen years. Rather than continue to explore Western China, he explored India, modern day Pakistan and Iran, and, as usual, published voluminous scholarly and popular accounts of his expeditions. In particular he pursued a lifelong obsession, as he explored the same path that Alexander the Great traveled thousands of years earlier. His finds and continued exploration established his reputation as one of the world's pre-eminent archaeologists and gained him international recognition.

In the thirty years since his first expedition to China, however, the world had changed, and, as explained earlier, there were few places that had undergone changes as dramatic as China's. Stein, however, had arguably changed little in the past thirty years. A traveler in the remotest of countries who preferred a tent and the sands to his job in British India, his knowledge of politics was limited. While Stein was more experienced in affairs of archaeology in 1930 than he was in 1901, his attitudes and principles remained the same for better or for worse. Twenty-eight years after the end of his first expedition, he was selected to receive the Flinders Petrie medal for Archaeology. It must have been a particularly moving moment for Stein who had credited Sir Flinders Petrie in his very first book. He told the assembled guests that, "he remembered, too, with deep gratitude, the interest Sir Flinders had always shown in his work..." and that "The excellent handbook on archaeology..." had been the source of the "guidance Sir Flinders had first so clearly indicated and inculcated."<sup>91</sup> The admiration he expressed for *Methods and Aims* was not that of a work whose influence was past, but that of a work whose influence was still ongoing. While his rival – and the first person to thoroughly travel through the Taklamakan Desert – Sven Hedin had recognized that the times had changed and that the

---

<sup>91</sup> "Petrie Medal for Archaeology. Presentation to Sir Aurel Stein," *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*, Wang ed., 101.

imperialist might of the European powers would no longer be enough, Stein believed that little had changed since the *Ambans* had given him aid in the early 1900s.

In spite of the fact that Stein had officially retired, Langdon Warner of Harvard's Fogg Museum, who was also a fellow traveler to Dunhuang, contacted Stein to mount a fourth expedition to expand the museum's collection. Warner also had an unsavory past connection to Dunhuang. He had taken twelve frescoes from the cave walls at Dunhuang, damaging both the cave and several of the frescoes in the process. It was a decision that earned him the wrath of an angry mob when he returned on another expedition several years later.<sup>92</sup> Unlike Stein's earlier missions, Warner planned it to be a solely American and Harvard enterprise. He courted Stein carefully and seemed to share a similar mindset on the avarice of the average Chinese political official. The official budget of \$100,000 US contained \$6,500 for "presents."<sup>93</sup>

This low estimation of Chinese government officials, shared by both Stein and Warner, was undoubtedly a major component of the mission's failure. They were unable to see past their own greed. In addition, Stein's past experiences, like those with Abbot Wang, led him to believe that they would be met with little resistance that could not be bought off. While this might have worked in a relatively decentralized province of Western China in the twilight years of the Qing Dynasty, the basis for the prejudices had disappeared along with the Imperial System. While nationalist China was far from stable in the 1930s, there existed certain ideological principles, which included a united distaste for anything that seemed linked to American and European imperialism. According to Walker's biography:

... if there was one issue which the vulnerable Nationalists hoped would unite the people, it was a hatred of foreign interferences of all kinds. And among the influential scholars

---

<sup>92</sup> Brysac, "Sir Aurel Stein's Fourth 'American' Expedition," 18.

<sup>93</sup> Brysac, "Sir Aurel Stein's Fourth 'American' Expedition," 19.

and intellectuals who knew something of the finds Stein and his rivals had made in the past, feelings of resentment ran high.<sup>94</sup>

By 1930, Stein accepted Warner's offer to come out of retirement and to return to the country that brought him fame and international recognition. It was to be a joint expedition sponsored by Harvard University's Fogg Museum and the British Museum. In spite of Warner's hopes, Stein insisted upon the prestige and diplomatic resources that the association with the British Museum would impart. For Stein, it was a chance to return to a country he had not seen for over a decade, as well as an opportunity to regain some of the glory that had been taken when other explorers make their own impressive archaeological discoveries in the region he had first made famous.

Stein's decision to set out on the fourth expedition was made with the full knowledge of what had happened to previous expeditions. As mentioned earlier, Warner had faced "open hostility" in 1925 when, after his previous removal of twelve frescoes, he returned to China. He wrote in a comparatively sympathetic tone, "The local authorities cannot be entirely blamed for their refusal to take our word that we would remove none of their treasures from the spot, a promise that was kept in letter *and in spirit to the great detriment of knowledge*" [emphasis mine].<sup>95</sup> This reflects the principles espoused by F.M. Petrie twenty years earlier, the idea that the archaeologist worked as a conservator for the sake of knowledge:

If a site is certain to be destroyed by natural causes, or the cupidity of man, then an imperfect examination and a defective record of it is better than none. But to ensure the fullest knowledge, and the most complete preservation of things, in the long run, should be the real aim.<sup>96</sup>

Stein's outmoded attitudes towards the susceptibility of the Chinese government to bribery and Warner's inability to comprehend that the Chinese people might stake a claim to their own

---

<sup>94</sup> Walker, *Sir Aurel Stein*, 263.

