Sir Aurel Stein’s Medals at the Royal Geographical Society

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A stream of awards and honorary degrees were presented to Sir Aurel Stein between 1904 and 1939, reflecting the very high esteem in which he was held in Europe and the USA in the early decades of the 20th century. They included the following accolades:

- 1904 Back Grant, Royal Geographical Society
- 1909 Founder’s Medal, Royal Geographical Society*
- 1909 Diploma, Geographical Society, Munich
- 1909 D.Litt degree, Oxford University
- 1909 Campbell Memorial Gold Medal, Royal Asiatic Society, Bombay*
- 1909 Stanislas Julien prize, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres
- 1909 Hardy prize, Royal Bavarian Academy
- 1910 Honorary Doctor of Science, Cambridge University
- 1910 Diploma, Royal Scottish Geographical Society
- 1910 C.I.E. [Commander of the Indian Empire]
- 1911 Member of the Anthropologische Gesellschaft, Vienna
- 1912 K.C.I.E. [Knight Commander of the Indian Empire]
- 1917 Honorary Member, Russian Geographical Society
- 1918 Tchihatchef Prize, Académie des Sciences, Paris
- 1921 Fellow, British Academy
- 1923 Gold Medal, Société de Géographie, France*
- 1923 Anders Retzius medal, Swedish Anthropological and Geographical Society
- 1925 Honorary Member, Hungarian Archaeological Society
- 1928 Flinders Petrie Medal for Archaeology, London University*
- 1930 Medal, Hungarian Geographical Society*
- 1931 Medal (In Memoriam L’oczy), Hungarian Geographical Society*
- 1931 Honorary Member, Société Asiatique
- 1932 Gold Medal, Royal Asiatic Society†
- 1934 Huxley Memorial Medal, Royal Anthropological Institute*
- 1935 Gold Medal, Society of Antiquaries*
- 1939 Member, American Philosophical Society
- 1939 Honorary Doctorate, University of St. Andrews

Nine of these medals (those marked *) are now in the Collections of the Royal Geographical Society, though one (the Royal Asiatic Society medal Society, marked †)3 has been recorded as missing for some years. These are discussed below in chronological order. For each medal we have prepared a short description, a summary of the criteria by which the medal was awarded, and a list of recipients. The purpose of listing the recipients is to enable us to see Stein’s position among his very distinguished contemporaries, his predecessors and followers. The Royal Geographical Society also holds extensive archives relating to Stein, consisting mostly of over 700 letters of correspondence between Stein and officers of the Society,4 and a summary of the papers relevant to the medals is given at the end of this paper.

1. 1909 Founder’s Medal, Royal Geographical Society*

Description of the medal
Circular medal. Gold. Glazed and framed. 54mm diameter. The obverse features a bust of a bare-headed King William IV, facing right. The Latin inscription reads GUILIELMUS III D.G. BRITANNIARUM REX MDCCCLXXII FUNDATOR [William IV, By the Grace of God, King of the Britons, 1830, founder]. Below bust: W. WYON. The reverse shows Minerva, standing and facing left, wreath-crown in right hand, map in left hand.
Behind her are measuring instruments [a sextant and telescope] and a globe. The Latin inscription above Minerva reads: OB TERRAS RECLASUS [To lands unknown, or for lands yet to be discovered]. Inscription in exergue: ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON. Above exergue: W. WYON A.R.A. (to left), and MINT 1836 (to right). Inscription on gold band edge: DR. M. AUREL STEIN, 1909.

In square red box, 96mm, inscribed ‘Wyon, 2 Langham Chambers, London W.’

RGS ref: 700446/D4 (1)

About the medal

The Society's Gold Medals (Founder’s and Patron’s Medals) originated as an annual gift of 50 guineas from King William IV. They were awarded for the first time in 1832, for the encouragement and promotion of geographical science and discovery. In 1839 the Society decided that this sum should be converted into two gold medals of equal value, to be designated the Founder's Medal and the Patron's medal. These have been awarded annually, with some omissions, to the present day, and are currently awarded with the approval of Her Majesty the Queen.

