

# Aurel Stein's Methods and Aims in Archaeology on the Silk Road

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The old saying that a man finds what he looks for in a subject, is too true; or if he has not enough insight to ensure finding what he looks for, it is at least sadly true that he does not find anything that he does not look for.<sup>1</sup>

As early as the publication of *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan* (1904), Aurel Stein had developed clear notions about the geographical and historical patterns that regulated life on the Silk Road. Among the forces of change that he considered to be the most definitive were the availability of water, the transmission of Buddhism, and constant shifts in political authority. His speculations over where these patterns originated, how they moved across the massive territorial extensions of Asia, and how they expressed themselves in the daily lives of its oases steered the direction of his expeditions, regulated where he stopped to search, and dictated which finds he considered important and worth preserving. What, then, were Stein's major scientific goals? How did his interpretations and methods of inquiry change throughout his thirty years of work in northwest China?

In *On Ancient Central Asian Tracks* (1933), the succinct account of his first three Central Asian explorations,<sup>2</sup> Stein condensed his findings of over thirty years of archaeological, antiquarian and geographical research in Central Asia.<sup>3</sup> Chinese Turkestan, he wrote, despite the arduousness of its geography, 'served as the principle scene for that important historical process, the early interpenetration of Far Eastern, Indian and Western civilizations.'<sup>4</sup> During the reign of emperor Wu-ti [Wudi] (115 BC) the Chinese had begun to expand westwards, establishing military colonies along the northern part of the Nan-shan in order to protect the corridors that made trade possible. They would control these 'great natural highways, provided by the string of oases in the Tarim basin'<sup>5</sup> for more than a century until the downfall of the Han in the early 3rd century c. Stein clarified, however, that before the Chinese discovered the possibilities of Central Asian trade, different groups of cultivators had inhabited the oases of the Tarim Basin. These peoples spoke a variety of Indo-European languages and their remains bore undisputable marks of western classical influence.<sup>6</sup> The hope that first led him to Khotan, to find proof of this 'bygone culture, which rested mainly on Indian foundations',<sup>7</sup> remained his primary objective throughout the course of his long archaeological career. It is perhaps worth pointing out that not only was Stein's main academic training in oriental (essentially Indian) philology, he was for most of his life employed by the [British] government in India, and thus it would have been appropriate for him to stress the Indian angle. Even in the choice of titles for his publications, he chose to emphasize the diverse cultures of this region – *Desert Cathay* (1912), *Serindia* (1921), *Chinese Turkestan* (1923), *Innermost Asia* (1928), *Ancient Central Asia* (1933) – when the political name for the most northwesterly region of China was Xinjiang Province between 1884 and 1955.<sup>8</sup>

None of the major historiographical traditions of the area recorded the full details of the existence of the ancient settlements in the region. Stein continually expressed this idea and tied it into his notion of archaeological responsibility. In the preface to *Ancient Khotan* he asserted:

Neither the occasional references of the Chinese Annals nor the brief notices of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims could help us far to reconstruct, in its main aspects, that bygone phase of civilization of which all indigenous records and remains seemed to have banished.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, it was necessary for Stein to attempt to find the records of the daily lives of these people in their own languages and script, and to recover from beneath the layers of Chinese influence their development, their relationship to the West and the ways in which they had come to settle in the lands of Central Asia.<sup>10</sup>

Stein's main aim, though refined and further clarified, remained the same from the publication of *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan* in 1904, until he delivered the Lowell Lectures at Harvard (December 1929), which were published in the volume *On Ancient Central Asian Tracks* (1933). An unfailing archaeological interest in the sites of Niya and Miran – and his very different approach to investigating the remains at Dunhuang – demonstrate Stein's intent to solve the puzzle of the original inhabitants of the Silk Road and how they were connected to the West. Finally, the contents of his writings, both personal and academic, and their relationship to the broader world of archaeology, particularly to the works of the Egyptologist Sir Flinders Petrie (1853–1942), also suggest that, for Stein, the execution of a systematic archaeological method was inextricably linked to his scholarly identity and project. The first sentence in Petrie's seminal guide *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* reads 'Archaeology is the latest born of the sciences';<sup>11</sup> and in the same spirit, Stein referred to his own detailed scholarly publications as scientific reports.