<sup>95</sup> Mirsky, *Sir Aurel Stein*, 425.

<sup>96</sup> Petrie, *Methods & Aims in Archaeology*, 180.

history left them both unready and unwilling to face the events that would take place on the fourth expedition.

### **The Failure of an Expedition**

It was, in fact, a former companion of Warner, William Hung, who managed to successfully sabotage the expedition. Hung was a Western educated Dean of Arts and Sciences at Yenching University in Beijing, ironically a university funded by Charles Martin Hall, the same man who would fund Stein's failed fourth expedition.<sup>97</sup> Hung, in an attempt to encourage Stein to work with the Chinese government, suggested that Stein contact a man close to the Chinese National Commission for the Preservation of Cultural Objects. Hung would later write that Stein told him: "Mr. Hung, you are young [Hung was thirty-seven]; you do not know. I have been in China long before and many times. The Chinese officials – they do not care. I know how to manage them."<sup>98</sup> After talking to his sources in Britain, Stein flatly refused Hung's advice, a mistake that would ultimately cost him the expedition.<sup>99</sup> Stein, convinced that he knew best, worked against a man who was not only trying to help him, but who would soon actively work against him.

In May 1930, Stein received his visa and he planned to outmaneuver the watchful government in Beijing, just as he had on his third expedition, by marching through the loosely regulated region of Sinkiang.<sup>100</sup> Stein remained tied to a particular mode of thinking; what had worked in the past would have to work again. In 1916, however, there had been no Commission. After news leaked that Stein planned to go ahead, they passed a new "Law for the Joint Preservation of Antiquities," which meant that Stein would not only have to bring along a

---

<sup>97</sup> Brysac, "Sir Aurel Stein's Fourth 'American' Expedition," 18

<sup>98</sup> Stein as quoted in Brysac, "Sir Aurel Stein's Fourth 'American' Expedition," 20.

<sup>99</sup> Brysac, "Sir Aurel Stein's Fourth 'American' Expedition," 20.

<sup>100</sup> Brysac, "Sir Aurel Stein's Fourth 'American' Expedition," 20.

Chinese expert, he would have to give all of his finds back to the nationalistic and newly possessive Chinese administration. When Stein arrived and was promptly delayed and harassed, he only took on a Chinese expert because he thought him the kind to be interested in “supplements in kind & coin.”<sup>101</sup> He assumed what had worked for the Abbot would work for this watchdog, a mistake and a serious underestimation of the determination of the Chinese administration to protect what they now considered their national treasure.

By December, Stein had yet to make any serious progress in his archaeological expedition, and news of a call for expulsion by the Commission had reached the *London Times*. The December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1930 edition stated that “the society’s pretext for this demand is based on certain remarks derogatory to the new China which, it alleges, Sir Aurel Stein made...”<sup>102</sup> Dean Hung, as cited earlier, enacted his revenge by using Stein’s own words against him. The Commission saw to it that Stein was to meet a polite refusal at every level of government for any request that would aid him in his research or excavations. While the government had been unaware and unprepared for the magnitude of Stein’s takings more than twenty years earlier, this time they out-planned and outsmarted him.

The controversy over Stein’s presence in China came to a head with the *London Time’s* reporting each new development via special correspondent. According to Brysac:

His triumphal account of how, by invoking the name of his ‘Indian Pausanias, Hsüan-tsang’, he was able to persuade Abbot Wang to part with treasures from Cave 17 at Dunhuang, as told in the pages of *Ruins of Desert Cathay* would return to haunt him in 1930, when the same Chinese National Commission protest his act with dignity and eloquence...

---

<sup>101</sup> Brysac, “Sir Aurel Stein’s Fourth’ American Expedition,” 21.

<sup>102</sup> “‘New’ China and Sir Aurel Stein. Demand for Expulsion,” *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*, Wang ed., 101.

What was Stein's reason for returning on his fourth expedition? According to the *Times* he was there to "trace the route of the Buddhist priest Hsuan Tsang."<sup>103</sup> That Stein would use a reference to the same figure he had previously used to reassure Abbot Wang with the much more sophisticated Chinese National Commission speaks volumes both about Stein's understandings of what was politic, and about his underestimation of the impact his previous expeditions had had on the Chinese perception of his activities.

The situation rapidly deteriorated when a transcript of questionable authenticity between Stein and the board of trustees at Harvard Yenching University was leaked to the Chinese press. In it Stein was purported to have said, "I think I can do with Sinkiang officials today what I used to do with those of the old regime. If you can give me some additional money with which to bribe them, I can have everything my own way in Sinkiang."<sup>104</sup> Though Stein dismissed them, and Walker also agrees that the words are not Stein's, they still ring true. His history with Abbot Wang, the money allocated for bribes, and his other comments make the accusation eminently believable.

