

SIR
AUREL
STEIN

Archaeological Explorer



Jeannette Mirsky

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Contents

Preface

ix

PART 1

Beginnings

1

PART 2

The First Central Asian Expedition, May 1900–July 1901

107

INTERMISSION

1901–6

193

PART 3

The Second Central Asian Expedition, 20 April 1906–13 November 1908

225

PART 4

The Third Central Asian Expedition, 1913–16

331

PART 5

1919–26

395

PART 6

The Borderlands and into Persia, 1926-36
445

PART 7

The Promised Land at Last, 1937-43
505

Notes

549

Index

571

Photographs

following page 50

Maps

- The world wherein Stein explored the past 106
 From India across the top of the world to China 108
 The Aksai Chin 226
 From Swat to the Gorges of the Indus 332
 Indo-Iranian Borderlands 394
 Sites in Zhob and Loralai, Baluchistan 394
 Reconnaissances in Southern Persia 396
 The Roman frontier in Iraq and Trans-Jordan 506
 Chinese Turkestan and adjacent areas *Centerspread,*
photographic section

Preface

"The most prodigious combination of scholar, explorer, archaeologist and geographer of his generation," is Owen Lattimore's characterization of Sir Aurel Stein; his discoveries were "the most daring and adventuresome raid upon the ancient world that any archaeologist has attempted" according to Sir Leonard Woolley; "unforgettable" is Laurence Sickman's adjective for Stein.

While Sir Aurel lived (1862–1943) there was no need for a biography. A wide public followed his extraordinary expeditions as he himself told them in an outpouring of books and articles and lectures. A wider public kept abreast of his travels through newspaper dispatches telling of far-flung journeys in little-known exotic places and of his spectacular "finds." Since his death, almost unnoticed during the war, his name has fallen into the eclipse common to those no longer in the limelight; it continues to hold its place in repositories proper to scholarly endeavor: the footnotes, bibliographies, and dedications of contemporary writings. It would indeed be difficult for anyone engaged in any of the many disciplines—social, political, technological, religious, economic, ecological, art-historical, and so forth—located anywhere within the wide continental sweep from the Persian Gulf to the Pacific watershed, dealing with events occurring during the millennia between the neolithic and medieval, not to touch on Stein's pioneering efforts.

The range and importance, style and success of Stein's archaeological reconnaissances would be enough to recommend him to a biographer. What lifts his achievements into a special category is the historical vision that, to the end, motivated his questing.

For long, Europeans tended to view their cultural heritage in narrow,

parochial terms as though their roots were limited to ancient Greece and the Bible lands. Thus seen, Europe is wrenched away from the mainland to become an island, distinct and apart from the rest of the Old World. Yet again and again the European imagination has been stirred by its kinship to ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Achaemenid Persia, and Han, Tang, and Sung China. As the manifold roots of Europe's cultural heritage were explored, time and space were majestically extended.

Orientalist, archaeologist and explorer, geographer and topographer, Sir Aurel Stein was of that small scholarly fraternity of pioneers who created the modern paradigm which views the Eurasian landmass as one cultural field whose forces were its four high civilizations: the Mediterranean West, the Indian and Iranian, and the Chinese. Central Asia, with which his name is most notably associated, was a region where these four met and interacted.

Why was I attracted, and what attracted me to attempt this biography, devoting much of twelve years to the work? To the questions put to me, I cannot say *why* a subject takes possession of a writer but I can suggest *what* fascinated me about Stein's work. Let me try to explain it in my own shorthand.

As known to historians, the modern paradigm—it was sobering to learn—was initiated not by a European explorer but by a Chinese, when, about 125 B.C., Chang Ch'ien went overland and established contact with the West. Thereafter for fifteen hundred years an artery of transcontinental routes laced East and West together. Then Columbus ventured across the Atlantic. Europe's overseas epic began. Sea lanes replaced the overland routes.

There is a subtle but significant difference between maritime commerce and land traffic. Whatever the dangers of oceanic venturing, a ship in a foreign port remains a familiar home-base, whereas a caravan, however welcome, is an uninvited guest in a succession of alien entrepôts.

Because Spain and Portugal controlled the southern approaches to Asia, English, Dutch, and Russian sailors went northward hoping to find the shortest distance to Cathay. In a manner of speaking, the Arctic Ocean replaced the Himalayan passes and the Taklamakan desert of Central Asia as the inhuman region separating the main centers of the Old World. The long parade of ships that attempted the Northwest and Northeast Passages was the subject of my first book, *To The Arctic!* It was the earlier story, still unfamiliar, that brought me to Aurel Stein.

This book was to have been short. Originally the biography of Stein was to have been supplemented by a volume of letters, including his un-

published "personal narratives." When this became impracticable, I had to retrace my steps to combine the material from both in one book.

In drawing on the letters and unpublished personal narratives, I have taken the liberty of letting the story run along without denoting ellipses; the pages filled with dots looked unseemly. Out of Stein's vast printed outpouring, I have utilized whatever books and articles would carry the story ahead fully and honestly and so obviated the repetitiousness of an archivist's bibliography. After some thought I decided to omit the diacritical marks used on Oriental words—while consequential for the specialist, they are but of passing interest to the general reader. To understand is, I hope, to forgive.

