

Dunhuang Textiles in London: A History of the Collection

Helen Wang,* Helen Persson** and Frances Wood***

*Curator of East Asian Money, British Museum

**Curator of Textiles, Asian Department, Victoria and Albert Museum

***Curator of the Chinese Collections, British Library

We can satisfactorily tackle only finite things in this world, – and a study of Chinese textile art would at present belong to the infinite category if taken up as a whole!¹

Introduction

Sir Aurel Stein (1862–1943) visited Dunhuang in 1907 and 1914. Here, at Qianfodong, the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, the Chinese monk Wang Yuanlu revealed to him the hidden library in Cave 17, which had been sealed at the beginning of the eleventh century. The contents of that library are well-known: in particular, the paper documents in various languages and scripts, and the exquisite paintings on silks.² Less attention has been paid to the textiles, and it was therefore with great pleasure that we welcomed Professor Zhao Feng and his assistants Wang Le and Xu Zheng to work on the collections of Dunhuang textiles in London in the summer of 2006.

Our introduction aims to explain some of the background to the textiles from Dunhuang that are now in London. First, we offer a concise history of the three institutions in which those textiles are now housed: the British Museum, the British Library (which includes the India Office Library) and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Second, we offer an outline history of the Stein Collection. Stein made four Central Asian Expeditions, visiting Dunhuang on the Second and Third Expeditions.³ Although the Dunhuang textiles in London are from the Second Expedition only, we have prepared a concise history of the finds from the first three expeditions for the sake of clarity. Third, we offer a survey of the work that has been done on the textiles in the three institutions subsequent to their publication by Stein.

The British Museum, the British Library, the India Office and the V&A

The British Museum

The British Museum has its origins in the vast collections of Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753). When Sloane died, a parliamentary act (the British Museum Act of 1753) was passed to purchase his private collection of 80,000 objects and select a board of trustees who would be responsible for preserving it and making it publicly accessible. Other important collections were added to the Sloane collection, including the library of the family of Sir Robert Bruce Cotton. The Museum was open to the public, and a reading room was provided in which scholars could consult the library. For over 200 years the library of printed books and manuscripts was a major department within the Museum (with a Sub-Department of Oriental Manuscripts). In 1972, the British Library Act was passed by Parliament, bringing the Library into operation from July 1973, and the British Museum's library became part of the newly formed British Library. Non-textual material remained in the British Museum. The Museum's collection of Asian antiquities was first housed in the Department of Antiquities, and as the collection grew a Sub-Department of Oriental Antiquities was established in 1921. There was also a Sub-Department of Oriental Prints and Drawings (created in 1912) within the Department of Prints and Drawings. In 1933 these two sub-departments were brought together to form the Department of Oriental Antiquities. With some

reconfigurations, this was renamed in 2003 as the Department of Asia.

The British Library

The British Library was created in 1972 from several institutions with the most significant being the British Museum's printed books and manuscript departments. In this way, the manuscript material (including the Chinese scrolls, with their silk attachments) collected by Sir Aurel Stein was transferred from the British Museum to the British Library. In 1982, the India Office Library and Records were also deposited with the British Library, bringing the Stein collection of Tibetan and Khotanese documents in to join the Chinese manuscripts from Dunhuang. The new department was first named the Oriental and India Office Collections (OIOC). Thus, the Stein collection that is now in the British Library has been moved several times: from the Stein Collection (British Museum) to the Oriental and India Office Collections (British Library). OIOC has had three addresses since 1982: Store Street, London WC1 (1982–1990), Orbit House, Blackfriars, London SE1 8NG (1991–1998), and St Pancras, Euston Road, London NW1 2DB (1998 – to present day). OIOC was re-named Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections (APAC) but is now known as Asian and African Studies.

The India Office

The India Office was the successor of the East India Company (founded in 1599). In 1858, after the Mutiny, the East India Company was transferred to the Crown (Her Majesty's Government), under the name of The India Office. The India Office functioned like the Foreign and Colonial Office, handling Indian affairs in the UK for the Government of India. After Indian independence in 1947 the India Office was subsumed into the Foreign and Colonial Office. The India Office Library together with its manuscript and archive collections was incorporated into the British Library in 1982.

The Victoria and Albert Museum

The Victoria and Albert Museum has its origins in the Great Exhibition of 1851. Profits from the Exhibition were used to found the Museum of Manufactures, and to purchase some of its exhibits to form the basis of the new Museum's collections. Its founding principles were to make works of art available to all, to educate working people and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. The Museum moved to its present site in 1857 and was renamed the South Kensington Museum. Its collections (including textiles) expanded rapidly, and new buildings were constructed as semi-permanent exhibition halls, as necessary. In 1880, the holdings of the India Museum were also formally transferred to the South Kensington Museum. In 1899 Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone of a new building designed to give the Museum a grand façade and main entrance. To mark the occasion, it was renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum, in memory of the enthusiastic support Prince Albert had given to its foundation.