The Founder's Medal was in fine gold except for 1918–21, when the medals were bronze and the value of the award was made up in War Bonds, and from 1975 being made in silver gilt. It was designed by William Wyon (1795–1851), who was an Associate Royal Academician (ARA) at that time. With some minor alterations over the years, it continued to be made by the Wyon firm until 1923, when production switched to the Royal Mint.

About Stein's medal

Stein was notified of his award whilst he was in England during April 1909. It was conferred on him at the Society's anniversary meeting on 24 May 1909, by the Society's President, Major Leonard Darwin (1870–1943). In his acceptance speech, Stein acknowledged the assistance of Lord Curzon, Lord Minto, the Survey of India and the Royal Mint. Stein expresses in sincere tones his 'lasting gratitude for the truly great distinction', noting that the medal was the 'highest recognition which my archaeological labours could have possibly received.'
1903, an Indian administrator and ethnologist. In 1907 his friends founded the gold medal in his memory, to be awarded triennially by the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society for the best original work on Indian folklore, history or ethnology. The Fund is administered by the Royal Asiatic Society and the first medal was awarded 1907 and awarded every three years for exceptional work in the field of Oriental research.

The Asiatic Society of Mumbai (the renaming took place in 1955) continues to award the Campbell Memorial Medal 'in recognition of distinguished services on the subject of oriental history, folklore or ethnology, [which] further the object of the Society, namely the investigation and encouragement of oriental arts, sciences and literature.'

About Stein's medal
Stein was the first recipient of this medal, and was awarded it in recognition of his book *Ancient Khotan*. It was conferred upon him at a meeting of the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society on 2 March 1909, by Sir George Sydenham Clarke (1843-1933), Governor of Bombay. As Stein could not attend in person, the medal was handed to A.M.T. Jackson, trustee of the medal fund, to be forwarded to him. Jackson accepted the medal, and paid tribute to Stein.

Recipients of the medal

Dr Sir Aurel Stein (1908), Dr D.R. Bhandarkar (1911), Prof. A.A. Macdowell (1914), Dr Jivanji J. Modi (1917), Dr Shama Shastri (1920), R.B.P. Joshi (1921, Special), Sir G. Grierson (1923), Sir Sir Jadunath Macdonell (1914), Dr Jivanji J. Modi (1917), Dr Shama Shastry (1920), Dr Aurel Stein (1908). Recipients of the medal

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About Stein's medal

Stein was awarded this medal for his exploration work in Central Asia.19

Recipients of the medal

Captain John Franklin (1820), René Caillé and Major Laing (1830), Douville (1832), Captain John Ross (1834), Alcide d’Orbigny (1835), Captain Callier (1836), Captain Back (1837), Dubois de Montpereux (1838), Contre-amiral d’Urvillé (1841), Captain James Clark Ross (1843), Hommaire de Hel (1844), D’Arnaud (1844), Claude Gay (1845), Ferret and Galinié (1846), Dr C. T. Beke and T. Lefèbvre (1846), Dr E.W.L. Leichhardt (1847), Rochet d’Hericourt (1847), Antoine d’Abbadie and Arnaud d’Abbadie (1849), Captain MacClure (1855), Dr Henry Barth (1856), David Livingstone (1857), Dr E. K. Kane (1858), Robert Hermann and Adolf von Schlaginitweit (1859), R. F. Burton and J. H. Speke (1860), Nicolas de Khanhok (1861), Henri Duyvveruy (1864), Sir Samuel W. Baker (1867), Doudart de la Gre and Francis Garnier (1869), Alfred Granddietier (1872), Dr Gustave Nachtigal (1875), Commandant Verney Lovett Cameron (1877), Henry M. Stanely (1878), P. Savorgnan de Brazza (1879), Adolf Erck Nordenskjold (1886), Major de Serpa Pinto (1881), Alphonse Milne-Edwards (1884), Ch. de Brito Capello (1886), Captain Binger (1890), Gabriel Bonvalot (1891), Commandant P.-Louis Monteil (1893), Prince Henri d’Orleans (1896), Dr Fridjof Nansen (1897), Edouard Foa (1898), Emile Gentil (1899), Commandant J.-B. Marchand (1890), Fernand Foureau (1891), Captain P. J. Joalland (1892), Alfred Grandidier (1893), Dr Gustave Nachtigal (1894), General de Pourtales (1895), Colonel Bourgeois (1896), Sir E. Shackleton (1910), Dr J. B. Charcot (1912), Captain R. Amundsen (1913), Admiral Robert E. Peary (1914), Commandant Jean Tilho (1918), G. Bruce (1922), C. Howard Bury (1922), Mme Rosita Forbess (1923), Sir Aurel Stein (1923), Bruneau de Laborde (1924), Prof. Olausen (1924), Cdt Baron A. de Guerlache de Gomery (1925), Charles Lindbergh (1927), Jacques de Rohan-Chabot (1928), Hassanesin-Bey and S.A.S. le prince Kémal el Dine (1929), Wickliffe P. Draper (1932), Audoin-Dubreuil Haracht (1933), Dr A. Hamilton Rice (1933), M. Herzog (1930), Theodore Monod (1932), Augustin Lombard (1933), Cdt Georges Houtot et Ingen. G. P. Wilm (1934), Sir John Hunt, Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Norkay Tenzing (1953), Henri Lhote (1957), U.E.uchs (1958), Neil Armstrong, Eldon Aldrin and Michael Collins (1970), Germaine Dieterlen (1973), Norbert Casteret (1981), Jean-Louis Etienne (1982), Jean-Yves Empereur (2002), Nicolas Hulot (2003), Gilles Elkaï (2004), Jean-Marc Pineau (2005), Erik Orsenna (2006), Jean Raspail (2007).