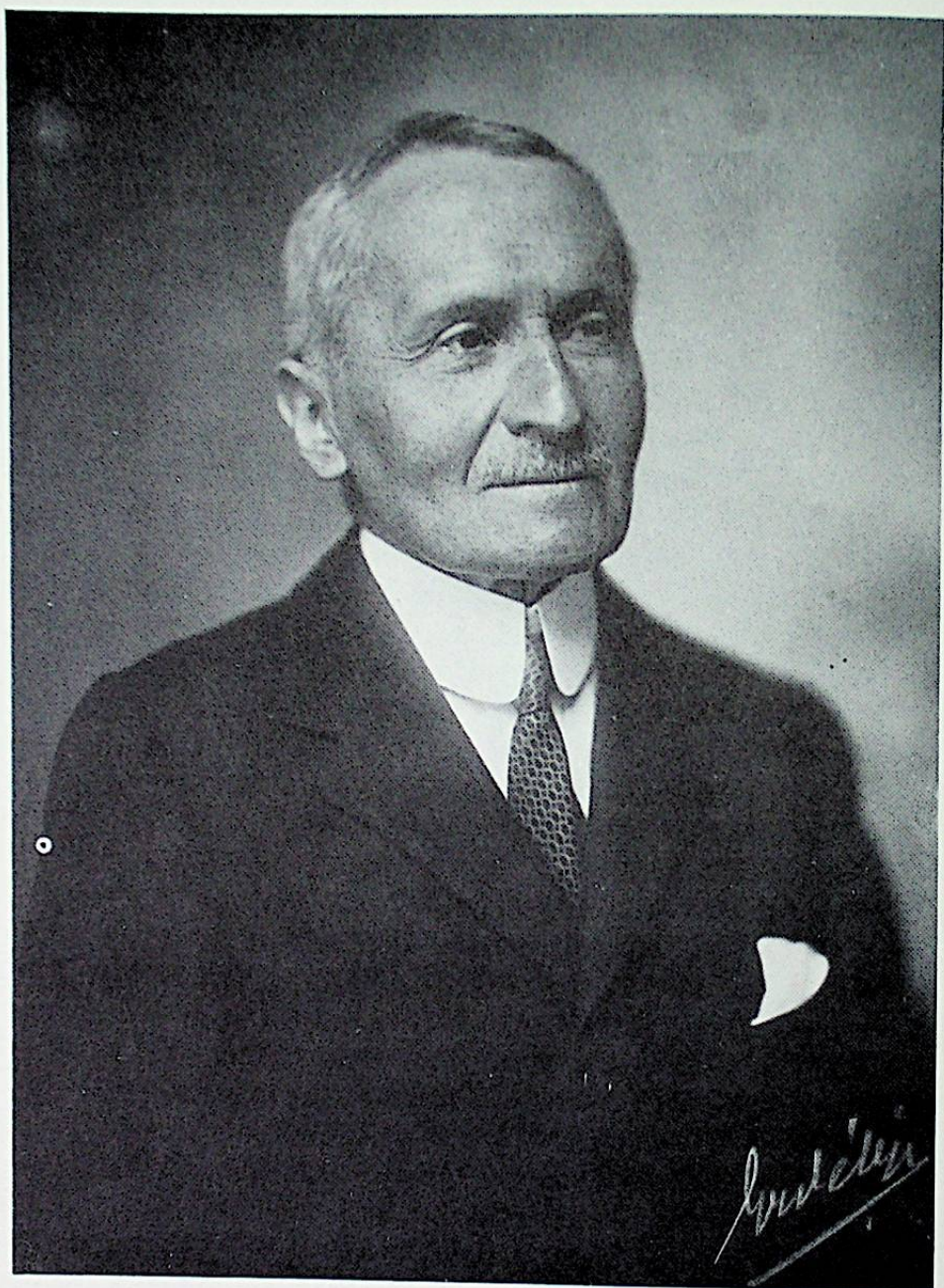
Institutions and individuals have sustained me physically and spiritually. It is a pleasure to look back and, with a sense of accomplishment, express my gratitude to the Rockefeller Foundation, to the National Endowment for the Humanities, to the Stein-Arnold Fund, and to the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation. Their generous responses to my proposal made possible the long period of research and writing. Princeton University twice honored me by naming me a Visiting Fellow in the Department of East Asian Studies, where I became the beneficiary of the friendship, scholarship, and active encouragement of Professors Frederick W. Mote and Marion J. Levy, Jr., and, at different times, of Visiting Professors A. F. P. Hulsewé, Joseph Fletcher, and Denis Twitchett.