The rumors of Stein's alleged statements were controversial in England as well. When allegations of his conduct reached English ears, there was disbelief that Stein could ever engage in such behavior. Percy Stafford Allen, the President of Corpus Cristi College at Oxford and a close friend, wrote a letter to the editor stating, "[T]he language attributed to him is not only fantastic and ridiculous, but entirely without foundation."<sup>105</sup> While the specific allegations made by the Chinese Commission were a matter of dispute between Stein and the Commission, there is little doubt that Stein's overall attitude was one of derision. Unfortunately for Stein, he was now

---

<sup>103</sup> "Imperial and Foreign News: China and her Treasures. Hampering the Scientist," *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*, Wang ed., 104.

<sup>104</sup> As quoted in Walker, *Sir Aurel Stein*, 284.

<sup>105</sup> "Sir Aurel Stein in China. To the Editor of *The Times*," *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*, Wang ed., 102

operating in a time when other members of the archaeological community were aware that the bribery, intimidation, and stalling tactics were no longer acceptable behavior for an archaeologist. His unwillingness to settle and work within the new system left him with no choice but to “abandon his work in Sinkiang owing to the obstruction of the local authorities.”<sup>106</sup> Stein, aware of the impact his failure had made on his own reputation, wrote a “detailed account” to the *Times* that defended his reputation based upon the aid he had given in preserving China’s history, and a list of the objects and obstacles he had faced at the hands of the Chinese government. His closing paragraph showed that he was still unable to fully understand *why* he had faced opposition and how his own past behavior led to his expulsion. He wrote:

Perhaps the time may not be too distant when competent Chinese scholars will be prepared to recognize that researches bearing on the cultural past of their country have suffered by the obstacles which unjustified agitation has raised against continued work of a *confrère* who has done as much as any one to throw light on the great and beneficent part played by ancient China in the history of Central Asia.<sup>107</sup>

### **The Fourth Expedition’s Legacy**

The fourth expedition was a failure on nearly all counts. Stein returned with few objects for the Fogg. A considerable diplomatic and financial investment was ultimately wasted in a fruitless attempt that could have at least partially succeeded were it not for Stein’s stubbornness. While Stein would continue his career as an archaeologist throughout Central Asia and the Middle East, he would never again return to China.<sup>108</sup> Stein had met the first insurmountable obstacle in his career, a defeat made all the more bitter by his initial overconfidence and his past three successful expeditions.

---

<sup>106</sup> “Sir Aurel Stein. Turkestan Expedition Abandoned.,” *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*, Wang ed., 106.

<sup>107</sup> “Into Chinese Turkestan. Sir Aurel Stein’s Expedition. Obstruction from Nanking,” *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*, Wang ed., 109.

<sup>108</sup> Brysac, “Sir Aurel Stein’s Fourth ‘American’ Expedition,” 21.

The expedition was a victory for the newly formed Chinese National Commission for the Preservation of Cultural Objects. They co-opted Sven Hedin's expedition and turned it into a Joint Sino-Swedish expedition which later turned out to be a huge success, a project that made Stein's failure all the more ignominious by comparison. It was the one-two punch that ended archaeology as imperialism in China and began the process of archaeology as a nationalistic endeavor for the Chinese. The Chinese government had proven that coalitions of Chinese and international archaeologists could work together and that they had the political and diplomatic muscle to stop those who insisted on going it alone. Stein had only cemented the new government's control by adhering to the same practices that had worked in the Qing Dynasty, a plan that could not work in a China that held nationalism as its official ideology.

The fourth expedition was notable for its absence in most discussions of Stein's legacy. Jeanette Mirsky, the author of the first major biography on Stein, devoted ten pages to the expedition in a book that stretches on for over 500.<sup>109</sup> Annabel Walker's biography of Stein, published in 1995 at the dawning of the modern interest in Stein, refers to the events as the "Chinese Debacle" and devotes a relatively greater 25 of 355 total pages to the fourth expedition.<sup>110</sup> As already mentioned, Stein's autobiography, published after the expedition had ended, made no mention of his fourth expedition. Stein's obituary in both the *Times* and the *Royal Geographical Journal* also made no mention of the expedition. The lack of any serious exploration as to the cause and repercussions of Stein's fourth expedition was a reflection on the discomfort caused by examining Stein not only as a failure, but also as an archaeologist who was willing to engage in underhanded methods to succeed.

---

<sup>109</sup> Mirsky, *Sir Aurel Stein*, 461-470.

<sup>110</sup> Walker, *Sir Aurel Stein* 263-287.

Recently, however, academics and writers of archaeology have taken a closer look at Stein's fourth expedition. In the past ten years Shareen Brysac's article "Sir Aurel Stein's fourth 'American' expedition" which was written in 2002, and Sanchita Balachandran's article "Object Lessons: The Politics of Preservation and Museum Building in Western China in the Early Twentieth Century" which was published in 2007 are examples of more on recent research on Stein from the British Museum. Together they brought the story of Stein's fourth expedition out of the archives of the Fogg Museum at Harvard and the British Museum and brought them to the attention of the scholarly community. The more critical examination of Stein develops a more complete picture of the man and eradicates the silence around one of the more pivotal confrontations in Chinese archaeology.