(5) 1928 Flinders Petrie Medal for Archaeology (London University)20

Description of the medal

Circular, 90mm diameter.

The obverse shows the bearded head and shoulders of Sir Flinders Petrie, facing left. The raised inscription gives his full name WILLIAM MATTHEW FLINDERS PETRIE and the year of his 70th birthday MMXXXII (1923). The reverse features an ibis (sacred to Thoth, god of knowledge) facing right with head lowered, and the head of a statuette of King Khufu (also known as Kheops), for whom the Great Pyramid at Giza was built. Petrie had excavated this statuette at Abydos in 1903. Below, to the left of the ibis’ beak is the name of the designer Carline in a shallow inscription. The inscription on the reverse says PRESENTED FOR WORK IN ARCHAEOLOGY.

Engraved around the edge: AWARDED BY THE SENATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON TO SIR AUREL STEIN 1928.

In black box, 123mm square.

RGS ref: 70044/6/D4(2)

About the medal

To celebrate the 70th birthday of the distinguished archaeologist Sir Flinders Petrie (1853–1942), a fund was created, which allowed for the production of 20 medals, and a capital sum which could be invested. The medal was to be awarded ‘once in every three years for distinguished work in Archaeology, preferably to a British subject [and that the name of the recipient shall be engraved on the rim of the medal.21

The Petrie Medal was issued to Sir Flinders Petrie and then to seven recipients in this way. There is then a gap of over 20 years until 1824/5 when a Working Party of the Scholarships Committee at University College London, confirmed that The Petrie Prize, value £100, has been established from funds raised on the occasion of the 70th birthday of Sir W.M. Flinders Petrie in 1923 to create a memorial to his work in Archaeology. In addition a number of Petrie Medals were provided from the Fund when the University accepted its administration in 1926. The Petrie Prize will be accompanied by the award of a Petrie Medal while the existing stocks of the Medal permit. The Prize will be awarded annually … to the best candidate at the examination for the MA/MSc degrees under the aegis of the Board of Studies in Archaeology.”7 The last of the original Petrie Medals was awarded in 1993. Further two casts were made, with the last of these presented in 1993.

In 2005, the Institute of Archaeology’s Policy Group and Staff Meeting decided to reinstate the Petrie Medal as a three-yearly award to an outstanding international archaeologist.

