

# ‘Yours ever so sincerely’: Albert von le Coq seen through his correspondence with Aurel Stein

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‘Pray let me congratulate you to the work already done and still before you. The energy you develop is admirable & will serve as a beacon to me in my further labors’, reads a letter written in Berlin on the 9th of January 1923.<sup>1</sup> The addressee was the archaeologist and explorer Marc Aurel Stein, the author Albert von le Coq, then curator at the Museum of Ethnology who left no doubt as to his admiration for his colleague.

It is but one of a number of letters exchanged between 1908 and 1928 and thus this article originally set out to explore the relationship between the two men in the light of their correspondence.<sup>2</sup>

But when analysing the letters it became obvious that even after 20 years of correspondence, Aurel Stein maintained a polite distance, while a clear picture of the much more forthcoming von le Coq could be gained. Shifting the focus of research seemed all the more important because it turned out that the hitherto available information on von le Coq is sparse and, in part, different from what he tells. The aim of the text is therefore to correct common misconceptions and to complement our knowledge of Albert von le Coq by giving an overview of his life and career as described by his colleagues as well as himself in his letters to Aurel Stein.

## Albert von le Coq (1860–1930)

As already mentioned, the information published on Albert von le Coq is patchy. In fact, the only detailed account of his life is the obituary written by the German Indologist Ernst Waldschmidt (1897–1985), who was von le Coq’s protégé and colleague at the Museum in Berlin before becoming professor for Indology at Göttingen University in 1936.<sup>3</sup> From what Waldschmidt tells us, Albert von le Coq was born in Berlin on the 8th of September 1860, a descendant of a Huguenot family. His father was a merchant who had inherited an already thriving business from his own father and expanded it further. Albert von le Coq was thus heir to a considerable fortune derived from wineries and breweries distributed all over Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>4</sup>

He went to two different secondary schools, the French secondary school (Französisches Gymnasium) in Berlin and another secondary school in Darmstadt. Shortly before getting his university-entrance diploma (Abitur), though, he was expelled because of his membership in an illegal students’ fraternity.<sup>5</sup> Having missed the chance to study at a German university, von le Coq went instead to London and the United States of America, where, from 1881 to 1887 he did a business apprenticeship and gained a diploma in medicine. Upon his return to Berlin, aged 27, he became a partner in the family business – a decision that seems to have been motivated by respect for his father much more than actual interest in the profession.<sup>6</sup> So it is not surprising that he sold the business soon after his father’s death and in 1900 he moved to Berlin where, at the age of 40, he could finally do what really interested him – he enrolled at the Seminar for Oriental languages at Berlin University.<sup>7</sup>

The same year he started working as a volunteer at the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin, first in the Department of Africa and Oceania, and subsequently in the Department of India. He soon became indispensable and within four years was put in charge of the second German Turfan-Expedition

(Deutsche Turfan-Expedition) upon which he embarked from September 1904 until December 1905.<sup>8</sup> In December 1905 the third expedition formally began when von le Coq's team was joined by Professor Albert Grünwedel in Kashgar. Although this expedition officially lasted until June 1907 von le Coq was forced to leave one year earlier than planned due to ill health. It would be another six years before he returned to the Silk Road city of Turfan and in the meantime he worked assiduously on the publication and exhibition of the finds. While some of his books proved to be very popular and sold out quickly,<sup>9</sup> the exhibition took far longer to arrange, and it was not until 1928 that the final installation of the objects took place.

Von le Coq's research focussed on a wide range of topics. He published on the Archaeology and Ethnology of Eastern Turkistan and translated a large number of Turkic manuscripts thereby making important contributions to the field of Manichaean studies.<sup>10</sup> Among art historians and archaeologists he is probably most famous for his six-volume work, *Die buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien*, but, like many of his contemporaries, he also wrote popular travel accounts (a 'pot-boiler', as he called one of them),<sup>11</sup> about the adventures of the German Turfan expeditions.<sup>12</sup>

In Summer 1909 le Coq received the honorary doctorate Dr Phil h[onoris] c[ausa] from the university of Kiel and on the 31st of March was additionally made Professor, which normally would not have been possible without a doctorate. Shortly afterwards, from January 1913 until February 1914, he made his last journey to the Silk Road and returned to Germany a few months before the beginning of the First World War (28th July 1914–11th Nov 1918).<sup>13</sup> Thereafter, he focussed exclusively on his work in the museum, a topic which features prominently in his letters. Having worked as an unpaid volunteer for 14 years, on the 1st of April 1914 he was finally made curator and on the 26th of April 1923, two years before reaching his retirement age, he became the head of the Department of India (Direktor der indischen Abteilung), a position that he held until the end of March 1930, less than one month before his death on the 21st of April.