To understand Stein's approach it is helpful to revisit the contents of Petrie's *Methods and Aims in Archaeology*. This 208-page book consists of 14 chapters which cover, in order,

- (1) **the excavator** (character, experience, organization, acquirements, demands of the work);
- (2) **discrimination** (temples, towns, cemeteries, indications, productions, pottery, style, visual memory);
- (3) **the labourers** (quality, education, control, substitution, overseers, direct system, day pay, piecework, day and piece work, rewards, accounts, native ways);
- (4) **arrangement of work** (turning over, raising earth, tracing walls);
- (5) **recording in the field** (need of record, value of record, resulting view, marking, nature of notes, planning, plotting);
- (6) **copying** (paper squeezes, dry squeezes, casting, drawing, restored forms, copying inscriptions);
- (7) **photographing** (the camera, preparing objects, lighting, arrangement of objects, stereographs, developing);
- (8) **preservation of objects** (stone, pottery, textiles, wood, ivory, papyri, beadwork, stucco, gold, silver, copper, bronze, lead, iron, sorting);
- (9) **packing** (blocks, long objects, heavy stones, pottery, softening, cases, unpacking);
- (10) **publication** (arrangement, plates, processes, editions, text, publishing);
- (11) **systematic archaeology** (systems of work, need of a *corpus*, example of *corpus*, utility, successive ages, sequences, sequence dates, conservation, buildings, lighting, grouping, national repository);
- (12) **archaeological evidence** (nature of proof, legal evidence, witnesses, material facts, exhaustion, probabilities, legal proof, Egypt and Europe, in XXVIth dynasty, XVIIIth dynasty paintings, burnt

groups, rubbish mounds, houses, scarabs, tombs in Egypt, tombs in Greece, variation with date, style, recapitulation, XIIth dynasty Kahun, XIIth dynasty in Crete, pan-graves, VIth to IIIrd dynasties, Ist dynasty Aegean, Ist dynasty Cretan, prehistoric;

(13) **ethics of archaeology** (individual rights, destruction, restoration, sacrifices, responsibility, rights of the future, rights of the past, duties, future of museums, publications, state claims, state rights, excavating laws; and

(14) **the fascination of history**.

In her biography of Stein, Jeannette Mirsky reconstructs the circumstances that prompted him to organize the First Central Asian Expedition. Stein had carefully studied the inscriptions discovered by Major Deane,<sup>12</sup> explored ruined Buddhist establishments in Swat and Buner with Alfred Foucher,<sup>13</sup> and read extensively about the Chinese pilgrims who traversed Central Asia in search of Indian lands and their Buddhist knowledge. The appearance of Bower's manuscript from Kucha and of numerous coins and sculptures, convinced him 'beyond all doubt' that the old sites in the territory of Khotan, 'systematically explored, promise[d] to yield finds of great importance for Indian antiquarian research'.<sup>14</sup> The transmission of Buddhism somehow demonstrated to Stein that all of these settlements had once been connected by common religious concerns and practices. For Stein, understanding these interconnections required more than the hoarding of precious materials purchased in bazaars or obtained far beyond their places of origin. Systematic research entailed recording an object's precise surroundings and speculating on its everyday uses, allowing the researcher to reconstruct the daily life of a vanished community.<sup>15</sup>

In the opening pages of *Ancient Khotan* (1907), the detailed report of his First Central Asian Expedition (1900–01), Stein clarified his stance on method. He emphasized that he sought not only to recover great objects in Chinese Turkestan but also to establish a precedent in Central Asian studies, a new way of understanding the region through archaeology.<sup>16</sup>

Extensive recordkeeping, the search for the objects of daily life, and packaging finds appropriately were central to his approach. His standard was 'an archaeological explorer of unequalled experience', Professor Flinders Petrie, and his manual *Methods and Aims in Archaeology* (1904). As Stein explained:

No part of Chinese Turkestan had then been explored from an archaeological point of view, and it struck me that, however much attention these and other future discoveries might receive from competent Orientalists in Europe, their full historical antiquarian value could never be realized without systematic research on the spot.<sup>17</sup>

*Methods and Aims* contains Petrie's reflections of what proper archaeology ought to be. Surviving correspondence demonstrates that Stein was also well informed of Petrie's activities on the ground: Petrie visited Stein's collections of the first expedition in London in 1901–2, and both scholars exchanged works and letters between 1907 and 1938.<sup>18</sup> Stein also became the second recipient of the Petrie medal, after Petrie himself, in 1928.<sup>19</sup> The archaeological techniques pioneered by Petrie in Egypt such as grouping materials to determine their relationships, his insistence on everyday objects such as pottery fragments, plain tools and weapons

and his use of a typological sequence dating to determine the chronology of a society, addressed the kinds of historical questions that Stein wished to resolve about the ancient inhabitants of the Silk Road.<sup>20</sup> Given the limited amounts of writings about archaeological practice at the time, the precedent set by the Egyptologist's work also allowed Stein to contextualize his Central Asian project in a language more intelligible to fellow scholars:

It is impossible to overlook the fact that archaeological research in great fields like India and Central Asia, which lie beyond the stimulating influence of Biblical associations, has not as yet succeeded in gaining its due share of sympathy and interest from the wider public.<sup>21</sup>

The First Central Asian Expedition began in May 1900 north of Kashmir. On the morning of 18 January 1901, a 38 year-old Stein reached Niya.<sup>22</sup> Stein's camel-man soon found two wooden tablets with Kharoshthi script.<sup>23</sup> Stein was surprised to find that these tablets had writing in an Indian script and language. During a brief survey of the site, Stein and his assistants discovered 85 more tablets; he described each tablet carefully, mentioning characteristics like the degree of preservation of the ink and the manner in which he had unearthed them. He went so far as to point out in which cases he used a brush to remove the sand and how he kept the objects in the order in which he had unearthed them to preserve the chronology. He believed the tablets to have originated in 'the first three centuries of our era',<sup>24</sup> but was still unsure about the significance of the discovery. He worried that the tablets might contain exact replicas of prayers or extracts from sacred Buddhist texts and offer no information on the daily affairs of the community. The way in which the inhabitants of Niya had sealed the tablets, however, seemed point to more practical writings, perhaps contracts or official documents of some kind.<sup>25</sup> When he examined them more closely, he realized that he could read parts of them because 'the language was an early Indian Prakrit.'<sup>26</sup> The texts also seemed to vary greatly from tablet to tablet. His excitement increased when he found Kharoshthi tablets with seal impressions of classical deities including depictions of Athena, Eros, and Heracles. He knew that classical art had existed in Bactria and on the northwest frontier of India, 'but there was little to prepare' him 'for such tangible proofs of the fact that it had penetrated so much further to the east, half-way between Europe and Peking.'<sup>27</sup> The seal of Athena which he found at Niya appeared on the title page of every one of Stein's publications about Central Asia, and became a symbol of how profoundly Niya shaped his scientific inquiries on the Silk Road.<sup>28</sup> This is further attested in *Ruins of Desert Cathay* where Stein also dedicated a substantial part of the Niya chapters to describing the intaglios of classical workmanship representing Pallas Promachos, Heracles with a club and lion-skin, Zeus, and helmeted busts.

From Niya's residences Stein retrieved objects as diverse as an ancient wooden chair, household implements, and parts of musical instruments. The designs on these objects made Stein wonder whether they were meant to resemble the Kimnaras of Indian mythology or the Centaurs of Greece.<sup>29</sup> He began to question why the inhabitants of Niya crafted

their objects in this manner, and how their artistic techniques related to the classical legacy of the West or to India. *Ancient Khotan* (1907), the scholarly report of the expedition, presented more detailed descriptions of each of the items that Stein extracted from the site. Petrie's manual warned the explorer that 'recording is the absolute dividing line between plundering and scientific work, between the dealer and the scholar',<sup>30</sup> and Stein took this extremely seriously. In Section VIII, at the end of the chapter entitled 'The Ancient Site beyond the Niya River', Stein classified the antiques he found at Niya according to material and by the section, or the dwelling, in which he found them. He then numbered, measured, and described the quality of the writing on each of the documents. These classifications were part of Stein's preliminary interpretations.<sup>31</sup>

Stein recorded the progression of his Second Expedition (1906–08) in two major works, a personal narrative entitled *Ruins of Desert Cathay* (1912) and the four-volume scientific report, *Serindia* (1921).<sup>32</sup> During the expedition, he traveled north via Chitral and the Wakhan corridor of Afghanistan, revisited old sites, including Niya, and excavated at new ones such as Miran, Lou-lan, the Chinese *Limes*, and Ming-oi.<sup>33</sup> Stein claimed in the introductory chapter of *Ruins of Desert Cathay* that 'the very novelty [of the discoveries] and the remoteness of their region laid it upon' him 'to become their interpreter.'<sup>34</sup> Stein's writing in *Ruins of Desert Cathay* is much more poetic and self-analytical than in *Sand-buried Ruins of Khotan*. This 'personal narrative' is representative of a genre of travel writing common among explorers of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the 20th century that was aimed towards a larger audience more interested in the journey and its perils, and in gaining a broader understanding of the world, than in the minutiae of the archaeological finds.<sup>35</sup> Hence, the book was not simply a description of the excavations, the logistics, the crew and the possible historical interpretations of the documents. It also recorded Stein's impressions and feelings about the landscape. Niya was the object of many of these poetically tinted reflections, and Stein came to think of this site as 'my own little Pompeii'.<sup>36</sup>