The Petrie medal was designed and modelled by the sculptor and medalist Sir W. M. Flinders Petrie’s son, W.M. Flinders Petrie.  It was presented to him by Sir Gregory Foster, Vice-Chancellor of University College London on 5 July 1929, and the occasion was followed by a reception given by Sir Flinders and Lady Petrie in the Exhibition Room, University College. Sir Flinders Petrie’s tribute to Stein, and the latter’s response, were published in The Times, 8 July 1929. 22

About Stein’s medal

The Petrie medal was awarded to Stein ‘in recognition of his great work in Central Asia and Western China.”7 It was presented to him by Sir Gregory Foster, Vice-Chancellor of London University on 5 July 1929, and the occasion was followed by a reception given by Sir Flinders and Lady Petrie in the Exhibition Room, University College. Sir Flinders Petrie’s tribute to Stein, and the latter’s response, were published in The Times, 8 July 1929. 22

Recipients of the medal

Sir Flinders Petrie (1925), Sir Aurel Stein (1928), Sir Arthur Evans (1931), Abbe Henri Breuil (1934), Prof. J. B. Charcot (1937), Sir Mortimer Wheeler (1938), Prof. J. B. Wace (1953), Sir Leonard Woolley (1955). These medals have the name of the recipient engraved on the rim.

(6) 1930 Medal of the Hungarian Geographical Society23

Description of the medal

Circular. Silver medal, 60mm diameter.

The obverse features a portrait of Sir Aurel Stein, the monogram of Beck O. Fülöp, and the Latin inscription AURELIO STEI HOSPITI CLARISSIMO IN URBE NATALEM REVERSO
About Stein's medal
Stein had been an Honorary Member of the Hungarian Geographical Society since 1903. The medal commemorates Stein’s visit to Budapest, to give a lecture entitled ‘The Indo-Iranian Borderlands: Their Prehistory in a Time of War’, entitled ‘The Indo-Iranian Borderlands: Their Prehistory in a Time of War’, 33 and to receive the Light of Geography and of Recent Explorations’.33

The medal was cast in bronze and was probably presented to Stein during his visit. At least four examples were made; these are now in the collections of the Hungarian National Gallery, the National Museum of Hungary, the Fruchter Collection (Hungary), and the British Library. At some stage, the Hungarian National Gallery also acquired, from Beck’s family, a plaster cast with an alternative reverse, showing a figure with two animals (cattle?) in place of the seated Minerva. The text is the same as on the Minerva version.

The silver version of the medal was commissioned after the lecture by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, with the intention of presenting it to Stein on his next visit to Budapest. However, the medal was posted to Stein, care of P.S. Allen in Oxford in 1930. (Stein was away in China during the spring of 1930, and left Shanghai on 13 May for Calcutta via Singapore and Rangoon.) A handwritten letter in the RGS from A. Rethly, General Secretary of the Hungarian Geographical Society, to P.S. Allen, dated 5 May 1930, reads:

I am glad to return to you Sir Aurel Stein’s medal and request you to kindly keep it for him until his coming back from India. At the same time I write to Sir Aurel Stein too. Do kindly forward it.

The medal was posted on 26 May 1930. In Stein’s absence, Allen acknowledged receipt of the parcel, and his handwritten letter (in the archives of the Hungarian Geographical Society), dated 31 May 1930, acknowledges that ‘Sir Aurel Stein’s medal has reached me safely. It shall be kept for him, until his return.’ On 9 July 1930 Stein sent a letter of thanks from Mohand Marg, Kashmir, on 9 July 1930.

About the medal
This is a commemorative medal, founded in 1922 in honour of Ludovici L’oczy, the late President of the Hungarian Geographical Society. Aurel Stein was the first Hungarian scholar to receive this award. It was L’oczy who first alerted Stein to the Buddhist caves at Dunhuang and alpine flowers from Kashmir by Stein to L’oczy in 1920 can still be found, pressed behind glass, at L’oczy’s tomb in the cemetery at Balatonárás in western Hungary. Stein had been an Honorary Member of the Hungarian Geographical Society since 1903.

(8) 1931 Medal of the Hungarian Geographical Society – in memoriam Ludovici L’oczy

Description of the medal
Circular, bronze medal, 63mm diameter. The obverse features a bust of Thomas Huxley, facing left. The inscription reads THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY B. 1825 D. 1895. The reverse has an inscription at the centre: AUREL STEIN 31ST JULY HUXLEY MEMORIAL LECTURER. The inscription around the edge reads ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN & IRELAND.