#### **PART IV: DEBATING THE NARRATIVE**

While Stein was almost always condemned in China after the late 1920s, the tone taken both by the government and academics had changed over the subsequent decades. In Stein's adopted homeland of Great Britain, the attitudes towards Stein have changed dramatically from the time of his third expedition to the present day. Though he had received many accolades, even the institutions that had most strongly supported him backed away from their wholehearted enthusiasm. Even those closest to Stein, including the official cataloguer of the Stein collection, qualified his praise, and soon after his death there were few willing to defend him. The period after this death until the 1980s saw Stein and his contributions all but left out of the historical record. It was only with the combination of the publication of Jeanette Mirsky's biography in the late 1970s and a renewed interest in Stein at the British Museum that historians once again took up the study of Stein and his finds. The start of this millennium also saw a renewed interest in Stein, thanks in part to the new debate over the concept of ownership of cultural property that

Stein and his controversial actions at Dunhuang (discussed in part two) have become a part of the larger conversation.

### Stein Viewed by History: Condemnation

None of Stein's obituaries in major publications mentioned the controversy his actions engendered. His nearly six-page obituary in the pages of *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* which dedicated the issue to his memory and which had awarded him its gold medal, mentioned only his "momentous discoveries" at Dunhuang.<sup>111</sup> Of his fourth expedition the journal only recorded that "the attitude of the Chinese government, however, had meanwhile changed, and he was held up at various stages, and finally forced to turn back."<sup>112</sup> *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* mentioned almost none of his accomplishments or their related controversies in his obituary.<sup>113</sup> The address at the general meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in 1944 began with a discussion of Stein and said that Stein's name "will always stand amongst the highest in our annals," but once again no mention was made of his actual archaeological accomplishments.<sup>114</sup> His obituary in the *Times*, which had chronicled and published accounts of his expeditions, was admiring but said of his experiences in Central Asia only that "he brought to light a vast realm of buried and forgotten history."<sup>115</sup> The obituaries represented an attitude towards Stein that indicated an unwillingness to tackle the specifics of an issue that was to become only more contentious in the coming decades. Rather than mention Stein's chief triumph and the controversy that was now attached to it, the first people to summarize his life stayed away from discussing his actual contributions to their respective fields.

---

<sup>111</sup> C. E. A. W. Oldham, "Obituary Notices: Sir Aurel Stein," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (April 1944): 82.

<sup>112</sup> C. E. A. W. Oldham, "Obituary Notices," 83.

<sup>113</sup> "Death of Sir Aurel Stein, K. C. I. E., F. B. A." *The Geographical Journal* 102 no. 3 (September 1943): 143-144.

<sup>114</sup> George Clerk, "Address at the Annual General Meeting of the Society, Held on 19 June 1944," *The Geographical Journal* 104 no. 1/2 (July - August 1944): 2.

<sup>115</sup> "Sir Aurel Stein. A Great Asiatic Explorer," *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*, Wang ed., 129.

Stein and his methodology would come up for debate only a few times until renewed interest in the 1970s and 1990s led to a gradual reawakening of interest in research and academic study.

One of the few works intended for a popular audience to come out of the finds at Dunhuang was Arthur Waley's *Ballads and Stories from Tun-Huang*, first published in 1960. It is a collection of stories from the manuscripts discovered and brought back by Stein. Waley was an "eminent translator of Chinese and Japanese literature" who "had never visited Asia," but he nonetheless had a nuanced perspective that was decades ahead of his time.<sup>116</sup> He was also one of the first people besides Stein to examine the Dunhuang collection as an employee of the British Museum.<sup>117</sup> He was able to sympathize with both Stein's reasoning and the Chinese government's logic. His afterword, which reads like another one of the stories, carefully explores both Chinese and British perspectives. He wrote:

The Chinese regard Stein and Pelliot as robbers. I think the best way to understand their feelings on the subject is to imagine how we should feel if a Chinese archaeologist were to come to England, discover a cache of medieval MSS [manuscripts] at a ruined monastery, bribe the custodian to part with them and carry them off to Peking.<sup>118</sup>

Metaphors aside, Waley was equally ready to leap to Stein's defense, saying that he behaved in an "absolutely irreproachable way"<sup>119</sup> when one considered the historical context under which he was operating. According to Waley, Stein saw Central Asia as divorced from its past in much the same way contemporary Islamic society was divorced from its pre-Islamic past. He did admit that Stein refused to concede that "Chinese scholars who in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries wrote about the geography and antiquities of Central Asia were anything more than

---

<sup>116</sup> Obituary of Arthur Waley, *New York Times*, June 28, 1966.