Outline history of the Stein Collection

Having studied Sanskrit, Old Persian, Indology, and philology at the universities of Vienna, Leipzig, and Tübingen (1879–84), and map-making as part of his military service in Budapest, Aurel Stein had set out for a career in India. His formal positions were as registrar of Punjab University and principal of the Oriental College, Lahore (1888–99), and principal of the Calcutta Madrasah (1899–1900). But his real interest lay in the 'archaeological exploration' of Central Asia, China, India, Iran, Iraq and Jordan.⁴

Stein's Central Asian Expeditions were funded by various institutions for which he promised to collect archaeological and textual artefacts. The intention was that the finds would eventually be allocated proportionately to the funders. Stein's First Expedition (1900–1) was funded by the Government of India and the Governments of Punjab and Bengal,⁵ and it was agreed that the finds should be studied in London and allocated to specific museums later. His visits to Dunhuang occurred on his Second (1906–8) and Third Expeditions (1913–16). The Second Expedition was funded 60% by the Government of India and 40% by the British Museum, and the finds were to be allocated accordingly. The Third Expedition was funded entirely by the Government of India. The intention was that the majority of finds from this expedition should go to a new museum in New Delhi, and that representative specimens and 'literary remains' should be presented to the British Museum.⁶

However, before any 'division' of finds took place, every attempt was made to keep them together so that they could be studied, catalogued, photographed and published. This often took many years, involved representatives from different institutions, and some decisions had to be deferred owing to the Second World War.⁷

Stein's aim was to publish fairly quickly his own 'personal narrative' of the latest expedition. These were based on his personal diaries and published as *Sand-buried Ruins of Khotan* (1903) and *Ruins of Desert Cathay* (1912).⁸ Then, after extensive study and cataloguing of the finds, he would publish a more scholarly 'scientific report' which also included work by specialists in different disciplines. These are the well-known titles: *Ancient Khotan* (1907), *Serindia* (1921) and *Innermost Asia* (1928). For both types of publication, he needed a base for the collection and for those managing and working on the collection.⁹ The British Museum provided such facilities from the time of Stein's First Expedition. His assistant, Fred Andrews, worked on the finds from all three Expeditions, in London and in Kashmir, thereby providing a steady continuity to Stein's work.

It is often assumed that the finds from Stein's three Central Asian Expeditions came to London in their entirety, and that they were worked on at the British Museum, as part of the British Museum collection. As this is not an accurate assumption, we have tried to outline the history of the collection below. It is important to understand that although the Stein Collection occupied part of the British Museum premises in Bloomsbury, it was not part of the British Museum's collection until specific pieces had been formally acquired by the Museum, usually after lengthy negotiation with the India Office. Until the formal division of finds was

made, the Stein Collection was merely based at the British Museum, and Stein allowed pieces to be removed for study purposes to different people in different locations. His assistants at the Stein Collection kept records of which pieces were removed, so that they could collect them back in later.

Finds from the First Expedition

The finds from Stein's First Expedition (1900–1) were sent to London, where Stein worked on them in a room lent by the British Museum's Indian Antiquities section. The Government of India then recommended that Dr Rudolf Hoernle, together with the British Museum, should determine the distribution of the finds.¹⁰

Finds from the Second Expedition

The finds from Stein's Second Expedition (1906–8) were also sent to London. They were initially stored at the Natural History Museum (then part of the British Museum) in January 1909,¹¹ until facilities for the 'Stein Collection' on the British Museum site in Bloomsbury were ready. Stein was disappointed with these facilities, and asked if the Collection might remain at the Natural History Museum, or if there might be alternative accommodation available at the Indian Museum (under the aegis of the V&A).¹² Although investigations were made, his request was turned down, chiefly because of the major transformations that the South Kensington museums were undergoing at that time.¹³

On 5 August 1909 the finds from the Second Expedition were eventually delivered to the Stein Collection, British Museum. The 'Stein Collection' was kept separate from the Museum's permanent collections, and had its own lock and key, as well as its own staff, of whom Fred Andrews and Miss F.M.G. Lorimer were the most important. Although they worked more or less independently on the Stein Collection, they consulted with both Museum staff and with specialists outside the Museum.

After the cataloguing work had been completed, in preparation for the publication of *Serindia* (1921), came the negotiations over the division of finds. Those pieces allocated to the British Museum were formally transferred from the Stein Collection to the British Museum collection in 1917 and 1919 (see below). The finds allocated to the Government of India were removed from the British Museum on 12 February 1919, and sent to the India Office (London), prior to shipment to India.

However, it appears that the finds were not shipped to India immediately, and that they remained in the India Store Depot in London. The publication of Fred Andrews' article 'Ancient Chinese figured silks' (1920)¹⁴ and Stein's *Serindia and The Thousand Buddhas*¹⁵ (both 1921) must have prompted a re-opening of the discussion over the finds, for in March 1923 they were back on the British Museum premises, and were transferred in summer 1923 to facilities at the V&A, where Fred Andrews was 'absorbed wholly by the examination, division and re-packing of the antiquities forming the Indian Government's share of the finds' from the Second Expedition.¹⁶ The finds were then repacked, and the majority of crates were sent back to the India Store Depot in October 1923. It would seem that the textiles from the Second Expedition were removed from the rest of the finds at this

stage. The V&A applied to the Government of India for a loan of the textiles, and this was approved in December 1923. Three cases, said to contain paintings on silk, were temporarily stored in the bomb-proof store at the V&A, and were removed to the British Museum facilities in September 1924, presumably for comparison with finds from the Third Expedition, some of which were sent from Kashmir to London in 1924.¹⁷