In dark tan box, 105mm square. RGS ref: 700446/D4(4)

About the medal
The medal was instituted in 1900 in memory of the biologist and science educationist Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95), and is the highest honour awarded by the Royal Anthropological Institute. It is awarded annually, ‘by ballot of the Council, to a scientist, British or foreign, distinguished in any field of anthropological research in the widest sense.’34

About Stein’s medal
Although Stein’s work was primarily archaeological and geographical in nature, he also collected information of interest to anthropologists, in particular Thomas Athol Joyce (1878–1942), President of the RAI. As the recipient of this medal, Stein delivered a paper to the Society on 31 July 1934, entitled ‘The Indo-Iranian Borderlands: Their Prehistory in the Light of Geography and of Recent Explorations’. Stein’s Huxley Memorial Lecture was arranged one of the events of the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, London Session, 30 Jul–4 Aug 1934, and was subsequently published in the Society’s Journal.
About Stein's medal

Stein was awarded this medal for distinguished services to archaeology at the anniversary meeting of the Society on 30 April 1935. At the meeting, Sir Frederic Kenyon made his presidential address, focussing on archaeological research, and concluded with a brief survey of Stein's archaeological work in Kashmir, Central Asia and China. Stein's words of thanks (to the Society and all people who had helped him 'from officials of the British Museum to native employees, who had made possible his achievements in Eastern archaeology').

Recipients of the medal


Further information from the RGS archives

The RGS did store, for a short time, Stein's award from the Swedish Anthropological and Geographical Society (SAGS) – the Anders Retzius medal. It was passed to the Society via the Foreign Office in April 1923, having been handed to Sir Colville Barclay by the Crown Prince of Sweden on the 50th anniversary of the Society the previous month. It was known that Stein was in Kashmir, though thought to be back in England shortly, so the RGS was requested to hold it until his return. The RGS Secretary, Arthur Hinks, wrote to Stein on 13 April suggesting that it be kept in the Society’s safe: ‘They evidently imagine you are simply on a journey... It is a good heavy lump of metal worth quite a bit.’ The letter also records information provided by SAGS that this medal was rarely awarded, and that there were only two candidates.
previous recipients: Professor Oscar Montelius in 1910 and Sir Arthur Evans in 1921.

The missives between Stein and Hinks at this time was very amiable, though when Stein requested that the Anders Retzius medal be sent by registered post to FS. Allen in Oxford 18 months later the tone between the two men seems to have cooled a little and Stein appears to be in direct correspondence with the Librarian, Edward Heathwood, for much of 1926. The letters between Hinks and Stein seem to regain some of the former familiarity by the following year. The correspondence from Stein held by the Society also records his donation of the block of wind-sculpted wood from Lop-Nor. More recent donations, yet to be catalogued, are a pedometer used by Stein and a small assortment of letters, photographs and ephemera sent to his secretary at Oxford, Mrs Ida May Brown, and given to the Society by her son, Richard. Amongst the latter is a clipping from The Daily Mirror of 17 June 1932 with a photograph of Stein receiving the gold medal from the Royal Asiatic Society and an edition of The Illustrated London News of 8 August 1925 featuring a four-page article on the exhibition at the British Museum of finds from Stein’s Third Expedition. The Society also holds the tape measure that Stein recovered from the south-west base of a stupa, north of Lop-Nor, in December 1906 which Sven Hedin had left behind in March 1901. The tape measure was returned to Hedin during a Society dinner of 23 February 1909 at which the President, Sir Leonard Darwin, is said to have sat between the two men as the exchange took place. Hedin accepted the tape measure and presented it that evening to the Society [Fig. 2].