<sup>117</sup> Walker, *Sir Aurel Stein*, 265.

<sup>118</sup> Arthur Waley, Afterword to *Ballads and Stories from Tun-Huang*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1960), 237.

<sup>119</sup> Waley, Afterword to *Ballads and Stories from Tun-Huang*, 237.

what he called ‘arm-chair archaeologists.’”<sup>120</sup> Waley was able to see beyond the nationalist arguments that both the British Museum and academics in Beijing used to defend their right to the manuscripts.

For comparison’s sake, the National Library of Beijing (then Peking) released a volume on printing in 1960, the same year *Ballads and Stories from Tun-Huang* was published. The book was a product of an institution of the state and could therefore be said to reflect official attitudes. The volume included a description of the Diamond Sutra found by Stein at Peking, which was by then famous for being the “earliest complete survival of a dated printed book.”<sup>121</sup> The Diamond Sutra was famous as a symbol of China’s early domination of the technology necessary for printing, and the humiliation that accompanied its location in the British Museum was too much for the author to bear. He wrote, “This famous scroll was stolen over fifty years ago by the English-man Ssu-t’an-yin [Stein] which causes people to gnash their teeth in bitter hatred.”<sup>122</sup> There was little love lost for the man who had made off with one of China’s most prized cultural possessions and no acknowledgment that Stein might actually have saved the priceless manuscript by his act of theft.

One of the greatest admissions of the discomfort that the British Museum had with the Stein collection can be seen in the way they treated it after his death. Until relatively recently, the British Museum, the repository for some of Stein’s most spectacular finds, did nothing to acknowledge his importance in building their Central Asian collection. In 1980, Peter Hopkirk wrote that “Unlike its other archaeological heroes, such as Layard and Rasam, whose contributions are proudly acknowledged, the visitor will look in vain for a portrait – or even a

---

<sup>120</sup> Waley, Afterword to *Ballads and Stories from Tun-Huang*, 238.

<sup>121</sup> British Library Board, “Online Gallery: Sacred Texts Explore Treasure of the World’s Greatest Faiths; The Diamond Sutra,” British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/diamondsutra.html>.

<sup>122</sup> Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, 174.

mention – of Stein in the Central Asian gallery where a pitifully small selection of his finds are currently displayed.”<sup>123</sup> In spite of Stein’s outsize importance to building the collection and the incontestable contributions made by Stein, the museum chose not to display them to visitors. It was only with a renewed interest in Stein, thanks to his biographer Jeanette Mirsky, and the “Stein Study Days,” the yearly gathering of academics and curators with an interest in Stein, that Stein has once again returned to historical prominence.

Even Stein’s biographer Jeanette Mirsky is revealing with her work on Stein. Though she depended heavily on primary source materials for her biography, it is telling that, of the hundreds of citations, she made less than thirty references to articles and books published after 1943 – the date of Stein’s death, and few of those refer directly to Stein. Thirty-four years later, the scholarly research that one would expect to find on a figure like Stein simply did not exist. Historians, archaeologists, and geographers let his research dwell in semi-obscurity. Perhaps his voluminous writings had said all that needed to be said on the subject. Or, more likely, he was an embarrassment, a subject best left forgotten as a relic of a politically uncomfortable signifier of a British imperialist past. Two factors would lead to Stein’s modern prominence in discussions of archaeology. The first was a renewed interest by members of the British Museum’s staff in the Stein collection. The second was a renewed interest and global conversation about the Silk Road, and a discussion over the idea of antiquity and the ownership of cultural property.

### **Stein Viewed by History: Rehabilitation**

Helen Wang has arguably been the individual most responsible for bringing Stein back to relevance at the British Museum as the founder of the Stein Study Days. The event, originally a once yearly meeting for those with interest or experience with documents related to Stein, soon grew into a gathering that attracted international attention. It served as a place for those with

---

<sup>123</sup> Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, 173.

interest in Stein to present papers including those on previously undisguised topics like the failed fourth expedition. She collaborated with a group of other curators and academics across the United Kingdom to create a handbook that “aims to serve as a finding list for the Stein collections and archives.”<sup>124</sup> As Helen Wang wrote in the introduction to a compendium of the papers presented at one of the study days devoted to Stein:

On 23 March 2002 the British Museum held a study day devoted to Sir Aurel Stein. The occasion celebrated the completion of a three-year international project resulting in the publication of the Catalogue of the Collections of Sir Aurel Stein in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.... It was also organized as the British Museum's seventh Central Asian Study Day, in response to the great public interest expressed in Stein during the series of Central Asian Study Days held at the Museum in 2000–2001.<sup>125</sup>

The British Museum's interest in Stein extended beyond its decision to hold the “Stein Study Days.” In 2007, the Museum jointly sponsored alongside the British Academy and the Sino-British Fellowship Trust, a three-day conference called “A Hundred Years of Dunhuang,” which was scheduled to take place a hundred years after Stein first met the Taoist priest at the Cave of a Thousand Buddhas.<sup>126</sup> The stated purpose of the conference was to:

reflect on the discovery, to review its impact on ‘oriental studies’, including the writing and re-writing of history and to discuss directions for the future. The rich finds from Dunhuang have implications beyond ‘oriental studies’ and need to be understood as part of world culture.