Stein rushed his October 1906 excavation of the Domoko oasis in order to reach Niya once more. To do so, Stein reported to his friend Percy Stafford Allen in a letter dated 10 October, meant nearly exhausting local financial reserves. The decision to hurry towards Niya, excavate there as quickly as possible and then march to Charchan, was in part related to the fact that a French excavation party led by the French sinologist Paul Pelliot had already reached Kashgar,<sup>37</sup> and that he had competition. Stein's main motivation, though, was the appearance of new ruins. From these Stein expected to retrieve more evidence with which to reconstruct the lives of the original inhabitants of Niya.

The excavations at Niya on this Second Expedition, like those on the First, yielded proof that the Kharoshthi script and Prakrit language had been in use as far east as the Lop Nor region, as some of the documents had originated in the Lop Nor sites. In *Serindia* he continued to pursue the linguistic question that he had first established in both *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan* and *Ancient Khotan*.<sup>38</sup> He was able to confirm the contents of the documents and to begin to ascertain the

nature of the relationship between Niya's local administration and the Chinese political authority. The abundance of documents in the Kharoshthi script and Prakrit language showed that beneath the Chinese supra-structure there had been a semi-autonomous community which continued to thrive and to produce documents in their own language. The nature of this population, however, remained enigmatic. Stein wished to know the specific reasons why the settlement had been abandoned and, perhaps more importantly, where the ancestors of these people came from and why they expressed themselves using classical motifs. To answer these questions, he revisited Niya in his Third (1913–16) and Fourth Expeditions (1930–31).

If Stein interpreted Niya's textual remains as the earliest examples of the daily affairs of a classically influenced Indo-European population that predated the arrival of the Chinese, the site of Miran allowed him to witness how these peoples might have looked. On the walls of a circular passage, enclosing a small stupa, Stein discovered 'frescoes of unexpected beauty'.<sup>39</sup> He was able to date the site almost immediately on account of remains of silk prayer flags with Kharoshthi inscriptions. It seemed likely that the shrine was already deserted by the 3rd or 4th century, giving him what he had 'always longed for, specimens of pictorial work of the same period as the Niya ruins'.<sup>40</sup> As he cleared the stupa, Stein found paintings of winged angels and 'felt completely taken by surprise' to see in 'the desolate shores of Lop-nor, in the very heart of innermost Asia ... such classical representations of Cherubium'.<sup>41</sup> These were the clearest depictions of classical design and colour in any ancient pictorial art that he had unearthed so far.<sup>42</sup> In *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, using the same rose-tinted narrative tone reserved for describing Niya, he described having felt as if he were '... among the ruins of some villa in Syria or some other Eastern province of the Roman empire', and not in 'a Buddhist sanctuary on the very confines of China'.<sup>43</sup> Stein expressed in this personal narrative his desire to recover, like the explorers of Pompeii, vignettes of everyday life in Central Asia and to identify the possible interconnectedness of these scenes with the classical world, much as Petrie had done in Egypt.

Although his scientific interpretations of the possible origins of these frescoes are limited, even in his 1933 book *On Central Asian Tracks*, he dedicates a significant number of his descriptions to their iconography and even ventures to produce a hypothesis about one of the painters of the murals. He saw in their faces Greek features mingled with Circassian types.<sup>44</sup> After the French scholar Abbé Boyer determined that one of the Kharoshthi votive offerings recorded the name *Tita* for the painter, Stein conjectured that since *Tita* could not be accounted for etymologically in any Indian or Iranian language it must have been a rendering of the Roman name *Titus* in Sanskrit and Prakrit. This was a common name in the Roman Orient, and perhaps this painter had been travelling eastwards on his way to China. Stein recalled as evidence a passage on Marinus of Tyre, preserved in Ptolemy's *Geography*, which showed that Roman Eurasians 'as it were, were accustomed to visit the land of Seres i.e. China proper, in connection with [the] silk trade' since 'long before the probable date of the Miran shrines'.<sup>45</sup> Given the paintings' paramount importance in deciphering the puzzle

of the original inhabitants, Stein decided that it was necessary to remove the frescoes to a location where they could be better studied. Since he knew of no established method to do so, he improvised the procedure and recorded each step in detail.<sup>46</sup> He first photographed the frescoes and then attempted their removal. The process was long and hard and in the end only partially successful. In 1908, while still on the Second Expedition, Stein sent his assistant to retrieve the remaining paintings. Naik Ram Singh, however, had severe glaucoma and lost his sight before he could remove them. Having failed to obtain the paintings a second time, Stein made a point of returning to Miran on his Third Expedition (1913–16). He recorded the final removal in *Innermost Asia* (1928), the scientific report of the Third Expedition. All in all, Miran had demanded from him great persistence and the need to display significant archaeological inventiveness.

