

OBITUARY NOTICES

Sir Aurel Stein

Like another famous traveller and scholar, Csoma de Körös, who also felt the call of the East, Marc Aurel Stein was by birth a Hungarian, though he acquired British nationality in 1904. Born at Budapest on 26th November, 1862, after school education at Dresden and Budapest he joined the universities of Vienna and Leipzig. His bent for Indian and Iranian studies next drew him to Tübingen, where he worked under R. von Roth, and later to Oxford and London. In 1885 he returned to Budapest to undergo his volunteer training at the Ludoviceum, where, as he gratefully remembered, he got the grounding in surveying that proved so valuable in after years. While in England he came under the influence, among others, of Sir H. Rawlinson, who helped to secure for him employment in India.

In 1888 Stein was appointed Principal of the Oriental College at Lahore, where he pursued the linguistic and geographical studies that culminated in his masterly edition, and translation, of Kalhana's *Rājataranginī*, a history of the kings of Kashmir (1892, 1900). A revised edition of this work, with additional notes and illustrations, to which he had devoted much time of recent years, is under the consideration of the Kashmir Darbar. In the same period was written his *Ancient Geography of Kashmir* (1899). He became fascinated by the scenery of that country, and it was there that he retired to his "beloved mountain camp", Mohand Marg (11,000 feet), after each of his subsequent expeditions, for uninterrupted quiet to write the detailed reports of his explorations. In 1898, accompanying the Buner Field Force, he made a preliminary tour in that hilly region, the archæological results of which presaged his future career. In 1899 he was appointed Principal of the Calcutta Madrasa, a post he held for but a few months. His holidays were spent on a tour in the Gaya and Hazaribagh districts, where he gave further proof of his discernment by correcting the previous identifications of some sites mentioned by the Chinese pilgrims (*Indian Antiquary*, 1901).

Stein was enlisted in the Archæological Survey of India in January, 1904. Meanwhile he had been maturing plans for the exploration in Central Asia that was destined to make him famous. With the sanction and support of Lord Curzon's government he carried out his first Central Asian expedition in 1900-1, when his discoveries at Dandan-oilik, Niya, Endere, and other sites unveiled in a startling manner the early history of that region. The story was first told in *Sand-buried Ruins of Khotan* (1903), and the scientific results embodied in *Ancient Khotan* (2 vols., 1907). His second expedition, in which he pushed much further afield, occupied the years 1906-8, and resulted in yet more momentous discoveries, notably at Niya, Miran, Lou-lan, and Tun-huang, of documents, paintings, textiles, household articles, etc., some of them dating from the first centuries of our era, and all in a wonderful state of preservation owing to the extreme aridity of the climate. It was then that he traced the important cache of documents and paintings at the "Caves of the Thousand Buddhas". The finds have been listed and described in *Serindia* (5 vols., 1921), which contains the detailed scientific record of this expedition, while a popular account of it appeared in *Ruins of Desert Cathay* (2 vols., 1912). Specimens of the art treasures from the caves have been illustrated and discussed in the portfolio *The Thousand Buddhas* (1921). Stein's third expedition in 1913-16 carried him over still greater distances (through nearly 30 degrees of longitude), from Darel along the southern fringes of the deserts as far as Khara Khoto in the east, from the Nan-shan ranges above Kan-chou across the perilous Pei-shan to Dzungaria in the north, along the skirts of the T'ien-shan to Kashgar, through the high ranges of the Pamirs to Samarqand, and on to Persian Baluchistan, fresh and important discoveries and identifications being made at almost every stage. The finds in these three expeditions disclosed conclusive evidence of Classical, Iranian, and Indian influences linking up with those of China through these now desolate wastes. Stein succeeded in tracing for 400 miles the Chinese *limes*, or line of forts and wall, completed by the first century B.C. between Su-chou and "Jade Gate" (also identified), routes followed by silk caravans and military missions in ancient days, and some hitherto doubtful stages in Marco Polo's journey.