Finds from the Third Expedition

The finds from the Third Expedition (1913–16) were sent to Srinagar, Kashmir. Fred Andrews and Miss Lorimer moved to Srinagar, and worked on the Stein Collection in a specially built annexe at the Andrews' house there (the wall paintings were housed separately at Lahore).¹⁸ In December 1919 the Government of India agreed that the manuscripts should be transferred to London for study purposes. The India Office, London, was the appropriate location, but there were queries over lack of working space there, and they were probably transferred to the British Museum for examination and cataloguing.¹⁹

In 1924, some other groups of objects, including textiles, were also transferred from Kashmir to London for the preparation of the plates for the volume *Innermost Asia*. Fred Andrews returned to London to do this work, with the assistance of Joan Joshua, who treated, mounted and restored the textiles. Here, in facilities again provided by the British Museum, 'he directed and supervised the proper treatment and illustration of hundreds of specimens of ancient textiles'.²⁰ In his Introduction to *Innermost Asia*, Stein wrote 'If the many extremely delicate and fragile objects recovered from the desert sands and ruined sites of the most arid parts of Asia survive in future the effect of wholly different climatic conditions, it will be largely due to the special treatment it was possible to secure at the British Museum'.²¹

The textiles were temporarily removed from the British Museum facilities prior to publication, and in May 1925 Stein wrote that the 'ancient textiles which are reproduced in my *Innermost Asia* are still at Banbury [near Oxford] with the blockmakers [Messrs Henry Stone and Son]'.²²

In June 1932 the V&A received some textiles (from Astana and Loulan) from the Stein Collection (then at the BM facilities), on loan from the Government of India.²³

It would seem that the rest of the textiles were sent to India, and that in May 1933 a further group of textiles (from Astana, Kharakhoto and Karakhoja) were brought from India to London on formal loan from the Government of India to the V&A.²⁴

Who worked on the Dunhuang textiles from the Second Expedition?

Fred Andrews and Miss F.M.G. Lorimer were the key people working at the Stein Collection on the finds from the Second Expedition. Andrews was employed to work on the Stein Collection on a part-time basis, and had to manage this alongside his main employment as Director of the Art Department, Battersea Polytechnic (London) and subsequently as Director of Industrial Art Education (Kashmir). Miss Lorimer was employed on a full-time basis. They were in regular contact with the staff working on the

Museum's permanent collections, and with other specialists outside of the Museum.

For the textiles, in addition to writing out the 'slips' (slips of paper on which they wrote detailed notes in preparation for the catalogue entries in *Serindia*),²⁵ other tasks included conservation of the textiles, including finding suitable silk fabric as backing, and finding appropriate dyes for the task.²⁶ For these tasks, Andrews and Lorimer consulted with the Museum's staff: Miss Winter (repairs to textiles), Mr Goodchild (working on silk), Mr Littlejohn (paintings conservator).²⁷ Specialists from outside the Museum were also consulted: Professor Julius von Wiesner (1838–1916) of Vienna, expert on Persian textiles and Central Asian paper, and his student Dr T.F. Hanausek (1852–1918), who worked on microscopical analysis of characteristic fabric specimens from different sites, the results of which were included in the Descriptive Lists in *Serindia*, and Prof. Summerville.²⁸ Prof. Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941) advised on the influence of textile products from Iran.²⁹ Raphael Petrucci (1872–1917) was also consulted over the selection of objects for illustration in *Serindia*.³⁰ Andrews, Lorimer and Stein sought out publications that might be relevant to the textiles from Dunhuang. These included Eugène Chartraire's comparison of a silk piece in the V&A with a piece in the Cathedral at Sens (Burgundy, France) that had links with textiles from Dunhuang;³¹ and Prof. Otto von Falke's study of the influence of designs from Khorasan or the Oxus region on Persian figured silks.³²

At that time, Fred Andrews' main employment was at the Battersea Polytechnic. When he found it difficult to combine this with his preferred work on the Stein Collection, Stein arranged for him to select materials from the Stein Collection at the British Museum and take them to the Polytechnic to work on them there.³³ Although his chief task was to examine the textiles and write up the 'slips', Stein also encouraged Andrews to make drawings of the fabrics, insisting that he was the ideal person to do this.³⁴ From the correspondence between Stein and Andrews, it is clear that he enjoyed this work, discovering the intricate details, patterns and techniques of the woven silks:

With regard to the drawings of textiles, these are progressing as quickly as possible, and the most difficult are being done first. I know from experience how much time is consumed in finding the scheme of patterns on damasks (which are all in one colour) and gauzes.³⁵

As an instance of what may turn up, one pattern now nearly worked out measures about 2 feet square. This was quite unsuspected, and is a white silk damask banner top painted rather roughly with the usual seated B [Buddha]. The painting hides so much of the woven pattern that I had overlooked it. Another has an almost invisible woven pattern of a fine decorative peacock about 10" to 12" high. Yesterday only I found another white silk banner top with a large pattern but so confused with the paint on it, that I have not been able to make out the scheme. But of course I shall try. All these large patterns are quite new to me (and I think I have a fairly wide acquaintance with pattern) and I am sure should be carefully done.³⁶

But he struggled to find time away from his work at the Polytechnic, and the demands of preparing the plates for

Serindia, and eventually engaged a number of draughtsmen to help him. We do not know their names, only that there was one woman and one German among them.³⁷ Whilst there is no doubt that Stein understood the importance of detailed examination of the textiles, Stein urged Andrews to work as quickly as possible:

As regards the textile patterns kindly concentrate your efforts – & your drawings on the absolutely essential. Else the risk is great of the whole remaining a torso. It is enough for you to have bravely faced a new line of research. *Serindia* cannot exhaust this enquiry which would need a monograph.³⁸

While Stein carried out his Third Expedition in Central Asia (July 1913–February 1916), Andrews and Lorimer remained at the 'Stein Collection' at the British Museum. Stein continued work on *Serindia* after his return from the Third Expedition.