Stein's approach to working at Miran and Niya contrasted starkly with his approach to Dunhuang. The different approaches speak volumes about the methodological and scholarly aspirations that were central to Stein's Silk Road project. Although Stein understood the magnitude and importance of China (and, in the case of Miran, of other powers like Tibet) in shaping the inner rhythms of the Silk Road, he remained resolutely interested in the peoples that populated the central Asian oases before the arrival of these empires. A comparison between his understanding of Niya and Dunhuang demonstrates this. Niya epitomized what Stein considered a proper archaeological excavation should be. Not only in terms of method did Niya fulfill Stein's expectations, its documents presented tangible examples of a 3rd century society that possessed clear expressions, both linguistic and material, of 'strong Hellenistic influence as transmitted from Eastern Iran and the North-Western borders of India'.<sup>47</sup>

Dunhuang, on the other hand, was the site that brought him international acclaim and scholarly freedom; its massive finds eased the process of obtaining funds for future investigations.<sup>48</sup> For instance, after his return from Dunhuang, *The Times* carefully followed Stein's Central Asian expeditions and reported on his findings, taking the information directly from his letters or quoting the public discussions in the *Geographical Journal*. The newspaper articles highlight the importance of the discoveries in lands where 'nothing but desert and sands prevail',<sup>49</sup> and the audacity and brilliance of the explorer.<sup>50</sup> The *New York Times* also reported on Stein's expeditions in similarly heroic terms.<sup>51</sup>

Yet for all the fame it brought him, the discovery of the library cave in 1907, the negotiations with Wang Yuanlu, the keeper of the manuscripts,<sup>52</sup> and the removal of the finds, hardly constituted by Stein's standards an archaeological excavation. Dunhuang was in his eyes an important opportunity to salvage hundreds of documents from a commendable, but ignorant keeper. Although Stein knew Dunhuang to be fundamental in achieving a greater understanding of the relationships that might have existed between the original settlements of the Silk Road and the Chinese supra-structure of military and administrative control, he did not regard the site as having the same bearing as Niya or Miran in the resolution of his main historical

concerns. His interest in the manuscripts was especially aroused when he heard that some of them were not Chinese: ‘the assertion that some of these manuscripts were not Chinese had naturally made me still keener to ascertain exact details.’<sup>53</sup> Moreover, his justification for removing the manuscripts, even though Dunhuang was still an active place of worship, hinged on the hope that the finds would eventually prove useful to Indian and Western research:

In the first rapid examination Chiang [Stein’s learned Chinese assistant] failed to discover colophons giving exact dates of the writing in any of the Chinese rolls, and owing to their length a complete unfolding would have required much time. So I had reason to feel doubly elated when, on the reverse of a Chinese roll, I first lighted upon a text written in that cursive form of Indian Brahmi script with which the finds of ancient Buddhist texts at sites of the Khotan region had rendered me familiar. Here was indisputable proof that the bulk of the manuscripts deposited went back to the time when Indian writing and some knowledge of Sanskrit still prevailed in Central Asian Buddhism. With such evidence clearly showing the connection which once existed between these religious establishments and Buddhist learning as transplanted to the Tarim Basin, my hopes rose greatly for finds of direct importance to Indian and western research.<sup>54</sup>

Dunhuang was after all a meeting point, and the hidden library was an archive where remains from diverse communities along the road might have been preserved. Stein believed that

apart from all philological interest, these texts in Indian script, whatever their language, possess historical value as tangible proofs that the monastic communities established at Tun-huang among a population mainly Chinese were, until a relatively late period, maintaining direct connection with their co-religionists in the Tarim Basin, from which Buddhism first reached China.<sup>55</sup>

Retrieving the relationships between the strings of Buddhist communities and their chronologies might illuminate unaccounted aspects of the history of some of the Tarim Basin settlements. Stein’s reconnaissance work on the *Limes* and subsequent excavations at other sites such as Endere and Lop-nor, were, like Dunhuang, supplementary pieces for solving the question of the original population.