### **'With best regards and thanks again for all the help' — favours and collaborations instead of competition**

In terms of the Great Game and the Silk Road, much has been written about the competition among the different countries involved. For the participants of the expeditions, the pressure for success must have been extremely high and when reading some of Aurel Stein's letters to his friend and confidant Percy Stafford Allen (whom he affectionately called Publius) one can sense his tension at the arrival of teams from other European countries. While naturally all of them were competitors, in one letter Stein clearly states that the 'true race will be with the Frenchmen',<sup>14</sup> under the leadership of Paul Pelliot. The German team did not worry him so much, mainly because the official leader of the first and third German Turfan expedition, Albert Grünwedel, was known to be a 'slow-moving man'<sup>15</sup> who preferred in situ documentation over excavation and removal of objects. Nonetheless, Stein hoped that the German team would concentrate on sites north of the Taklamakan Desert, and thus stay out of his way. Learning about Grünwedel's plans

for the third Turfan expedition he remarks:

It is a relief to know that 'the party' will stick to Kuchar [a northern oasis] and may the genius loci and Grünwedel's personal disposition keep it there until I have got to Lop-nor.<sup>16</sup>

However, the competition between different nations seems not to have extended to a personal level and the 'rivalry' between Aurel Stein and Albert von le Coq<sup>17</sup> cannot be seen in the letters. On the contrary, a large part of the correspondence revolves around possible collaborations and the conditions under which these should take place. For example, nine letters written between the 20th of July and the 22nd of October 1910<sup>18</sup> record that Stein had contacted Friedrich Wilhelm Karl Müller at the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin to ask him for help in assessing a Manichaean manuscript acquired in Dunhuang. But Müller referred him to the person who was already in charge of the Manichaean texts found by the German Turpan expeditions – Albert von le Coq. Stein duly wrote to the latter and in his reply of the 20th of July 1910, the delighted von le Coq writes 'rest assured of my sincere gratitude for your friendly reminiscences and the honorable offer'.<sup>19</sup>

By October 1910 von le Coq had completed the translation of the manuscript (Ch. 0015), which turned out to be a Manichaean confession prayer, and it was published in an annotated form, with illustration, in January 1911.<sup>20</sup>

This was the first of several contributions that he made towards an understanding of Aurel Stein's finds and it seems to mark the beginning of a scholarly relationship of mutual 'give-and-take'. But while Aurel Stein never wrote any articles for von le Coq, the latter clearly asked for favours in return for his work. Although these were mostly rather small and flattering requests – for instance, inviting the famous explorer to become a Corresponding Member of the newly founded Gesellschaft für Ostasiatische Kunst (Society for East Asian Art)<sup>21</sup> – some of them were more demanding of Stein's time. Among other things, von le Coq frequently asked his English colleague for references and letters of introduction, sometimes for himself but mostly for young and promising scholars whom he supported by introducing them to already established academics or by raising money for travel scholarships. In a post-hyperinflation Weimar Republic this was a slow and difficult process, once described by von le Coq as being 'like growing teeth'.<sup>22</sup> But his reward would be the success of the second generation of Turfan scholars: Annemarie von Gabain, Ernst Waldschmidt and Wolfgang Lentz (to name but a few), who were among the finest experts in their field.

Stein, who had assistants rather than mentees, complied untiringly with these requests, though let slip his frustration with one of von le Coq's protégés who was sent to study the Stein Collection in the British Museum:

I have tried to indicate to him what would be the best way for securing the extension of his permit which he is anxious about. That seems to be the matter which at present interests him most.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to supporting each other in their research and other things related to their academic lives, both men made sure that they sent copies of their latest publications

whenever they could. For Stein especially, this cannot have been an easy task as the list of recipients for his books must have been long. And von le Coq, clearly aware of the high demand in free copies, remarks in one letter:

I am delighted to know, that you have again put me on the list ... You certainly always treated me with great munificence & you may be sure that this great kindness will be duly appreciated.<sup>24</sup>

But the letters tell us more than who received which book or off-print – they give valuable insight into how both men viewed their own and each other’s research. Impressed by Stein’s untiring work and long list of publications, von le Coq often downplayed the value of his own books and articles. In one letter he even dismissed the impressive volumes of *Die Buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien* as a ‘mere Bilderbuch’.<sup>25</sup> Stein, on the contrary, valued the information given in these richly illustrated books and remarks about the *Bilderatlas zu Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Mittel-Asiens*, a copy of which he received in 1925:

I hasten to let you know that your splendid Bilderatlas has reached me today and to send my heartiest thanks for this charming and most welcome present. I need not assure you how much I appreciate the kind thought which prompted you in sending me this copy. Nor do I need to tell you at length what a source of most valuable information it will be for me. ... Nobody can appreciate more than I do the value of the service which your atlas is furnishing to students of Central-Asian civilisation. ... [I am] glad to have now in your Atlas a most convenient outil de travail at my disposal. It shall certainly accompany me to future camps, however light I must keep my baggage.<sup>26</sup>

Such scholarly praise and moral support clearly meant a lot to von le Coq who, being a late-starter in the fields of art history, archaeology and linguistics, must have sometimes felt insecure among more senior colleagues. His pride and joy at Stein’s encouragement are best described in his own words written on the 24th of September 1922:

I have been so pleased to hear that you got my Ethnographical work & the kind words you bestow on these labours have greatly elated me, coming from a man whom I reverence as the successful senior of the guild of central-asian investigators...<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, Albert von le Coq had no desire to compete with Stein, but instead valued his scholarly endorsement.

### **Beyond the academic relationship – tales of disputed theories and quarrels with ‘the aesthetic school of art amateurs’**

While the first letters written by Stein and von le Coq were rather formal, over the years mutual admiration and respect appear to have grown into friendship, at least from von le Coq’s point of view. This was certainly also due to face-to-face encounters such as in the summer of 1925, when Albert von le Coq spent almost one month in London. Exactly how many times they met is impossible to tell from the correspondence, but Aurel Stein maintained his usual distance and never talked about his personal life and his feelings. The only time we sense some of the excitement and curiosity that must have been the driving force behind his work is in a letter sent from his favourite place, Mohand

Marg in the Kashmir Valley, on the 25th of July 1926. Written shortly after his identification of Aornos, the site of Alexander the Great’s last siege, an issue that had been debated for a long time by classicists, Stein’s passion for the exploration of uncharted territory becomes obvious when he talks about his latest find:

... what pleased me most was the opportunity I had of locating the chief site which figured in Alexander’s campaign in this region. ... It means very strenuous work, including plenty of climbing, but I felt in my true element & enjoyed it greatly. I can scarcely hope again for a chance of working on ground both unexplored and enriched [?] by classical reminiscence.<sup>28</sup>

Compared with Stein’s rather restrained letters, Albert von le Coq wrote on a much more personal level. From the 1920s on, he began to confide in Stein and told him openly not only of the political situation in the Weimar Republic but also of his personal trials and tribulations, health problems and his constant and painstaking search for funding. It is not entirely clear whether there was a specific reason for his trust but a comment von le Coq makes about his opus magnum *Die buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien* gives an interesting hint. On the 9th of January 1923 he informed Stein: ‘I have this day given the text of the second volume to the printer – the old pleasure I used to feel in writing on such matters is gone & substituted by weaker emotions’.<sup>29</sup> He does not go into further detail himself, but a look at his obituaries clarifies the situation.

One of the central views von le Coq expressed in many of his publications – as in the *Buddhistische Spätantike* – was that Asian art had been influenced profoundly by Western, namely Greek, art. While a clear Greek (or rather Hellenistic) influence can be seen in the Gandharan-style Buddhist art found at many sites along the Silk Road, von le Coq seems to have been convinced that the exchange between East and West was almost unilateral and that Chinese culture could never have blossomed without Hellenistic influence. His approach becomes evident in titles such as *Auf Hellas Spuren in Ost-Turkistan* (1926) (In the footsteps of Hellas in East-Turkistan) and ‘Die Brücke zwischen dem Hellenismus und dem Chinesentum’ (The bridge between the Hellenistic and the Chinese worlds) (1924).<sup>30</sup> It is even more explicit in his descriptions of Silk Road cultures as ‘a mixture of Indian and Iranian elements which have Hellenistic influences’,<sup>31</sup> and the site of Khotan as a ‘hearth of purely Hellenistic art exercises’.<sup>32</sup>

Such statements caused a stir in the academic community during von le Coq’s lifetime, and different opinions were still being voiced after his death. While Waldschmidt generously credits his mentor for ‘his avid contribution to the destruction of the delusion of an isolated development of the Chinese art’,<sup>33</sup> Paul Pelliot is brutal in his dissatisfaction with von le Coq’s theory. He sees him as a victim to the latest ‘reverie, which, in Germany and France, denies the existence of Chinese bronzes earlier than the Han’.<sup>34</sup> His statement ‘Many of us, and he knew it, refused to follow him on this path’<sup>35</sup> makes it clear that von le Coq found himself sailing against the wind.

The fact that Aurel Stein never openly criticised von le Coq but instead continued to compliment him on his work

and his publications, probably gave him the encouragement and reassurance he needed, but that other members of the academic community denied him for this particular part of his work.