This emphasis on “world culture” has played a large part in bringing Stein and his research back into the public eye. Perhaps the most famous project related to Stein is the International Dunhuang Project (IDP), a joint Chinese, Russian, Japanese, British, and French venture that was created to compensate for the dispersal by Stein, Pelliot, and other archaeologists of the objects

<sup>124</sup> Helen Wang & John Perkins eds., *Handbook to the Collections of Sir Aurel Stein in the UK*, Rev. edition, London: The British Museum, 2008, [http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Stein%2520Handbook%2520final\(3\).pdf](http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Stein%2520Handbook%2520final(3).pdf).

<sup>125</sup> Helen Wang, ed., *Sir Aurel Stein: Proceedings of the British Museum Study Day, 23 March 2002* (London: British Museum, 2004), v.

<sup>126</sup> British Museum, “A Hundred Years of Dunhuang, 1907–2007,” Research Projects. The British Museum, [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research\\_projects/a\\_hundred\\_years\\_of\\_dunhuang.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_projects/a_hundred_years_of_dunhuang.aspx).

from Dunhuang. Like the conferences sponsored by the British Museum, the IDP uses technology “to ensure the objects’ preservation and cataloguing, and by pushing the limits of new web technologies to make this material accessible to all.”<sup>127</sup> Stein’s and Pelliot’s work decentralized the contents of the caves at the Dunhuang, but modern technology is working to centralize them so that the objects – including the prized Diamond Sutra – are available to all. The IDP has not been able to stop the controversy surrounding the objects, and it is in the debate over cultural property that Stein remains a prominent figure.

### China Speaks

As James Cuno, Director of the Art Institute of Chicago, writes in the preface to his book *Who Owns Antiquity*, “The real argument over the acquisition of undocumented (unprovenanced) antiquities is not what it appears to be. It is not really between art museums and archaeologists... It is between museums and modern nation-states and their nationalist claims on that heritage.”<sup>128</sup> While Cuno refers to unauthenticated objects his argument is only stronger for items that a government believes were stolen. For one nation to hold another’s property is a sign of weakness. If, as Cuno argues, “national museums are important instruments in the formation of nationalist narratives...” then for the British Museum to hold the manuscripts at Dunhuang is to hold not just the physical objects, but also a part of Chinese national identity hostage.<sup>129</sup> If, as he later states “possession is power” then Britain still holds power over China nearly 160 years after the first Opium War. The presence of Chinese objects in a British institution is an intolerable reminder of humiliating past. As long as the British Museum maintains control over the Stein collection, the British hold power over China.

---

<sup>127</sup> International Dunhuang Project, “About IDP,” <http://idp.bl.uk/pages/about.a4d>.

<sup>128</sup> James Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), xviii.

<sup>129</sup> Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity?*, xix.

Recent articles published in the popular presses of both nations have shown just how delicate the negotiations can be. According to an article from the British Broadcast Corporation, though “the Chinese Worker's Daily carried a campaign for their return several years ago - Chinese authorities have never formally brought up the issue of the Dunhuang treasures.”<sup>130</sup> The conflict between official attitudes and public attitudes is of particular interest. While the Chinese government may have declined to make a specific request, the quest for the return of the objects has been featured prominently on official channels. The Chinaculture.org website, a website under the “guidance” of the Ministry of Culture and maintained by the official *China Daily*, featured an article in June 2007 following the centenary conference on Dunhuang held at the British Museum. The article stated, “it was reported that Chinese scholars planned to ask the British government to return the Dunhuang collections.”<sup>131</sup> Even though the official channels between Britain and China have been silent, unofficial and academic sources have made their sentiments known.

The Chinese government has also been willing to use the issue of the Stein collection as a way of stirring up Nationalist sentiment and as a reminder of indignities suffered nearly a century ago. The original BBC article and the article on Chinaculture.org both contain the following telling quote from Yasha Ke, a member of the cultural section of the Chinese Embassy in London: “When the time comes I think the Chinese authorities will request the return of these relics. It’s hard to say when that will be. Little by little, we will expect to see the return of items taken from Dunhuang. They should go back to their original place.”<sup>132</sup> The implication is that the

---

<sup>130</sup> George Marcus, “The Original Chinese Takeaway,” BBC News Online, October 22, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3190360.stm>.

<sup>131</sup> Ministry of Culture P.R. China, “When Will the Lost Be Retrieved?,” Chinaculture.org [http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en/2007-06/18/content\\_99809.htm](http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en/2007-06/18/content_99809.htm).

<sup>132</sup> Ministry of Culture, P.R. China, “When Will the Lost Be Retrieved?”