Stein’s methods and aims remained relatively unchanged throughout his expeditions to Central Asia. However, Stein’s report of his Third Expedition, *Innermost Asia*, also describes the changing situation with regards to foreign excavations in China. It was one that Stein found difficult to accept. The Chinese revolution in 1911 altered the character of the Third Expedition significantly, bringing to the fore the rise in Chinese nationalism and opposition to foreign explorers and archaeologists. Stein was aware of these changes, but displayed a rather bullish attitude to the situation. For example, in the introduction to *Innermost Asia*, Stein relates that, while removing the last of the Miran frescoes, he received a letter from Sir George Macartney, informing him that the ‘head-quarters of the provincial Government at Urumchi’ had issued an edict ‘ordering all district authorities to prevent us from carrying out any surveying work, and in case of any attempt to continue our explorations to arrest us and send under escort to Kashgar “for punishment under treaty”’.<sup>56</sup> Yet, Stein wrote about ‘obstructions’ and of finding ways to surmount them. It seems that he did not appreciate

the seriousness of the Chinese intent, and that he did not fully connect the rise of Chinese nationalism with his own excavations. Despite his rigorous approach to archaeological ‘scientific’ methods, it appears that he did not pay enough attention to Petrie’s idea of autonomous governments regulating over their patrimonies.<sup>57</sup>

Proper archaeological ethics for Stein in 1933 meant the same practices as in 1898.<sup>58</sup> His notions about the behaviour of the archaeologist were grounded on the concept of the scholar who defends and rescues history from oblivion, without regard for external social or political conditions. Petrie’s manual devotes an entire chapter to ethics, but also states that for the serious archaeologist ‘conservation must be his first duty’. Although Petrie writes in his *Methods and Aims* that it is the right of governments to determine how the archaeological remains of their territories should be treated, he also acknowledges how troubling this can be for the archaeologist who finds himself ‘debarred from using the material when an ignorant peasant may destroy and dig as he pleases.’<sup>59</sup> Stein, too, it appears, was set on upholding the preservation of archaeological remains above all other considerations.

Stein’s excavations irretrievably transformed the ways in which the Silk Road could be studied.<sup>60</sup> He made documents, artefacts and data available to scholars of all disciplines and gave rise to numerous investigations that continue just as vigorously today. His scholarly archaeological project, though constant and unchanging, provided a framework of selection and emphasis that, when combined with the antiquarian methods of description, yielded extensive and useful records, as well as hypotheses about the history of Central Asia. Stein’s commitment to applying systematic archaeological methods has allowed modern scholars to transcend Stein’s own aims as an investigator and to search in other directions beyond his own interests. The fact that his vast records allow us the possibility to do this is an immense contribution to our understanding of ancient Central Asia and the Silk Road.

## Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Valerie Hansen for reading multiple drafts of this paper and for inviting me to participate in the Stein conference that took place in Budapest in 2007; and Helen Wang for her comments and suggestions. The quote is from Sir Flinders Petrie, *Methods and Aims in Archaeology*, Macmillan and Company, London, 1904, p. 1.
- 2 Stein, *On Ancient Central Asian Tracks: Brief Narrative of Three Expeditions in Innermost Asia and North-western China*, Macmillan, London, 1933 (repr. Pantheon Books, New York), p. 1.
- 3 For a discussion of the antiquarian approach, see Arnaldo Momigliano, ‘Ancient History and the Antiquarian’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* vol. 13, no. 3/4 (1950): pp. 285–315, including on p. 313: ‘The antiquary rescued history from the skeptics, even though he did not write it. His preference for the original documents, his ingenuity in discovering forgeries, his skill in collecting and classifying the evidence and, above all, his unbounded love for learning are the antiquary’s contributions to the “ethics” of the historian.’
- 4 Stein, *On Central Asian Tracks*, p. 17.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–23.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 7 M.A. Stein, *Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan; Personal Narrative of a Journey of Archaeological & Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan*, T.F. Unwin, London, 1903, p. xvi.
- 8 The political name for this region between 1884 and 1955 was Xinjiang Province. M.A. Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay: Personal Narrative of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*, Macmillan & Co. Ltd,