These were not the only unpleasant situations von le Coq had to face. From 1922 to 1927 a large part of his time and energy was devoted to his personal differences with Otto Kummel and William Cohn. Both men were considerably younger than von le Coq and had discovered their strong interest in Asian Art after they had gained degrees in different disciplines – Kummel in European Art History, and Cohn in Philosophy. Years later they would not only found the Gesellschaft für Ostasiatische Kunst but also become influential figures in the development of the discipline of East Asian Art History in Germany.<sup>36</sup> In 1906, Otto Kummel, then aged 32, became keeper of the Department of East Asian Art at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin. He was appointed by Wilhelm Bode, general director of all Berlin museums from 1905 to 1920. The original plan had been for the Department of Asia to become an independent museum, with Kummel as director. But, without the necessary financial backing, the plan did not materialise and the Department of East Asian Art was integrated into the Ethnological Museum instead. This decision was not popular with the directors of the Ethnological Museum, Albert Grünwedel and Friedrich W.K. Müller.

But Kummel did not bother them too much as he spent the first three years of his new job in Japan acquiring objects for the future Museum's collections. He also managed to organise just a single exhibition, in 1911, before he was called up to serve in the army during the First World War. Upon his return to Berlin in 1918 he intended to continue with the work already started and relied on Bode's word, the general director having promised him that he could pick objects from any other department of the Ethnological museum. This is how Kummel, Cohn and von le Coq came to fall out – Kummel and Cohn claimed the Central Asian objects.

Exactly when the quarrels started is unclear, and the names of Kummel and Cohn appear for the first time in a letter dated the 24th of September 1922. Von le Coq starts to tell of the plans to restructure the display in the Museum using the collection of Indian Art as well as the Silk Road finds of the German Turfan-Expeditions. Then, he explains:

The Generaldirektor had approved of our plans and we hoped to be able to realise a long entertained dream, when Cohn and Kummel claimed all our Indian and Eastern Asiatic sculptures, as far as of any artistic value, for their collection.<sup>37</sup>

Kummel might have been fourteen years younger than von le Coq but he had friends in high places and for a while it looked as if he was going to be successful. Von le Coq was forced to campaign for the rescue of his collection and to fight against the 'aesthetic school of art-amateurs',<sup>38</sup> as he called Kummel and Cohn. But his efforts paid off and in the same letter he writes 'I saved Turfan & Gandhara, by mobilising my donors',<sup>39</sup> before reporting in a later letter, on the 9th of January 1923: 'the final outcome of this fight, which has kept me in a state of irritation for 9 months or more, has been a victory'.<sup>40</sup>

The so-called victory was short-lived though, and merely

18 months later Kummel and Cohn appear again in the letters, because they now dismissed the objects originally selected as being worthless! One can only assume that this happened because Kummel found it hard to cope with the unpleasant situation of being caught between Wilhelm von Bode's empty promises and Albert von le Coq's vehement protest, and that the only way to save his face was to prove that he was not interested in the objects in the first place. A rather upset von le Coq reports to Stein on the 14th of July 1924:

The museum is in a state of chaos... Bode & his friends the Aesthetes have gained the upper hand. So I have to battle with William Cohn & O. Kummel – men who call Turfan paintings & Gandhara sculpture trash. I have had hard times with these people whose manners as Laurence Binyon once wrote in the "Burlington" are on a level with their insight.<sup>41</sup>

These quarrels must have kept von le Coq busy for the better part of the next three years, and one can imagine his dismay when F.W.K. Müller retired as the director of the department of East Asian Art and Otto Kummel was appointed as his successor. Since the post also carried the responsibility for the ethnographical collections, von le Coq worried greatly about the future of the objects

(...) all ethnography, barring such objects as may appeal to his sense of beauty, is in his eyes only rubbish! So there are again breakers ahead! I begin to tire of these unceasing difficulties.<sup>42</sup>

But his fears were unnecessary as both Kummel and Cohn made considerable efforts to restore the peace, for instance by electing von le Coq to be a member of the steering committee of the Gesellschaft für Ostasiatische Kunst which they founded in 1926.

After more than 20 years of internal quarrelling it is hardly surprising that von le Coq expressed great relief at having 'buried the tomahawk'<sup>43</sup> and 'smoked the peace-pipe'.<sup>44</sup> Stein, who had the interests of science and research uppermost in his mind, agreed with him, saying:

I was very glad to read what you wrote about your peace with D. Kummel. I am sure it will be for the advantage of everybody and to that to the interests of research which is the main thing.<sup>45</sup>

### **'Conditions are constantly turning from bad to worse' – financial problems and health issues**

Apart from the quarrels with Kummel and Cohn, two other topics feature quite prominently in von le Coq's letters: health issues and financial problems. It is well-known that von le Coq ruined his health when participating in the third German Turfan-Expeditions and it was due to serious health problems that he had to leave thirteen months early in June 1906. He appeared to have recovered well, and seven years later was fit enough to participate in the fourth expedition, which took place from March 1913 to March 1914.