<sup>132</sup> Marcus, “The Original Chinese Takeaway,” 2003.

Chinese government will, when the time is right, put pressure on the British institutions in possession of the objects collected by Stein to return those objects. The Chinese people and the government may have been able to put a stop to Stein's fourth expedition, but the unhappiness over the location of the manuscripts remains the same as it did when the Chinese National Commission made its protest in 1930: "But Sir Aurel Stein, not knowing a word of Chinese, took away what he considered the most valuable, separating many manuscripts which really belonged together, thus destroying the value of the manuscripts themselves.... and their rightful owners, the Chinese, who are the most competent scholars for their study, are deprived of their opportunity [to study] as well as their ownership."<sup>133</sup> Some day, the Chinese government will officially join in the debate over cultural property, but until then, resources like the International Dunhuang Project have changed some of the fundamental arguments of the need for physical possession of cultural property.

## CONCLUSION

Stein's place in historical memory has shifted dramatically over the past century. His role as the founder of Central Asian archaeology established him as a giant in the field. He helped define what it meant to be an archaeologist and opened up a whole new region to exploration. His finds and sensational discoveries encouraged countless other archaeologists – imitators, competitors, and admirers to follow in his footsteps. His application of Petrie's scientific archaeology with all that it implied was a revolution as compared to the treasure hunters that had preceded him.

The reliance upon Petrie's scientific archaeology as well as his confidence in Western superiority as a member of the British and Indian Empires were Stein's greatest asset on his first mission to Khotan. They gave him the confidence and the authority to boldly strip ancient sites

---

<sup>133</sup> Brysac, *Sir Aurel Stein's Fourth American Expedition*, 18.

of their objects with the cleanest of consciences. A politically accommodating Qing government, interested British backers, and Stein's desire to prove himself were a potent mix that led to success. The critical response on his return home was striking; Stein's successes in Khotan created his reputation and directly enabled his second expedition. His decisions and principles were, on his first two expeditions to Central Asia, what led him to great success. His second expedition established his place in history, earned him his knighthood, filled a gallery of the British Museum, and destroyed his moral credibility. The price he paid, £130, was, in every sense of the word, a steal. Stein's contemporaries saw nothing wrong with his decision to bribe Abbot Wang and reviews of his book either praised his decision or let it pass scrutiny. Stein fit in perfectly with the standards of the time. Archaeology was a nationalistic endeavor and if he failed to bribe Abbot Wang then someone else certainly would have. By his actions he defined what was possible and what was right and so he set the standard for his admirers like Langdon Warner who would only do further damage, both to the objects they were attempting to remove, and to Chinese National Pride.

It was only with the advent of the Nationalist Revolution in China that Stein saw his methods lose their potency. While the government was hardly strong, the rise of Chinese nationalism undermined his ability to take what he wanted. Chinese nationalist feeling about archaeology was ironically, in part, caused by Stein's own activities, it was his removal of the items at Dunhuang that not only saw the country lose priceless national treasures, but that led to copycat visitors at Dunhuang and other locations. The Chinese people's attitudes towards archaeology changed, and it was due to Stein's behavior. Stein however retained the exact same attitudes and dismissed the new nationalist government as easily as he had dismissed the Boxer Rebellion thirty years before. Stein was so caught up in his own work that he failed to realize

that while knowledge from excavations should be shared, other people might lay a claim to the property he took.

In spite of his status as a major figure in archaeological history Stein was all but ignored following his death in 1943. While he was much respected and admired during his lifetime the lengths to which he had gone only stirred up controversy whenever he was mentioned. The past fifty years saw Stein's legacy ignored by the historical record and it is only recently with the newfound interest in the Silk Road and debate over the ownership of cultural property that scholars have begun to examine his life and his work. Though China chose to attack Stein and his methods, and Britain chose to essentially forget him – his story captured the attention of historians and museum curators who brought him back to a position of prominence.

The second major exhibition of Stein's works came 83 years after the first – modern historians have once again undertaken research on Stein. The new understanding of Stein as a flawed archaeological character, and the strides he made towards achieving a historical understanding of Central Asia have led to a more modern understanding of Stein's decisions. Though he was flawed and swayed by a system of archaeology that preached results over respect, his contributions to Central Asian history and archaeology remain historical landmarks. Though Stein did not always act in accordance with the highest ethical standards, the titan of Central Asian archaeology's legacy should continue to be open to debate and discussion.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Primary Sources:**

Arthur Waley, 76, Orientalist, Dead. *New York Times*. June 28, 1966.

Aurel Stein to John Keltie. 15 December 1907. Royal Geographical Society Archives. Quoted in Wang, Helen, ed. *Sir Aurel Stein: Proceedings of the British Museum Study Day, 23 March 2002 (The British Museum Occasional Paper)*. London: British Museum Press, 2004.

