



# Stein Collections in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

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## ABSTRACT

Each of the Institutions currently guarding Aurél Stein's spiritual legacy embodied in documents and photos is linked to the scenes of his life and activity. The Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (LHAS) keeps the material bequeathed to his homeland.

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## HISTORY OF THE COLLECTION

Each of the Institutions currently guarding Aurél Stein's spiritual legacy, embodied in documents and photographs, is linked to the scenes of his life and activity. The Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (LHAS) keeps the material bequeathed to his homeland.

Stein's ties with the learned institution are now well known: his childhood home stood close to the Academy building; his academician uncle Ignác Hirschler arranged for him, as a secondary-school student, to visit its library. The books he read there, and his talks with Hungarian scholars and travellers, aroused in him an interest in Asia and at a young age he started to learn the Sanskrit language.

His commitment to the institution increased when, in 1885, as recognition of his research work and at the very young age of 33, he was elected an External Member of the Academy. Until 1938 whenever he returned home, he used the opportunity to give public lectures, one of them (31 st December 1937) was even put on the air by the Hungarian Broadcasting Corporation and is preserved in its archives. In most cases these lectures were held in, and organized by, the HAS. He regularly sent copies of his new publications to the LHAS. In 1922 he sent the dispensable part of his private library, some 2,000 volumes, to the Academy. Because of the war, and then due to political reasons, his bequest only arrived at Budapest, to the Academy Palace on the banks of the Danube, in 1957, 14 years after his death.

In his will he left all his printed books to the LHAS. Moreover, the bequest arriving from Oxford contained some 7,000 photographs, 1,400 letters written to him, manuscripts, galley proofs of his works, hand-drawn designs of the maps that appeared under his name, printed maps which he used on his travels, his anthropometric notes, banking forms and financial documents of his expeditions, family correspondence, his medical records, diaries, photograph pocket albums, diplomas and clippings from the Durrants- and the Authors' Syndicate Press-cutting Services.

## PROCESSING OF THE STEIN COLLECTIONS IN THE LHAS

In the Academic Library, book donations began to be processed immediately on receipt. As the catalogue entry always contained the provenance, Stein's library can be fully reconstructed from the catalogue. The history and composition of the Stein Collection completed was summarized in Hungarian, and then in English, by László Rásonyi, at the time Head of the Oriental Collection (Rásonyi 1960; 1961). However, this was simply an expository review because the Library could not undertake yet a study of the documentary heritage.

Although the importance of the manuscripts, letters and photographs was well understood in Hungarian scholarly circles, communist politics of the time did not help the opening of the bequest.

In the meantime, the cataloguing of the Stein collections in the UK had been continuing. In 1998 Helen Wang edited the *Handbook to the Stein Collections in the UK* which contained all information regarding the different Stein Collections (Wang 1998). This wide-ranging work brought into focus the hitherto unknown bequest kept in Budapest. The processing of the latter revealed that the two collections had not been separated in a systematic way, but the materials in the UK and in Hungary complement each other. Thus the stock-taking of the Budapest-based collection filled important gaps. A three-year British-Hungarian project resulted in 2002 in the *Catalogue of the Collections of Sir Aurel Stein in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*, jointly published by the British Museum and the LHAS (Apor & Wang 2002), and five years later a Supplementary volume was compiled (Apor & Wang 2007).

Thanks to an agreement with the International Dunhuang Project in 2005 the relevant photographs of Aurel Stein in the LHAS collection were digitized, and the core data was made available to scholars worldwide via the IDP Interactive Web Database (<http://idp.bl.uk/>). In addition, the material from two exhibitions was also made available on the LHAS website: the first held in Budapest in 2000, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Dunhuang Library, entitled *Hidden Treasures of the Silk Road* (<http://dunhuang.mtak.hu>); the second, held in Hong Kong in March 2008, was entitled *Fascinated by the Orient, Life and Works of Sir Aurel* (<http://stein.mtak.hu>), and contains exhibits and related didactic panels of the large photographic exhibition organized by the LHAS and the Museum of the Hong Kong University. The texts of these digital exhibitions have English, Spanish, and Hungarian versions, while the latter is also available in Chinese.

Since then the LHAS Stein collections have been introduced to the public in exhibitions several times. On 24 March 2015, in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, a joint exhibition was opened on the life and works of Stein, concomitant with the international conference *Marc Aurel Stein with Special Reference to South and Central Asian Legacy: Recent Discoveries and Research*. Then, largely based on the photographic collection of Stein, an exhibition *Recollections: The expedition of 1897 – Hungarian Explorers in Dunhuang* was opened in Dunhuang on the 8<sup>th</sup> August 2018. This commemorated the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the East Asian expedition (1878–1881) led by Count Béla Széchenyi and Sir Aurel Stein. The exhibition revived Dunhuang of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the role that Hungarian scholars and travellers played

in the geographic and cultural description of this important city of the Silk Roads and its most precious artistic ornament, the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas. In November 2018, in Budapest, the Library opened the *Hungarians on the Silk Road* exhibition, with videos and films provided by the Dunhuang Research Academy, and with the opening address from Luo Huaqing, Deputy Director of the Research Institute.

In 2018 we also started a new digitization programme, where new copies of the photographic material were prepared using a higher level of photo-technology. Currently, we are working on incorporating the photographic parts of the 2007 printed catalogue into the Library's on-line catalogue, in a format that individual catalogue entries are supplemented with unique characteristics, and a link leading to the Library's digital repository (REAL: <http://real.mtak.hu/>). The format of the catalogue record follows the internationally recognized MARC 21 standard, and the records are regularly uploaded to WorldCat (<https://www.worldcat.org/>). Digitizing is undertaken in 600 DPI TIFF format, and PDF files are uploaded to the Library's digital repository (REAL). We expect that soon researchers studying the Stein photographs kept in the Academic Library will only have to personally call upon the Oriental Collection if they need publishing permission and print-quality copies. By to By now 2023, some the entire photographic material became accessible items are accessible online (<http://opac.mtak.hu>).

As a next step, we would like to continue the digitization project with the second most-frequently studied material, the correspondence. The digitized letters will be described and included in the online catalogue, with the repository containing the scanned

letters. Our long-term plan is to make the entire Stein bequest accessible to scholars all over the world.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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