The real extent of his health problems, though, becomes obvious in his letters, where maladies such as colds, influenza, mumps, throat infections and fatigue are often given as the reason for not replying earlier or quicker. He was susceptible to infection and what might seem like a trifle to another person was a more serious illness for von le Coq, who talks frequently about being forced to spend days and even weeks

in bed. Some of these troubles were probably self-induced. He did not cut any slack, working overtime in the museum most days without a break for lunch – a strategy that clearly backfired. At the same time, there may have been some psychosomatic elements, too: his letters reveal a man who worried about being sick and got sick because he worried so much. The tales of his illnesses are a leitmotif running through his letters and they are seldom delivered with the amount of humour displayed in a letter written on the 23rd of September 1927, in which he remarks: ‘It appears that every unemployed bacillus considers my poor body as a convenient inn’.<sup>46</sup>

It is surprising to find that a major cause of worry for von le Coq was the state of his finances. Surprising because the average biography usually states that he inherited a great fortune thereby implying that he could study and travel to his heart’s content. When von le Coq first moved to Berlin in 1900 this was probably the case but the German inflation of the years 1914 to 1923 seems to have left him as poor as many other people.

While remarks like ‘Things are looking quite desperately again (...) a lb [?] of veal costing now M 3000!’<sup>47</sup> are of a more general nature, a letter written in autumn 1922 leaves no doubt as to the seriousness of his personal situation. In response to Aurel Stein’s request for help in finding a scholar suitable to do some work on the index of a geographical memoir, von le Coq simply replied:

I should like to undertake the work myself & I would like to do it out of interest for the thing. But conditions are constantly turning from bad to worse & I am forced to make some money beyond what the State now allows me (...) I therefore enquire whether you can offer any employment.<sup>48</sup>

The matter was discussed in several letters but in the end, Stein did not employ von le Coq and somebody else finished the index. Six months later, in April 1923, von le Coq was promoted from curator to the Head of the India Department, but even this was not sufficient to alleviate his financial situation, as an interesting conversation revolving around a gift made in 1924 shows. Upon receiving the present, the German scholar writes with almost overflowing gratitude:

When I arrived, I was delighted to find an enormous box of this delicious Kangra tea waiting for me & as there is no one to whom I can attribute so charming a gift, I hasten to send you my grateful thanks. This will be a precious gift when the cold properly sets in & I shall ever drink of it in kind remembrance of the donator.

No matter how great his joy, von le Coq had to pay tax on goods sent to him from abroad which lead to the much more pragmatic postscript: ‘Ps.: If you could send me a letter or card stating that this tea is a “Liebesgabe” I should get refunded the tax put on it’.<sup>49</sup> As usual, Stein complied with his request and von le Coq reports on the 8th of December 1924:

The customs people promptly handed back to me the 10|- [|- probably meaning “Rentenmark”, the German currency 1923–1948] they had charged me on your generous gift, which by the way possesses a most delicious flavour.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to the general devaluation of the German currency, von le Coq was in a dire situation regarding his pension. By the time he reached retirement age in 1925, he had been employed for less than 12 years and was entitled to a very meagre pension. The 14 years of volunteering had cost him dearly. His refusal to accept this situation is seen clearly in a letter written on the 23rd of December 1925:

I have been so busy fighting for a better pension – I am only entitled to a very trifling one! – that I have had to neglect all correspondence. I am glad to be able to report to you, that my endeavours have been successful & that, while this success is far from securing for me riches, I am yet protected from actual want & can make both ends meet’.<sup>51</sup>

It is doubtful whether both ends really met and Waldschmidt explains that von le Coq continued working for a very low salary at the museum after reaching retirement age in 1925.<sup>52</sup> His trip to London was only possible because he received a travel grant and while he seems to have greatly enjoyed his one-month visit to the United Kingdom, the high cost of living partly spoilt the fun for him. ‘Things are so dear now in London that I am quite aghast’<sup>53</sup> he writes on the 20th of July 1925 in one of the last letters before his unexpectedly early return to Germany. The reason for this is mentioned in one of the next letters where he thanks Stein for providing the address of Lady Macartney ‘to whom I will send those negatives on pay-day next – my exchequer having badly suffered from my London visit’.<sup>54</sup>

The content of the letters makes it clear that the picture hitherto given of von le Coq’s finances has been oversimplified and while it was implied earlier that he was a worrier, his statements in regard to his financial troubles are confirmed by his wife Elinor von le Coq, who corresponded with Aurel Stein after her husband’s death.<sup>55</sup> The letters therefore help us gain a better impression of a man who might have started his life as wealthy heir but whom the hyperinflation hit just as hard as millions of other Germans.