Who worked on the textile finds from the Third Expedition?

Fred Andrews and Miss Lorimer moved to Kashmir to work on all the finds, including textiles, from the Third Expedition. Andrews later returned to London, where he continued to work on the textiles, with the assistance of Joan Joshua. *Innermost Asia* was published in 1928. There are no specific references to external help on the textiles, except from Lionel Giles, of the British Museum, who worked on the inscriptions on silk textiles from Astana.³⁹

Why are the Dunhuang textiles in London in three different institutions?

To some extent, the current location of the Dunhuang textiles is associated with the history of the institutions: in particular, the creation of the British Library and the incorporation into the British Library of collections from the British Museum and the India Office Library.

However, the current locations are also associated with how the finds from Stein's Expeditions were allocated. Although the guiding principle was that the finds should be allocated proportionately to the funder(s) of each Expedition, there were other criteria. For example, Dunhuang paintings from the Second Expedition were to be divided between India and the British Museum, mainly on the basis of style, although the system was complicated by arguments about relative fragility and less than ideal conservation methods or storage.⁴⁰ The Government of India generally agreed that the 'literary remains' could stay in London, usually for reasons of study or conservation. These were to be divided on the basis of language and script: the Chinese textual material went to the British Museum (now in the British Library), and non-Chinese languages and scripts to the India Office (subsequently incorporated into the British Library).

The Dunhuang textiles from the Second Expedition now in the V&A are there as a result of the loan agreement between the V&A and the Government of India (represented by the Director-General of Archaeology) signed on 19 December 1923.⁴¹

Research on the Dunhuang textiles in the three institutions

Dunhuang textiles in the British Museum

The Dunhuang textiles at the British Museum consist of canopies, valances, banners and banner parts (headers and streamers), covers and ties, patchwork, polychrome weaves (Jin silk, Sogdian samite, Liao samite, brocade, and textiles in two-colours), monochrome weaves (damask on plain weave, twill damask, gauze, other), dyed textiles (clamp-resist dyed), painted silk, and embroidery (split stitch, satin stitch, couching). These were first published in *Serindia* (1921). Selected pieces have since been published by curators of the Museum's Department of Oriental Antiquities: Roderick Whitfield (1983),⁴² Roderick Whitfield and Anne Farrer (1990)⁴³ and Shelagh Vainker (2004).⁴⁴ The late Alf Crowley, and more recently Mrs Qiu Jinxian, formerly of the Shanghai Museum, have also worked on the conservation of the silk paintings (including hundreds of fragments of silk paintings) from Dunhuang in the British Museum collection.

In line with the Museum's aim to create digital records and images of its collections, several people have worked on the digitisation of the collections of Sir Aurel Stein since 2000. They include Carol Michaelson (co-ordinator), Lilla Russell-Smith (on 2-D objects), Cecilia Braghin (on 3-D objects) [these projects were funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation], and Zhao Feng, Wang Le and Xu Zheng (on textiles) [this work was funded by the British Academy].⁴⁵

Other researchers have also consulted the collection, but on the whole, the notion of 'Dunhuang textiles in London' is more closely associated with the V&A collection (where the Stein collection consists mostly of textiles) than with the British Museum collection (where textiles are seen as part of the Stein and Central Asian collections). We are delighted that the British Museum, V&A and British Library collections of Dunhuang textiles have been brought together in this catalogue.

Dunhuang textiles in the Victoria and Albert Museum

At first the V&A arranged its collections according to material. In this way, all textiles, no matter their country of origin, were housed in the Department of Textiles. Although the India Museum collections were left intact until 1955,⁴⁶ the Far Eastern collections were incorporated into the V&A from 1908, and the textiles collected by Stein, on loan from the Government of India, were thus incorporated into the V&A's Department of Textiles. However, this led to a very particular approach to Asian materials; for example the Department of Textiles had a strong interest in the techniques of textile production.⁴⁷ It was not until the creation of the Far Eastern Section in 1970, and the consequent transfer of the East Asian textiles together with other pieces collected by Stein, that a more contextual approach to the material began.

At first glance many of the textile fragments appear to be scraps, cut-offs from larger pieces, or rejects, but closer examination reveals that most of them once formed part of votive objects such as banners and sutra wrappers. The Stein collection at the V&A does not include any of the larger banners and beautiful silk paintings such as may be found in

the British Museum and the National Museum of India in New Delhi. It was these more famous pieces that attracted the attention of researchers, and at times the material at the V&A was left somewhat in the background. Nevertheless, the V&A loan collection offers a fascinating insight into the scope of fabrics being produced in, as well as imported into, China before the early 11th century. It is also a marvellous resource for the study of weaving. The woven textiles comprising the Dunhuang textiles are almost exclusively silk and demonstrate a range of plain weaves, satins and beautifully subtle damasks, and vibrant polychrome pattern woven silks such as figured gauzes, brocading and samites. Many of these have been further decorated with embroidery, clamp-resist dyeing and painting. The textiles also show an incredible wealth of colour, from canary yellow through the clearest red to deepest indigo.