- London, 1912; *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1921; *Memoir on Maps of Chinese Turkestan and Kansu from the Surveys made during Sir Aurel Stein's Explorations, 1900–1, 1906–8, 1913–15*, Trigonometrical Survey Office, Dehra Dun, 1923; *Innermost Asia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia, Kansu and Eastern Iran*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1925; *On Ancient Central Asian Tracks*, *op. cit.*
- 9 Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, p. ix.
- 10 Stein, *Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan*, p. xiv.
- 11 Petrie, *op. cit.*, p. vii.
- 12 Harold Deane (1854–1908), Political Resident, Kashmir, Chief Commissioner, North-West Frontier from 1901.
- 13 Alfred Charles Auguste Foucher (1865–1952), Indologist, professor at the Sorbonne. On Foucher's work with Stein, see A. Fenet, 'Les archives Alfred Foucher (1865–1952) de la Société asiatique, (Paris)', *Anabases* 7 (2008), pp. 163–92.
- 14 Letter submitted to the Lieutenant Governor for its subsequent transmission to the government of India; see Jeanette Mirsky, *Aurel Stein: Archeological Explorer*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1977, p. 79.
- 15 A concern with the everyday life of ancient societies is present in Stein's writings from the beginning of his scholarly career. See Sir Aurel Stein, *Kalhana's Rajatarangini: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*, A. Constable, London, 1900, p. ix.
- 16 Stein, *Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan*, p. xii.
- 17 Stein, *ibid.*, p. xii.
- 18 Mirsky, *op. cit.*, p. 201; see also the correspondence from Stein to Petrie, now in the Petrie Museum, University College London.
- 19 P.J. Ucko and S. Quirke, 'The Petrie Medal', *Public Archaeology*, vol. 5 (2006), pp. 15–25; see also the paper by Strong and Wang in this volume.
- 20 See J. Malina and Z. Vasicek, *Archaeology Yesterday and Today: The Development of Archaeology in the Sciences and Humanities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) and New York, 1990, pp. 49–50; V.M. Fargo, 'BA Portrait Sir Flinders Petrie', *The Biblical Archaeologist*, vol. 47, no. 4 (Dec 1984), pp. 220–23; Sidney Smith, 'William Matthew Flinders Petrie, 1853–1942', *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society*, vol. 5, no. 14 (Nov 1945), pp. 3–16; and Margaret Drower, *Flinders Petrie: A Life in Archaeology*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1995.
- 21 Stein, *Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan*, pp. xii–xiii:
- 22 Stein, *ibid.*, p. 339.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 343.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 360.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 359.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 399.
- 27 Stein, p. 397.
- 28 'Mr. Fred. H. Andrews ... his wide knowledge of ancient Indian art, especially of the Greco-Buddhist styles, his familiarity with the products of many old Eastern industries ... exceptionally qualified him to assist me in the arrangement, description and illustration of my collection of antiques ... Besides the sketches and diagrams reproduced among the illustrations, I owe to Mr. Andrews' artistic skill the black and white drawing which has furnished the vignette for the title page. My volumes could scarcely issue under a more felicitous emblem than this faithfully restored enlargement of the figure of Pallas Promachos as seen in several of the ancient seal impressions in clay excavated by me', in Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, p. ix.
- 29 Stein, *Sand Buried Ruins of Khotan*, p. 379.
- 30 Petrie, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
- 31 After the end of the expedition Stein began to collaborate almost immediately with other scholars to interpret the documents. E.J. Rapson, with the assistance of E. Senart and Abbé Boyer, undertook the decipherment and publications of the Kharoshthi documents on wood and leather recovered from the Niya site. E. Chavannes translated the documents in Chinese. See Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, p. 364.
- 32 Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, vol. 1, p. 1.
- 33 A. Walker, *Aurel Stein: Pioneer of the Silk Road*, John Murray, London, 1995, p. 46.
- 34 Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, vol. 1, p. 1.
- 35 For representative examples of this genre see C. Heaney, *Cradle of Gold: The Story of Hiram Bingham, a Real-Life Indiana Jones, and the Search for Machu Picchu*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2010; B.G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; B. Kuklick, *Puritans in Babylon: The Ancient Near East and American Intellectual Life, 1880–1930*, Princeton University Press, 1996; W.H. Stiebing, Jr., *Uncovering the Past: A History of Archaeology*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, 1993, pp. 29–49; S. Hedin, *My Life as an Explorer*, Kodansha International, New York, 1996 (reprint).