### **‘He has always spoken with great, warm friendship of you and your colossal work’**

Albert von le Coq passed away on the 21 of April 1930, at the age of 70, in his home in Berlin. The lecture he had been expected to give on 23 April at a conference in Istanbul, was replaced with a memorial service. Obituaries were published in journals such as *Toung Pao*, *Artibus Asiae* and *Berliner Museen*, as well as *The Times*. The most interesting of these was written by Paul Pelliot and contains a number of personal anecdotes which give further insight into von le Coq’s character. As a fellow German, I cannot help but smile at what must have been one of von le Coq’s last deeds, that could be interpreted as a perfect example if not of ‘Deutsche Gründlichkeit’ (German thoroughness), then of ‘von le Coq’sche Gründlichkeit’. Pelliot describes it as follows:

When von le Coq felt the hour of the Great Departure [*separation supreme*] approaching, he bought mourning envelopes<sup>56</sup> without the knowledge of his wife, and thus we, his friends, received obituary notices with the address written in his own hand.<sup>57</sup>

Aurel Stein must have received one of these last handwritten envelopes too, although the regular correspondence

between the two men ceased two years earlier. The last letter from le Coq to Stein is dated the 2nd of July 1928 and repeats, as if to summarise, many of things that have been discussed in earlier paragraphs. Once again, Otto Kummel is mentioned. At that point he had not only succeeded F.W.K. Müller as director of the East Asia section but also von le Coq 'in India, Central Asia including Turfan, Tibet & Western Asia'.<sup>58</sup> The latter had clearly come to terms with these circumstances and remarked in an unusually reflective mood: 'too much time, too much energy has been wasted in ceaseless wrangling – these 20 years!'<sup>59</sup>

Relationships might have changed but von le Coq's research paradigms had clearly stayed the same. In reaction to Aurel Stein's latest finds he writes:

But – I always thought that some of these Border sites would bring us also Hellenistic things, say of 250 before Chr. (...) I am longing for the discovery of Ante-Buddhist Greek things & I should be extremely gratified if you succeeded in putting your hands on these as well'.<sup>60</sup>

Stein's response was simple yet disappointing, 'I am afraid no Hellenistic remains (...)'.<sup>61</sup>

The last letter Albert von le Coq received in person was written on the 28th of September 1928, but after von le Coq had passed away Stein corresponded with his wife Elinor for about a year. From these letters we get to know that Frau von le Coq, who had always been very supportive of her husband's academic career,<sup>62</sup> made every effort to complete his work. In co-operation with Ernst Waldschmidt she even edited the seventh and last volume of *Die buddhistische Spätantike*, which was published posthumously in 1933.

### **A 'museum man' and a 'man of fieldwork' – an impossible friendship?**

The correspondence with Aurel Stein gives us a much clearer impression of Albert von le Coq's character and life. Although a late starter in terms of the career of an academic, expedition leader or museum curator, he applied himself with determination and perseverance, often at the expense of his health. He worked hard to understand and publish the material brought back from the German Turfan-Expeditions and even fought his colleagues for the right to look after the objects he cherished so much. While some of his views were controversial and therefore unpopular with other academics, the opposition he faced could not change the fact that he was one of the foremost scholars in his field. Despite this, he remained a down-to-earth person who wrote both scholarly tomes and popular travel accounts and gave unfailing support to promising young students with a view to developing a second generation of Turfan scholars.

But the letters also hint at how unlike Albert von le Coq and Aurel Stein were. These differences can partly be explained by the way both men were raised and educated but must also be seen in the context of their individual careers, which were at different stages when most of the correspondence was written. Perhaps they are best described by Aurel Stein who once characterised himself as 'a man of fieldwork'<sup>63</sup> and Albert von le Coq as 'museum man'<sup>64</sup>.

The terms should not be interpreted as a judgement,

though, and each man seems to have at times even envied his respective counterpart for his profession. Von le Coq often waxes lyrically about his travels remarking 'I still love to think of the 10 months or so I spent in that out-of-the-way-place – the days ... there will always be numbered amongst the happiest of my life'.<sup>65</sup> Aurel Stein, on the contrary, seems to have longed for some more time not just to excavate but also research his finds, and once replied to von le Coq's accounts of his work at the Museum 'I can well understand why you look upon it as a paradise – except when visitors and the like claim too much time'.<sup>66</sup>

The correspondence between Albert von le Coq and Aurel Stein is characterised by mutual appreciation and respect, and the fierce competition some authors claim to have existed is not visible in their letters to each other. No matter how big the differences in character and approach to research, their shared passion for the art of the Silk Road must have been a strong enough bond to overcome them.