While awaiting reports from experts and preparing the detailed record of his third expedition (*Innermost Asia*, 4 vols., 1929) Stein

made some shorter archæological tours. In 1926 he made a rapid, but most profitable, tour in ancient Udyana, identifying, besides many sites of Buddhist association, the Bazira, Ora, and "Rock" of Aornos of Alexander's historians (*Mem. A.S.I.*, and *On Alexander's Track to the Indus* (1929)).

The discovery in 1923-5 at Mohenjo-daro in Sind of remains of an advanced civilization dating back to the third millennium B.C. aroused world-wide interest. In 1915-16 Stein had found in Sistan material which he recognized as possibly analogous, and bearing in mind the similarity of certain finds made by de Morgan at Susa and by Major Mockler at Gwadar in Makran he foresaw the probability of tracing vestiges of this prehistoric culture from Sind westwards to the Tigris basin. It was this quest that led him to undertake a succession of tours during the years 1927-1938 from Waziristan through Baluchistan and Southern and Western Iran to the borders of Iraq. The results, which fully confirmed his expectations, were published in *Memoirs, A.S.I., Archæological Reconnaissances in N.W. India and S.W. Iran* (1937), and *Old Routes of Western Iran* (1940). In 1929 Stein delivered a series of lectures at the Lowell Institute, Boston, U.S.A., which formed the basis of a condensed account of his first three expeditions in innermost Asia entitled *On Ancient Central-Asian Tracks* (1933).

In August, 1930, after visiting Nanking for sanction and passport, Stein once more crossed the passes, eager to carry out a fourth expedition to Hsin-chiang and Inner Mongolia. The attitude of the Chinese government, however, had meanwhile changed, and he was held up at various stages, and finally forced to turn back. Tact and pertinacity enabled him to reach Charchan, and then complete a tour of 2,000 miles round the Taklamakan and make valuable survey observations on the way.

The researches of Fr. Poidebard on the Roman *limes* in Syria and his own tracing of the Chinese *limes* referred to above led Stein to another field of inquiry. After a preliminary air reconnaissance in 1929, he traced and surveyed in 1938 and 1939 from the air and on the ground the remains of Roman *limes* from the Tigris in N.W. Iraq through Syria and Transjordan as far as the Gulf of Aqaba (papers in *G.J.*). Ever since his experience in the Lop desert in 1907, when he seriously contemplated using a man-carrying kite, Stein had foreseen the value of survey from the air.

His last three years were occupied by two very arduous trips in the Indus Kohistan, two surveys of ancient sites, many prehistoric, along the dry bed of the "lost river" (Sarasvati) of the Panjab, and a trying journey through the Las Bela State and part of Gedrosia. The travel record of the Buddhist pilgrim Hsüan-tsang had guided Stein, who fondly called him his "patron saint", to site after site in his explorations. Hsüan-tsang (seventh century) and an earlier pilgrim, Fa-hsien (fifth century), had traversed the stupendous gorges of the Indus by "the route of the hanging chains" as it was called in the Chinese annals. These gorges had never been visited by any European. The area, moreover, was tribal territory, beyond our administrative control, and so entry was barred. To his intense delight, as Stein had always wished to complete this last link in his explorations, news came in 1939 from his old friend the Wali of Swat that he had extended his sway up to the west bank of the Indus, and thus the road was so far clear. In October–November, 1941, Stein explored and surveyed the gorges on the west side of the river, much hard travel by tracks possible for bipeds only being involved, and the crossing of a high pass which took sixteen hours. Referring to this trip he wrote: "The scrambles along precipitous mountain sides are a bit fatiguing." In July–September, 1942, when close on 80 years of age, he made a longer trip, unfortunately interrupted by the preaching of *jihād* by a local *faqīr*, to the gorges on the eastern side of the river, "involving," as he wrote, "much hard climbing over a succession of passes, 14,000–15,000 feet"—a truly wonderful feat for a man of his years. His last journey, into Gedrosia, made in January–March, 1943, enabled him to trace Alexander's route on his retreat from Sind (*G.J.*). He had already identified the sites of many famous episodes in Alexander's eastern campaign, in the Panjab, in Persia, and in Iraq.