My research began in New Delhi in 1965. I am deeply indebted to Sri. A. Ghosh, Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, for expediting my search of its archives; to Dr. B. Ch. Chhabra, Chief Epigraphist, learned in the ancient history of India, who remains a valued friend; and to Dr. Krishna Devi for his vivid vignettes of his work in the field with Stein. At New Delhi that same year I was fortunate in many conversations to have Dr. Sourindrath Roy, Joint-Director of the National Archives of India, expatiate on details in his book, *The Story of Indian Archaeology*. There, too, my search was guided by Mr. M. L. Ahluwalia, the Archivist, and the Assistant-Director, Miss Dhan Keswani. My sincere thanks go to all who enabled me to complete my investigation in the months spent in New Delhi. At the Magyar Tudományos Akadémia in Budapest, the Director, Professor L. Ligeti, a pupil of Paul Pelliot, was most cordial. My examination of their Stein material was facilitated by Dr. L. Bese, an outstanding Mongolist, and Dr. Hilda Ecsedy, an expert in Turkic and Tibetan. There I was presented with more than a dozen reprints of Stein's articles, a prized and much used gift. I thank them for their help.

In London, at the British Academy where boxes filled with thousands of Stein's letters to his family had been sent from Vienna, the Secretary, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, spoke brilliantly on some of the persons and problems referred to in the letters. He and Sir Laurence Kirwan, Director and Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, the officials charged with disbursements from the Stein-Arnold Fund, honored my work with a grant. It was also an expression of friendship. My warm thanks go to Dr. Richard D. Barnett, former Keeper of the Department of Western Antiquities, for supplying me with copies of Stein's letters to his father, Dr. Lionel D. Barnett, Deputy-Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, a scholar who held Stein's respect, confidence and affection. Quite by accident, at Oxford, at the Bodleian Library, I found the great cache of Stein's papers deposited there. The courtesy and efficiency shown me by Dr. R. W. Hunt, Keeper of Western Manuscripts, and his assistant, Mr. D. S. Porter, enabled me to accomplish my search thoroughly and speedily; to both I am grateful.

Individuals, some friends of long standing, some newly-made along the way, at different times and in different ways, have become part of the book. Gladly and with gratitude I acknowledge their help. Dr. Gustav Steiner of Vienna gave me family pictures and his blessing on my portrayal of Stein, the man; Professor Martin B. Dickson, an encyclopaedia on the history, peoples, and languages of Iran and Central Asia, answered my questions with patience and an animated interest; Brigitte Schaeffer shared the tedium of translating Stein's German letters and articles and by her response to their contents transformed the sessions into delightful occasions; Julia Davis, a most talented veteran writer and an innocent on Central Asian matters—a model reader for the manuscript as it was being written—gave salutary suggestions and comments; Professor Mark Leone was an ideal guide to the history and the recent developments in archaeology; James and Lucy Lo, literati and master-photographers, whose unique, comprehensive record of Tun-Huang frescoes and sculptures was made at the temple-caves, enriched my understanding of the site's importance in art history; Sylvia Massell and Elizabeth Beatson counseled and encouraged me during the years of work-in-progress; Alfred L. Bush, of Princeton University Library, Collection of Western Americana, provided a safe deposit for my precious microfilms, and Linda Oppenheim, at the Library's Information Desk, led me to a Hungarian biography which established the importance of Stein's uncle, Dr. Ignaz Hirschler; Nancy Dupree was a delightful and informed companion during my stay in Afghanistan; Professor William Hung, formerly of

Yen-Ching University, Peking, detailed the events leading up to the debacle of Stein's Fourth Expedition; Professor Yu-kung Kao, a scholar to delight the mind and soul, translated the Chinese characters on Stein's antiquities' flag; Reyner Unwin, of George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., who published my *The Great Chinese Travellers* in England, extracted the necessary permission from the Stein executors to have the Bodleian materials microfilmed; Lewis Bateman, a friend, with his sharp, professional eye was a valuable aid in the chore of proofreading; and last, but far from least, I owe much to my staunch friend, Marion Bayard Benson, whose faith in and concern for me never failed.



Sir Aurel Stein
(1929)

Sir Aurel Stein

Archaeological Explorer

JEANNETTE MIRSKY

"This fascinating book gives us the world of archaeology with an intimacy I have rarely experienced. Jeannette Mirsky has performed a great service, taking us into fabled lands and fabulous fields of human endeavor."

—Leon Edel

An extraordinary individual who advanced human knowledge on many fronts, Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943) pursued dramatic adventure with scientific purpose. Trained as an orientalist, Stein exerted a decisive influence on a wide spectrum of scholarly disciplines. His investigations touched the neolithic to medieval periods and spanned the area from the Persian Gulf to the Pacific watershed. Jeannette Mirsky has drawn from Stein's voluminous outpouring of books and articles as well as from his letters and unpublished archival materials to trace both his character and his achievements.

Sir Aurel Stein was one of a small, scholarly band of pioneers who expanded knowledge of Europe's cultural heritage to include the Eurasian landmass and the interactions between each of its four high civilizations: the Mediterranean West, the Indian, the Iranian, and the Chinese. Central Asia, the region with which Stein's name is most notably associated, was a crossroads between East and West for commerce and culture, religion, arts, and peoples. Stein rediscovered the ancient Silk Route between China and the West and unearthed dozens of sites long buried in the desert sands of Central Asia. His recovery of the library at Tun-huang (the Cave of the

(Continued on back flap)