### **Notes on the correspondence**

Altogether four institutions hold either originals or typed transcripts of letters and postcards written by Albert von le Coq and Aurel Stein – the British Library in London (MS Stein.11), the Bodleian Library in Oxford (MS Stein.91), the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin (TA Berlin) and the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest<sup>67</sup>. (see Tables 1 and 2).

Most of the documents are hand-written in English or German – languages both men were fluent in – but occasionally contain single words or even whole phrases in French, Latin and Classical Greek. Since neither Stein nor von le Coq stopped writing to the other when travelling abroad letters were sent from Berlin, Oxford and London but also from more distant and hard-to-reach places such as Kashgar, Rawak Pindi, Turfan and the lower Swat Valley. 20 years (1908–1928), of communication are represented through the known documents, although there is a break lasting from February 1914 to December 1921. This could partly be connected to the First World War (28th July 1914–11th Nov 1918), but it is also generally unlikely that the complete correspondence has been preserved. Many of the letters kept in the British Library for instance are labelled 'please destroy' and it can be assumed that these orders were followed in some cases. Sadly, Aurel Stein often used a kind of ink that has faded over the years leaving some of his letters practically illegible. Thus, the bigger part of the documents taken into consideration for this article were sent by Albert von le Coq.



Figure 1 Portrait of Albert von le Coq, possibly taken at the opening of his exhibition in 1928 (Bundesarchiv; image 102-18442; photographer unknown)

Table 1: Overview of the total number of letters and the institution where they are kept

	British Library, London	Bodleian Library, Oxford	Museum of Asian Art, Berlin	Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest
von le Coq → Stein	1	45	1	18
Stein → von le Coq	-	34	10	12

Table 2: Number of letters listed according to date

	1908–12	1913–17	1918–22	1923–28
British Library, London	-	1 (1914)	-	-
Bodleian Library, Oxford	-	-	4 (1921–1922)	75? (five letters without date)
Museum of Asian Art, Berlin	10	-	-	1
Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest	27	-	-	3