The collection clearly proves the intensity of the silk trade in northwestern China during the centuries before the cave was sealed. Dunhuang lay on the main route along which Chinese silk was traded into Central Asia and to the West, and textiles from silk producing regions in the West, for example textiles of Sogdian manufacture, were traded in the East.

Canopies, altar valances and a number of complete and fragmented banners are evidence of the importance of this shrine site as one of China's great Buddhist pilgrimage complexes. While some of the smaller fragments were undoubtedly devotional, others may originally have had a more secular use.⁴⁸

Studies of the V&A Stein loan collection

The textiles from Dunhuang have been in and out of the limelight, largely owing to the driving forces of particular members of staff at the V&A. Over the decades, changing attitudes to the interpretation of objects has also affected how the collection is viewed. The Stein textiles have mainly been studied from a technical viewpoint and they were often overlooked as the focus in museums shifted to a more discursive scholarship on the meanings of objects.

Albert Frank Kendrick (1872–1954), Keeper of the Textile Department at the V&A from 1898, who zealously campaigned for a loan of the Stein textiles in the 1920s and 1930s, was also the first to draw attention to the Stein collection in a publication. In his *Catalogue of Early Medieval Woven Fabrics* (1925)⁴⁹ he discussed the possible origin of the roundel design with reference to some of Stein's finds from Dunhuang. He also mentioned Stein's textile finds in the book *Chinese Art* (1935).⁵⁰

Some years later, John Lowry, Deputy Keeper of Indian collection until 1982, outlined the changing style and design of textiles of the Han and Tang dynasty in the *CIBA Review* (1963),⁵¹ and selected a few Dunhuang fragments from the V&A to illustrate this transformation. In the late 1960s Peter Collingwood, a specialist on tablet-weaving, discovered the magnificent resource that was the Stein loan collection,⁵² and Mme Krishna Riboud of AEDTA [Association pour l'Etude et la Documentation des Textiles d'Asie] also came to study the Stein collection several times.⁵³ However, both appear to have paid more attention to materials from sites other than Dunhuang.

Another prominent V&A textile specialist, Donald King, Keeper of the Department of Textiles 1972–93, published just one article on the Stein loan collection, in *Bulletin du CIETA* [Le Centre International d'Étude des Textiles Anciens] (1968),⁵⁴ in which he focussed on the weaving technique of warp-faced compound weaves. However, he left a file full of notes with technical analyses on many of the textile fragments and may have intended to publish this more extensive research. Unfortunately his notes are written in a very abbreviated style, which is now partly undecipherable.

During the 1990s a number of papers and publications, featuring fragments from the V&A Stein collection, were written by V&A curators and external scholars. Most notable from the V&A were Amanda Ward, then Senior Museum Assistant in the Far Eastern Section, and Verity Wilson, formerly Curator in the Far Eastern Section. Wilson's article in *Textile History* (1995) provides an excellent introduction to the collection with several suggestions for further study.

The eminent Chinese textile scholars Wang Xu and Wang Yarong of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences visited the V&A several times in the late 1980s to study the Stein loan collection. Anna Muthesius also studied the textiles, but from a more Western point of view, and argues strongly for the cross-cultural exchange evident in the fragments from the Silk Road.⁵⁵

The new T. T. Tsui Gallery (a display focussing on China) opened in 1991; two banners and a canopy from Dunhuang were included in the section of the gallery labelled 'Temple and Worship'. These were also discussed in the catalogue accompanying the new gallery.⁵⁶ A selection of the textiles from the Stein loan collection was displayed in Gallery 98 between 1997 and 2011.

The 1990s saw a renewed interest in the textile fragments and new research paths were introduced, largely owing to the enthusiasm of Verity Wilson. This in turn led to the extensive work on the Stein Mellon Textile Project. With funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the textile fragments were photographed and catalogued in 2003. The work was done by curators Helen Persson and Sonia Solicari, photographers Colin Maitland and conservator Thordis Baldursdottir. The collection will be accessible on MIDA, a section of ArtStor, as well as on the British Library's International Dunhuang Project website [stein-collection](http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/s/stein-collection) and the V&A's own Collections Online website (<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/s/stein-collection>). The continued support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has enabled conservation work and improved storage conditions for the textile collection.

The project has already excited a degree of international research interest and has attracted several renowned visitors. These include Chhaya Bhattacharya-Haesner from the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin, and Yasuhiko Ogawa, who studied a handful of the silk ties from Dunhuang in 2004, as well as non-sinologist visitors, such as the Embroiderers' Guild. Now that the emphasis has shifted from the technical aspects of the textiles to embrace other disciplines, it is clear that the Stein collection represents a valuable resource for, say, economic, social and ethnographical studies.

Helen Persson has co-ordinated much of the work on the Stein textiles in recent years, and was already preparing to publish her own research on this collection. It was therefore an excellent and timely opportunity to work together with Zhao Feng, Wang Le and Xu Zheng on the Dunhuang textiles in the V&A in the summer of 2006. The results are published in *Textiles from Dunhuang in UK Collections*.