On 6th October, 1943, he wrote from Kashmir, elated by "the chance desired since boyhood for work in *Ariana antiqua*". On the 13th he wrote from Peshawar, full of plans for work in Afghanistan, adding that he was "very fit". On the 26th he passed away at Kabul, in the zenith of his fame, his faculties undimmed. Scholar and explorer, archæologist and geographer, he had lived laborious days, full of great accomplishment. It is not possible in the space available to describe the wealth and value of the material, now treasured by museums in London, Delhi, Calcutta, Lahore,

the U.S.A. (Harvard), and Iran, recovered in nigh half a century of constant exploration. That hundreds of cases should have been transported safely over such distances of shifting sand and snow-clad passes testifies to the care and skill devoted by Stein to their packing. Many finds had to be referred to specialists in languages, painting, pottery, coins, etc., and willing co-operation was had from leading experts in many countries. The documents in some languages have kept experts busy for over thirty years. For the elucidation, classification, photographing, and descriptive cataloguing of the finds Stein was indebted throughout to the expert services of his life-long artist friend and collaborator, Mr. F. H. Andrews. Moreover it has been possible only to cite Stein's major publications—all models of erudition and scientific accuracy, richly provided with maps and plans, and illustrations from his own photographs—omitting mention of very numerous brochures and papers contributed to learned societies.

On all his journeys Stein carried out, with the aid of trained surveyors deputed by the Government of India, invaluable surveys of areas hitherto unvisited or unsurveyed. Their magnitude may be gauged by reference to his *Memoir on Maps of Chinese Turkestan and Kansu . . .* (1923), though this covers only his first three tours in Central Asia. The fact is, had he never made the discoveries that have overshadowed his other achievements, his geographical work alone would entitle him to lasting fame. He also found time in secluded mountain tracts to record anthropometric data and make vocabularies of local speech.

Stein was awarded the C.I.E. in 1910 and the K.C.I.E. in 1912. He received the Founder's Gold Medal, R.G.S., in 1909, and the Gold Medals of the R.A.S. and the Society of Antiquaries in 1932 and 1935 respectively, not to mention other honours conferred in this country and abroad, too numerous to list.

Journeys under extreme conditions of heat and cold through trackless sand-swept deserts and amid the highest mountains on the globe necessarily entail hardships and dangers. Of these, always made light of in his letters, Stein had a full share. Scaling in foul weather a 20,000 ft. pass in the K'un-lun in 1908 his feet were badly frost-bitten. After he had been carried by forced marches 300 miles down to the Moravian Mission hospital in Leh,

all the toes of his right foot had to be amputated to save the leg. In 1914, when he was exploring in the high Nan-shan, his horse reared and fell backwards upon him, causing severe injury to his left thigh, which crippled his movements for some months. In minor accidents he broke a collar bone on two or three occasions. In 1937 he had to stop work in N.W. Iran and undergo a serious operation in Vienna. These mishaps never daunted his intrepid spirit.

Stein was exceptionally endowed by study and character for work of exploration. Rare linguistic attainments; familiarity, aided by a remarkably retentive memory, with all previous relevant records; careful planning in every detail; economy of time, labour, and expenditure; an almost uncanny flair for grasping topographical features influencing human movement and settlement: tenacity of purpose; instinctive tact in dealing with men of all races; a wiry physique and indefatigable energy of body and brain; accuracy of observation and discernment in inference, and meticulous attention to accuracy of detail in recording results—all contributed to his pre-eminent success.

By nature unassuming and retiring, Stein had a very generous and warm heart, and a genius for making and keeping friends. It was wonderful how he managed, even under conditions of extreme discomfort, to keep up regular correspondence with them all, letting them share in his thrilling life, and making them feel that he maintained a lively interest in their activities. He wrote a rapid, clear hand, acquired, it may be noted, with characteristic resolution, after one of his professors had warned him that his script was illegible.

Sir Aurel Stein will be mourned by a host of friends in many lands, and by none more deeply than by those hardy, brave, and devoted Indian and Pathan surveyors who were his sole assistants on most of his journeys.

C. E. A. W. OLDHAM.