Bloomfield, Maurice. Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay* by M. Aurel Stein, *The American Historical Review* 18, no. 1 (October 1912): 113-116

Broadfoot, W. Review of *Ancient Khotan* by M. Aurel Stein, *The Geographical Journal* 31, no. 2 (February 1908): 201-204

Churchill, William. Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay* by M Aurel Stein. *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 44, no. 7 (1912): 537-538.

Clerk, George. "Address at the Annual Meeting of the Society, Held on 19 June 1944, by the President." *The Geographical Journal* 104 no. 1/2 (July-August 1944): 1-7

"Death of Sir Aurel Stein, K.C.I.E., F.B.A" *The Geographical Journal* 102, no. 3 (September 1943): 143-144.

Giles, Lionel. Review of *Serindia* by Aurel Stein. *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (January 1924): 141-146.

Oldham, C. E. A. W., "Obituary Notices: Sir Aurel Stein." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (April 1944): 81-86.

Petrie, W.M. Flinders. *Methods & Aims in Archaeology*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1904.

Review of Ancient Khotan. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 27 (1907): 306

R.E.F. Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay* by M. Aurel Stein. *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 21 no. 111 (June 1912): 174

Stein, M.A. *Preliminary Report on a Journey of Archaeological and Topographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1901.

Stein, M. Aurel. *Ancient Khotan: Detailed Report of Archaeological Explorations in Chinese Turkestan*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907.

- Stein, Aurel. *On Central Asian Tracks: Brief Narrative of Three Expeditions in Innermost Asia and Central China*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1964.
- Stein, M. Aurel. *Ruins of Desert Cathay: Personal Narrative of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1912.
- Stein, M. Aurel. *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903.
- Stein, M. Aurel. *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*. Vol. 1. London: Oxford University Press, 1921.
- Stein, M. Aurel. *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*. Vol. 2. London: Oxford University Press, 1921.
- Taylor, A.E. Review of *Ruins of Desert Cathay* by M. Aurel Stein. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 32 (1912): 410-415.
- Warner, Langdon. *Langdon Warner Through His Letters*. Edited by Theodore Bowie. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966.

### Secondary Sources:

- Balachandran, Sanchita. "Object Lessons: The Politics of Preservation and Museum Building in Western China in the Early Twentieth Century." *International Journal of Cultural Property* 14 no. 1 (February 2007): 1-32
- British Library Board. "Online Gallery: Sacred Texts Explore Treasure of the World's Greatest Faiths; The Diamond Sutra." British Library.  
<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/sacredtexts/diamondsutra.html>
- British Museum. "A Hundred Years of Dunhuang, 1907-2007" Research Projects. The British Museum.  
[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research\\_projects/a\\_hundred\\_years\\_of\\_dunhuang.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_projects/a_hundred_years_of_dunhuang.aspx)
- Brysac, Shareen. "Sir Aurel Stein's Fourth American Expedition." In *Proceedings of the British Museum Study Day 23 March 2002*, ed. Helen Wang, 17-22. London: British Museum, 2004.
- Cuno, James. *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Dower, Margaret. *Flinders Petrie: A Life in Archaeology*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985.
- Fitzgerald, John. *Awakening China: Politics, Culture and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*.

- Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Hopkirk, Peter. *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984.
- International Dunhuang Project. "About IDP." <http://idp.bl.uk/pages/about.a4d>
- International Dunhuang Project. "IDB News Issue No. 12."  
[http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news12/idpnews\\_12.a4d](http://idp.bl.uk/archives/news12/idpnews_12.a4d)
- Marcus, George. "The Original Chinese Takeaway." BBC News Online. October 22, 2003.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3190360.stm>
- Ministry of Culture P.R. China. "When Will the Lost Be Retrieved?" Chinaculture.org  
[http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en/2007-06/18/content\\_99809.htm](http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en/2007-06/18/content_99809.htm)
- Mirsky, Jeanette. *Sir Aurel Stein*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977.
- Preston, Diana. *The Boxer Rebellion: The Dramatic Story of China's War on Foreigners that Shook the World in the Summer of 1900*. New York: Berkley Books, 1999.
- Russell-Smith, Lilla. "Hungarian Explorers in Dunhuang." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 10, no. 3 (November 2000): 341-362.
- Wakeman, Frederic E. *The Fall of Imperial China*. New York: The Free Press, 1975.
- Waley, Arthur. Afterword to *Ballads and Stories from Tun-Huang*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1960.
- Walker, Annabel. *Sir Aurel Stein: Pioneer of the Silk Road*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998.
- Wang, Helen ed. *Sir Aurel Stein: Proceedings of the British Museum Study Day, 23 March 2002*. London: British Museum, 2004.
- Wang, Helen. ed. *Sir Aurel Stein in the Times*. London: Saffron Books, 2002.
- Wang, Helen & Perkins, John eds. *Handbook to the Collections of Sir Aurel Stein in the UK*. Rev. ed. London: The British Museum, 2008.  
[http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Stein%2520Handbook%2520final\(3\).pdf](http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Stein%2520Handbook%2520final(3).pdf)