Dunhuang textiles in the British Library

The British Library is not the sort of institution where you would expect to find many Chinese textiles and those that exist in the collections have been largely ignored for nearly a century. Yet from the moment the paper scroll, rolled on a wooden roller, became the standard 'book' format in China, textiles were included in the form of ties, joined to the retaining rod and used to keep the scroll tidily in place when not in use. Amongst the thousands of paper scrolls collected by Sir Aurel Stein from the Qianfodong or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas near Dunhuang, are some 150 textile ties made from hemp or various types and colours of silk.

Most of the objects that he collected from Cave 17 which are now in the British Library, are documents written, or in rare cases, printed, on paper. Until very recently, their significance to scholars has lain solely in their contents and their physical aspects such as format and materials have only now become the focus of study.⁵⁷

One of the first to publish on the physical aspects of the documents was Jean-Pierre Drège who pioneered work on paper types and book formats, although he did not venture into the area of textiles; neither did Li Zhizhong of the Rare Book Section of the National Library who was also interested in the history of book formats.⁵⁸ The textile parts of a typical scroll were accepted without investigation until Dr Yasuhiko Ogawa made his first visit to the British Library in 2004 with the specific aim of examining the silk braids and ties surviving on some of the Dunhuang scrolls.⁵⁹ He started his survey on the basis of the 35 scrolls with braids or ties still attached that are listed in Lionel Giles' catalogue of Dunhuang manuscripts which was published in 1957.⁶⁰

As Dr Ogawa noted, Giles' list of scrolls with attached textiles was not complete, furthermore, Giles' catalogue only lists some 7000 Chinese items out of a total which is almost double that number. Though we have no record of Giles' working practice when he was assigned the job of cataloguing the Chinese documents from Dunhuang in 1919, it appears both from his catalogue and from the arrangement of the material he left uncatalogued, that he was aware of a far greater number of textile fragments in the entire corpus. Giles catalogued the scrolls that were relatively complete, often with titles or colophons that made identification possible. He must have made a preliminary division between these and the more difficult, fragmentary material that was placed in large blue boxes and put aside for many decades. These crumpled papers were known as 'the Stein debris' until the late 1980s when, with the financial support of the British Council and the Sino-British Fellowship Trust and the expertise of the Chinese conservators, Du Weisheng, Zhou Peiyuan, Dai Liqiang and Shao Zhuangwen, the 'debris' was smoothed and safely re-housed and elevated to the new name of 'Stein fragments'.⁶¹ That Giles had made some attempt to

sub-divide the ‘debris’ was clear for there are some 112 textile fragments, all grouped together between S.10853 and S.11961. Though there are some tiny pieces of painted silk (S.11428) which must have become detached from a larger painting or banner and a few hempen scroll covers (S.11468), the majority of these pieces are retaining rods which have become detached from the rest of the scroll, but still have a fragment of silken tie or braid neatly looped around them.

Amongst the India Office Stein materials, four previously unlisted hemp banners (Add. Or. 5222–5) were discovered as the India Office Library prepared to move from Blackfriars into the new British Library building in 1998, thus adding to the number of known textile pieces in the British Library.⁶²

Professor Zhao Feng and his team have examined the full range of these British Library textile fragments in detail and, though their interest is in the textiles themselves, we hope that their work may help to shed further light on the history of the ‘book’ format in China.

[This paper was first published in Zhao Feng et al. (eds), *Dunhuang Textiles in UK Collections*, Donghua University Press, Shanghai, 2007. It is reproduced here with the kind permission of Zhao Feng, with slight revisions.]

Notes

We would like to thank Joe Cribb, Anne Farrer, Beth McKillop, Carol Michaelson, Jan Stuart, Susan Whitfield and Jonathan Williams for their helpful suggestions and comments in the preparation of this paper. All quotes from the Sir Aurel Stein Collection housed in the Bodleian Library are reproduced with the kind permission of the British Academy.