- 36 'Niya is always wrapped in an elegiac tone' is Mirsky's description of Stein's personal correspondence regarding Niya; see Mirsky, *op. cit.*, p. 243. 'My own little Pompeii' is in a letter from Stein to P.S. Allen, from Niya, dated 8 December 1912, quoted in Mirsky, p. 363. In his article 'Into Chinese Turkestan', in *The Times* (16 July 1931, 13f), Stein refers to Niya as 'a sand-buried modest Pompeii abandoned in the 3rd century AD'.
- 37 Mirsky, *op. cit.*, p. 242.
- 38 See J. Brough, 'Some comments on third-century Shan-shan and the history of Buddhism', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 28, part 3 (1965), pp. 582–612, 590: 'Even with the lapse of years it would be presumptuous to claim that definite answers can now be given...and it does now seem possible to say that Stein's insight here was remarkable, and that his interpretation appears to be in essentials correct.'
- 39 Mirsky, *op. cit.*, p. 249.
- 40 Mirsky, *op. cit.*, p. 249; see also Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, pp. 459.
- 41 Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, vol. 1, p. 457.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 458.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 484.
- 44 Stein, *On Ancient Central-Asian Tracks*, p. 109.
- 45 *Ibid.*, pp. 110–11.
- 46 Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, p. 460.
- 47 Stein, *On Central Asian Tracks*, p. 26.
- 48 The acquisition of manuscripts at the library cave at Dunhuang brought Stein immediate recognition: a knighthood in 1912, and praise from scholars in a variety of disciplines; for example, 'A Third Journey of Exploration in Central Asia, 1913–16: Discussion' by A. Chamberlain, H. Read, F. Younghusband, H. Trotter, C.E. Yate and Dr Barnett, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Sept 1916), pp. 225–29; also 'Explorations in Central Asia, 1906–8: Discussion' by Mr Macartney, M.A. Stein, L.D. Barnett, Lord Curzon, H. Trotter, T.H. Holdich and S. Hedin, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Sept 1909), pp. 264–71.
- 49 'Explorations in Central Asia, 1906–1908 Discussion', p. 269.
- 50 See *The Times*: 'Dr. Stein's travels in Central Asia', 8 Dec 1906; p. 4a; 'Central Asia', 29 Jan 1907, p. 6e; 'Dr. Stein's travels in Central Asia', 25 May 1907, p. 8a; 'Dr. Stein's travels in Central Asia', 15 Oct 1907, p. 11a; 'Dr. Stein's travels in Central Asia', 9 Mar 1909, p. 10a; 'Dr. Stein's travel's in Central Asia', 31 Mar 1909, p. 9d; 'Dr. Stein and the Campbell Memorial', 8 Apr 1909, p. 3f; 'Sir Aurel Stein's expedition: Exploring Central Asia', 26 Jun 1914, p. 7f; "'New" China and Sir Aurel Stein. Demand for expulsion', 29 Dec 1930, p. 10b; 'China and Sir Aurel Stein. The expulsion demand', 30 Dec 1930, p. 10c; 'Sir Aurel Stein in China', 3 Jan 1931, p. 11e. These are reproduced in H. Wang, *Sir Aurel Stein in The Times*, Saffron Books, London, 2002.
- 51 See *The New York Times*: 'Bids China expel British explorer; Association for Preservation of Relics holds Sir Aurel Stein insulted nation', 28 Dec 1930, p. 13; 'Defends archeologist: British Legation at Peking', 30 Dec 1930, p. 6; 'Sir Aurel Stein, 80, an archeologist: explorer of Central Asia wrote many works on subject – dies in Kabul, Afghanistan, 23 Oct 1943, p. 19.
- 52 Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, chapters 64–66.
- 53 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 28.
- 54 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 176.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 184.
- 56 Stein, *Innermost Asia*, p. 175.
- 57 In a letter addressed to John Burrow [one of the main scholars working on the Niya documents at this time], dated 6 December 1937, Stein wrote: 'As you are probably aware, Chinese Nationalist obstruction made any systematic excavation impossible on that occasion. However, I succeeded in recovering a dozen or so of tablets. I was obliged to leave them at the Kashgar Consulate in accordance with a promise I had given of removing any antiquities collected on that journey only with the permission of the Chinese authorities. The efforts made by Captain Sheriff ... proved in vain ... they have probably been lost during the subsequent revolutionary troubles', see Wang Jiqing, 'Photographs in the British Library of Documents and Manuscripts from Sir Aurel Stein's Fourth Central Asian Expedition', *British Library Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Spring 1998) pp. 23–74, 22.
- 58 The conclusion of the Miran chapter in *On Ancient Central Asian Tracks* (p. 112) further illustrates this point. Stein reflects on the difficulties of

preservation and on the risks of allowing untrained amateurs to perform excavations. When he revisited the site in January 1914, he found that a young Japanese traveler, who 'lacked preparation, technical skill and experience', was attempting to remove the frescoes. His sloppy efforts resulted in the paintings' destruction. Stein's photographs, being the only original records of the damaged frescoes, became important for future researchers and symbolic of what Stein conceived to be proper

archaeological ethics, i.e. keeping meticulous records of an excavation and ensuring that the artifacts were removed safely and conserved to the best of the archaeologist's ability.

59 Petrie, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

60 See P. Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1980, p. 161.