In 1907 Stein had expressed to the Secretary, Sir John Scott Keltie, his wish to ‘move about like [Ellsworth] Huntington with a minimum of people and baggage’ and he discouraged the sending of personal items of value to Kashmir. In 1923 he wrote to Hinks that it would have been preferable for the Société de Géographie to follow the example set by the Swedes and send his medal to the RGS for safe-keeping. Stein’s k.c.i.e. insignia had been stolen from Mohand Marg just two years previously, so it is not surprising that he did not wish to keep such items close by in Kashmir. By the mid-1930s honours and awards were being conferred upon Stein, though his enthusiasm for the ceremony and pomp of the official presentations seems to have left him. Writing to Hinks from Agrigento, Italy, on 14 February 1935 he states his plan to be in London in March but return to Kashmir in May and in between, shall have to get through another medal award, one from the Society of Antiquaries, quite unread of. But the one which I value most, a real encouragement, came from the RGS 26 years before. Certainly, Stein wrote to Keltie in April 1906 (before the RGS medal was formally awarded) that he was already looking forward to the day of the presentation ‘as the proudest day of my life.’

Although plenty of medals were presented to Stein he was never negligent in commending the contribution made by his surveyors and later in 1909 was recommending Muhammad Ayub Khan for recognition from the RGS for his work. Muhammad Ayub was awarded the Back Grant the following year (Stein himself received it in 1904). The following awards were made by the RGS to Stein’s colleagues: Ram Singh, Cuthbert Peck Grant (1908); Lal Singh, Back Grant (1909); Lal Singh, Murchison Award (1917); Afraz Gul Khan, Back Grant (1926); Afraz Gul Khan, Gill Memorial Award (1933) and Muhammad Ayub Khan, Back Grant (1936). The consistency and concentration of communication from Stein between the beginning of the 20th century to the end of the 1930s testifies to his focus and determination when it came to his area of study, and to his very specific requests (sometimes perceived as exacting demands). Many of the 700+ letters relating to him and his work contain capacious details and specifications – on the number of offprints he wished to order, what type of postage they should be sent by, specifics of finds, pages of articles, etc., even calculating the number of pages of the Geographical Journal his articles would cover. As Hinks wrote to the historiographer William Foster (1863–1951), when the latter had to proof-read (yet) another revision of Stein’s Marco Polo article for the Geographical Journal,

There are certain penalties attached to friendship with this great man, and I’m sure you will pay them cheerfully.

Foster’s reply was not so airy.

Stein did not tell me of the honour he was thrusting upon me. But perhaps he had used up all his notepaper in giving me voluminous instructions on other matters.

The notice of Stein’s death in the Geographical Journal conveys a tone of great respect and the subsequent tribute by the President at the Annual General Meeting in June 1944 mentioned ‘some twenty massive papers’ that Stein had contributed to the Journal, and he concluded by saying, ‘Sir Aurel Stein’s name will always stand amongst the highest in our Annals.’ The medals presented to Stein that are now in the RGS Collections are records from a small number of other venerable institutions that held him in the same high regard.

Notes
1 This paper includes information from notes prepared for a paper on the Hungarian medal designed by Beck-O-Fülöp, by Pallos Lajos and Helen Wang (2000, unpublished). The authors are particularly grateful to Lajos for allowing us to include his work here. We would also like to thank Philip Attwood for checking the descriptions of the medals.
3 RGS ref: 700446/D4/3. For details of the presentation of this medal, see The Times, 17 June 1932, 16c.
6 The Times, 25 May 1909, 10a.
7 RGS Archives: [ar RGS/CB9/Stein]
Figure 2 (a-c) Founder's Medal, Royal Geographical Society (obverse, reverse, edge)

Figure 3 (a-b) Campbell Memorial Gold Medal, Royal Asiatic Society, Bombay (obverse, reverse)

Figure 4 (a-b) Lucy Wharton Drexel Medal, University of Pennsylvania, Museum (obverse, reverse)

Figure 5 (a-b) Gold Medal, Société de Géographie, France (obverse, reverse)

Figure 6 (a-c) Flinders Petrie Medal for Archaeology, London University (obverse, reverse, edge)
Figure 7 (a-b) Medal, Hungarian Geographical Society (obverse, reverse)

Figure 8 (a-b) Medal (In Memoriam Ludovici L'oczy), Hungarian Geographical Society (obverse, reverse)

Figure 9 (a-b) Huxley Memorial Medal, Royal Anthropological Institute (obverse, reverse)

Figure 10 (a-b) Gold Medal, Society of Antiquaries (obverse, reverse)