- 1 Letter from Stein to F.H. Andrews, 8 Dec 1912, Bodleian Library, Stein MSS 40/173.
- 2 See, for example, <http://idp.bl.uk> [the website of the International Dunhuang Project at the British Library] and <http://www.thebritishmuseum.net/thesilkroad> [featuring specimens from the collections of Sir Aurel Stein at the British Museum].
- 3 Stein was forced to abort his Fourth Expedition, and all finds were left in China.
- 4 J. Mirsky, *Sir Aurel Stein. Archaeological Explorer*, University of Chicago Press, 1977; and A. Walker, *Aurel Stein. Pioneer of the Silk Road*, John Murray, London, 1995.
- 5 M.A. Stein, *Ancient Khotan: Detailed Report of Archaeological Explorations in Chinese Turkestan*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1907, p. vi. [reprinted by Hacker Art Books, New York, 1975]
- 6 M.A. Stein, *Innermost Asia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia, Kansu and Eastern Iran*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1928, p. xvi (reprinted by Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1981).
- 7 See for example, F. Wood, ‘Two thousand years at Dunhuang’, in S. Whitfield and F. Wood (eds), *Dunhuang and Turfan: Contents and Conservation of Ancient Documents from Central Asia* (British Library Series in Conservation Science 1), London, 1996, pp. 1–6; also F. Wood, ‘Aurel Stein, the British Museum and the India Office’, in S. Whitfield and U. Sims-Williams (eds), *The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War, Faith*, British Library, London, 2004, pp. 91–95; and H. Wang, ‘Sir Aurel Stein in The Times’, Saffron Books, London, 2002.
- 8 Stein did not publish a ‘personal narrative’ of the Third Expedition.
- 9 For lists of the correspondence, see Diamond and Rogers paper in this volume; J. Falconer et al., *Catalogue of the Collections of Sir Aurel Stein in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*, LHAS/British Museum, Budapest, 2002; and H. Wang (ed.), *Sir Aurel Stein in The Times*, Saffron Books, London, 2002.
- 10 British Museum Central Archives, Stein Papers, CE32/23/5.
- 11 British Museum Central Archives, Stein Papers, CE32/231. The Natural History Museum was founded in South Kensington in 1881, and became the new location for the British Museum’s natural history collections. The Natural History Museum remained under the Board of the British Museum Trustees until the British Museum Act (1963), when the Natural History Museum became fully independent.
- 12 British Museum Central Archives, Stein Papers, CE32/23/23/2.
- 13 M. Conforti, ‘The idealist enterprise and the applied arts’, in M. Baker and B. Richardson (eds), *A Grand Design: the Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, V&A Publications, London, 1997, pp. 23–48, esp. p. 45.
- 14 F.H. Andrews, ‘Ancient Chinese figured silks excavated by Sir Aurel Stein at various sites of Central Asia’, *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* (in 3 parts), vol. 37, no. 208 (July) 1920, pp. 2–10; vol. 37, no. 209 (Aug 1920), pp. 71–77; and vol. 37, no. 210 (Sept 1920), pp. 147–52.
- 15 M.A. Stein, *Ancient Buddhist Paintings from the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas on the Westernmost Border of China*, B. Quaritch, London, 1921.
- 16 V&A Stein Archives, letter from Stein to C.H. Smith, 19 February 1923; also a note from A.F. Kendrick, dated 14 March 1923. Kendrick was Keeper of Textiles at the V&A, 1897–1924.
- 17 V&A Stein Archives, Memo, 3 October 1923.
- 18 A. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 234.
- 19 *Innermost Asia*, p. xv.
- 20 *Innermost Asia*, p. xv–xvi,
- 21 *Innermost Asia*, p. xvi.
- 22 V&A Stein Archives, letter from Stein to A.J.B. Wace, 18 May 1925. Wace was Deputy Keeper of Textiles, V&A, 1924–34. See also *Innermost Asia*, p. xix.
- 23 V&A Stein Archives, receipt of loan of textiles from the Government of India, 14 June 1932.
- 24 V&A Stein Archives, letter from the Office of the High Commissioner for India to the Board of Education, 20 April 1933; also signed loan agreement, 4 May 1933.
- 25 For examples of slips written by Miss Lorimer and/or an unidentified person on textiles see Bodleian Stein MSS 62/154–160.
- 26 There are samples of fabrics in the Stein archive at the Bodleian [Stein MSS 39/17 and 39/23], and comments on them; see letter from Stein to Lorimer, 16 March 1910 [Bodleian Stein MSS 38/18].
- 27 For Miss Winter see letter from Stein to Lorimer 16 March 1910 [Bodleian Stein MSS 38/18]; for Mr Goodchild see letter from Stein to Andrews, 13 April 1910 [Bodleian Stein MSS 39/26]; for Mr Littlejohn see letter from Andrews to Stein, 28 Feb 1913 [Bodleian Stein MSS 41/56].
- 28 For references to Prof von Wiesner and Hanausek see *Ancient Khotan*, pp. xiii, 135, 307, 571, 426; also M.A. Stein, *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1921, pp. xix, 673 (reprinted by Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1980). For Prof. Summerville see letter from Stein to Andrews 17 March 1911 [Bodleian Stein MSS 39/44].
- 29 *Serindia*, p. 902, n.2.
- 30 Letter from Andrews to Stein, 21 June 1912 [Bodleian Stein MSS 40/39].
- 31 *Serindia*, p. 908; also E. Chartraire, ‘Les tissus anciens de la cathedrale de Sens’, *Revue de l’Art Chrétien*, vol. 61 (1911).
- 32 *Serindia*, p. 908; also Otto von Falke, *Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei*, Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, Berlin, 1913.
- 33 Letter from Stein to Andrews, 26 Sept 1909 [Bodleian Stein MSS 37/196].
- 34 Letter from Stein to Andrews, 9 April 1910 [Bodleian Stein MSS 39]; letter from Stein to Andrews 15 Dec 1911 [Bodleian Stein MSS 39/64]; letter from Stein to Andrews, 18 Nov 1912 [Bodleian Stein MSS 40/148].
- 35 Letter from Andrews to Stein, 31 Oct 1912 [Bodleian Stein MSS 40/132].
- 36 Letter from Andrews to Stein, 31 Oct 1912 [Bodleian Stein MSS 40/132].
- 37 Letter from Stein to Andrews, 25 Nov 1912 [Bodleian Stein MSS 40/165] and from Andrews to Stein, 6 Dec 1912 [Bodleian Stein MSS 40/172].
- 38 Letter from Stein to Andrews, 17 Feb 1913 [Bodleian Stein MSS 41/24].
- 39 *Innermost Asia*, p. xvii and Appendix I ‘Chinese Inscriptions and Records’.
- 40 There are references to the fragility of some silks, for example in a letter from Stein to Andrews, 13 October 1910; Andrews to Stein, 6th

- June, 1913; and in a letter from Stein to F.C. Drake, Secretary of the Revenue Department in the India Office, 12th July, 1913. These letters are in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- 41 See V&A Archives, MA/1/S3242.
- 42 R. Whitfield, *The Art of Central Asia. The Stein Collection in the British Museum, vol. 3. Textiles, Sculpture and Other Arts*, Kodansha International, Tokyo, in co-operation with the Trustees of the British Museum, 1983.
- 43 R. Whitfield and A. Farrer, *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas: Chinese Art from the Silk Route*, British Museum Publications Ltd, London, 1990.
- 44 S. Vainker, *Chinese Silk: a Cultural History*, British Museum Press, London, 2004.
- 45 For example, see <http://www.thebritishmuseum.net/the-silk-road>.
- 46 See R. Skelton, 'The Indian Collections, 1798–1978', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 120, no. 902 (May 1978), pp. 297–304.
- 47 C. Saumarez Smith, 'National consciousness, national heritage and the idea of "Englishness"', in Baker and Richardson (eds), *A Grand Design, op. cit.*, pp. 1997, pp. 275–83, p. 279.
- 48 V. Wilson, 'Early textiles from Central Asia: approaches to study with reference to the Stein Loan Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London', *Textile History*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1995), pp. 23–52, esp. p. 38.
- 49 A.F. Kendrick, *Catalogue of Early Medieval Woven Fabrics*, V&A Museum, London, 1925.
- 50 See R.E. Fry et al., *Chinese Art. An Introductory Handbook to Painting, Ceramics, Textiles, Bronzes and Minor Arts*, B.T. Batsford Ltd., London, 1935. Kendrick wrote the chapter on textiles.
- 51 J. Lowry, 'Early Chinese silks', *CIBA Review* (CIBA Lrd, Basle), 1963/2, pp. 2–30.
- 52 See P. Collingwood, *The Techniques of Tablet Weaving*, Faber and Faber, London, 1982.
- 53 For her work on the textiles collected by Paul Pelliot in Dunhuang, see K. Riboud and G. Vial, *Tissus de Touen-houang conservés au Musée Guimet et la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Mission Paul Pelliot 13, Paris, 1970. See also K. Riboud, 'Some remarks on strikingly similar Han figured silks found in recent years in diverse sites', *Archives of Asian Art*, no. 26 (1972–73), pp. 12–25; and 'Further indication of changing techniques in figured silks of the Post-Han period', *Bulletin du CIETA*, vol. 41, no. 2 (1975), pp. 13–40.
- 54 D. King, 'Some notes on warp-faced compound weaves', *Bulletin du CIETA* 28 (1968), pp. 9–19.
- 55 See A. Muthesius, 'Byzantine influences along the Silk Route: *Central Asian silks transformed*', in *Contact, Crossover, Continuity*, 1994 Proceedings of the Textile Society of America, published in 1997.
- 56 See R. Kerr (ed.), *Chinese Art and Design: the T.T. Tsui Gallery of Chinese Art, V&A Publications, London, 1991*.
- 57 Though the vast majority of the documents were Chinese Buddhist texts, the non-canonical and secular documents have been studied with the greatest interest. See Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan Lishi yanjiusuo, Zhongguo Dunhuang Tulufan xiehui Duhuang gu wenxian bianji weiyuanhui, *Ying cang Dunhuang wenxian* [Documents from Dunhuang in UK Collections], Sichuan renmin chubanshe, Chengdu, 1990–95, for the range of non-canonical materials and for materials in other languages also found in Cave 17, the website of the International Dunhuang Project: <http://idp.bl.uk>.
- 58 See, for example, J.-P. Drège, 'Les cahiers des manuscrits de Touen-houang', in M. Soyumié (ed.) *Contributions aux études sur Touen-houang*, Librairie Droz, Geneva and Paris, 1979, pp. 17–28; and 'Papillons et tourbillons' in J.-P. Drège (ed.), *De Dunhuang au Japon: études chinoises et bouddhiques offertes à Michel Soyumié*, Librairie Droz, Geneva, 1996, pp. 163–78.
- 59 Ogawa Yasuhiko, 'A study of the silk braids on Stein Chinese scrolls', *IDP News* 27 (Spring 2006), pp. 6–7, http://idp.bl.uk/pages/archives_newsletter.a4d.
- 60 L. Giles, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Manuscripts from Tunhuang in the British Museum*, British Museum, London, 1957.
- 61 See P. Lawson and M. Barnard, 'The preservation of pre-10th century graphic material', in S. Whitfield and F. Wood (eds), *Dunhuang and Turfan: Contexts and Conservation of Ancient Documents from Central Asia* (British Library Studies in Conservation Science 1), London, 1996, pp. 7–15.
- 62 It is probable that these had been selected by Laurence Binyon at some time during the First World War for despatch to India but never sent; see F. Wood, 'Two thousand years at Dunhuang', in Whitfield and Wood (eds), *Dunhuang and Turfan, op. cit.*, p. 4; and R. Whitfield, 'Four unpublished paintings from Dunhuang in the Oriental Collections of the British Library', *British Library Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Spring 1998), pp. 90–97.