## Notes

- 1 MS Stein.91 folio 51v.
- 2 I am very much indebted to Dr Lilla-Russell Smith and Caren Dreyer at the Museum of Asian Art in Berlin who kindly provided the digitised versions of the letters from their archive. Professor Wolfgang Klose shared a lot of interesting information about Otto Kimmel, William Cohn and Wilhelm von Bode with me, for which I thank him sincerely. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr Helen Wang for getting me interested in this correspondence in the first place. Last but not least I would like to express my gratitude for the support given by Mr Wednesday.
- 3 For a brief biography of Ernst Waldschmidt see the web page of the Institute for Indology at Göttingen University <http://www.indologie.uni-goettingen.de/cms/index.php?id=13>. Waldschmidt's text was used as a source for other obituaries, such as the one published by Paul Pelliot in the journal *T'oung Pao* which is a translation that has been complemented with additional information as well as personal accounts. An anonymous obituary was published in *The Times*: 'Dr Le Coq. Archaeologist and Explorer (Obituaries)', *The Times*, 25 Apr 1930, p. 14; issue 45496. It should be mentioned that Peter Hopkirk gives some biographical information about von le Coq, too, but without mentioning any sources; see P. Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road: the search for the lost treasures of Chinese Central Asia*, Oxford University Press, 1980; pp. 114–15 in the OUP 1984 reprint.
- 4 Interestingly enough, a brewery producing beer, cider and soft drinks under the name of 'Albert le Coq' exists until this day in Estonia. A look at the English webpage revealed that the trademark was established in London in 1807 by another Albert von le Coq, possibly the grandfather of the later archaeologist. Although the Albert von le Coq in focus here is not directly mentioned, the company seems to be aware of the connection and has even (ab)used the well-known photograph of von le Coq, Bartus and Isa Khan (see [http://idp.bl.uk/idp\\_crea/pages/AK4\\_MIKB955.html](http://idp.bl.uk/idp_crea/pages/AK4_MIKB955.html)) to create a seemingly old commercial, which shows Albert von le Coq sitting on a giant beer bottle (see <http://www.alecoq.de/eng/company/history>).
- 5 E. Waldschmidt, 'Albert von le Coq', *Berliner Museen*, 51. Jahrgang, Heft 3 (1930), pp. 52–53 (this reference to p. 52).
- 6 H. Zimmer, 'Albert von le Coq', *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1930–32), pp. 70–73 (this reference to p. 70).
- 7 The available documentation does not clarify whether von le Coq had the status of a proper student or was regarded as the equivalent of what would be called Gasthörer (literally 'guest listener') today, i.e. a person who studies for his or her own interest and not in order to gain a degree. The titles he was awarded later were honorary degrees.
- 8 Additional information about the Expeditions can be found in von le Coq's own publication *Auf Hellas Spuren in Ost-Turkistan: Berichte und Abhandlungen der II. und III. Deutschen Turfan-Expedition*, Leipzig, 1926, esp. pp. 8–9. The webpage of the International Dunhuang Project (IDP), based at the British Library, is also always an excellent source of information. cf. [http://idp.bl.uk/pages/collections\\_de.a4d#1](http://idp.bl.uk/pages/collections_de.a4d#1).
- 9 MS Stein.91 folio 51v.
- 10 P. Zieme, 'Albert von Le Coq und die manichäischen Studien', *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 63 (2010), pp. 1–8.
- 11 MS Stein.91 folio 133v.
- 12 A. von le Coq, *Auf Hellas Spuren*; and *Von Land und Leuten in Ostturkistan: Berichte und Abenteuer der 4. Deutschen Turfanexpedition*, Leipzig, 1928.
- 13 Even though no letters were written during those four years, it can be assumed that at the age of 54, von le Coq was considered too old to serve in the army during the war. But a letter written by his wife Elinor von le Coq, who corresponded with Aurel Stein after her husband's death, mentions the loss of their only son in the war (MS Stein.91 folio 159r). This is confirmed in the obituary written by Heinrich Zimmer, 'Albert von le Coq', *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1930–32), pp. 70–73, esp. p. 72.
- 14 M.A. Stein to P.S. Allen, 6th January 1906, quoted by J. Mirsky, *Sir Aurel Stein. Archaeological Explorer*, Chicago University Press, 1977, p. 230.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 M.A. Stein to P.S. Allen, 20th January 1906, quoted by Mirsky 1977, p. 231.
- 17 f.i. Mirsky 1977, p. 354.
- 18 TA 3076–3101.
- 19 TA 3078: 'Ich bitte sie, für Ihr freundl. Gedenken und das ehrenvolle Angebot meines Dankes versichert zu sein.'
- 20 A. von le Coq, 'Dr Stein's Turkish Khuastuanift from Tun-huang. Being a confession-prayer of the Manichaeen auditors', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 43, no. 2 (1911), pp. 277–314.
- 21 MS Stein.91 folio 146r.
- 22 MS Stein.91 folio 118.
- 23 MS Stein.91 folio 98r.
- 24 MS Stein.91 folio no.num.
- 25 MS Stein.91 folio 51v: a 'mere picture book'.
- 26 MS Stein.91 folio 115.
- 27 MS Stein.91 folio 48r.
- 28 MS Stein.91 folio 129v.
- 29 MS Stein.91 folio 51.
- 30 Von le Coq, *Auf Hellas Spuren in Ost-Turkistan*. The English version of this volume (literally 'In the footsteps of Hellas in Eastern Turkistan') was published under the title *Buried Treasures of Chinese Turkestan* in 1928. A. von le Coq, 'Die Brücke zwischen dem Hellenismus und dem Chinesentum', *Velhagen und Clasing Monatshefte* 38 (1924), Heft 10, pp. 400–21.
- 31 Von le Coq, *Auf Hellas Spuren*, p. 24.
- 32 *Ibid.*: 'Herd rein hellenistischer Kunstübungen' (*ibid.*).
- 33 Waldschmidt 1930, p. 53: 'hat eifrig dazu beigetragen, den Wahn einer isolierten Entwicklung der chinesischen Kunst zu zerstören'.
- 34 P. Pelliot, 'Albert von le Coq', *T'oung Pao*, second series, vol. 27, no. 2/3 (1930), pp. 241–43, esp. p. 242: 'les rêveries récentes qui, en Allemagne et en France, ont voulu nie l'existence de bronzes chinois antérieurs aux Han'.
- 35 Pelliot, 'Albert von le Coq', p. 242: 'Beaucoup d'entre nous, et il le savait, se refusaient à le suivre dans cette voie.'
- 36 For lack of space Cohn and Kimmel will not be introduced in great detail here, but further information can be found under the menu item 'Ostasien in Berlin' on the excellent webpage of Wolfgang and Christine Klose. [http://www.w-ch-klose.de/html/ostasien\\_in\\_berlin.html](http://www.w-ch-klose.de/html/ostasien_in_berlin.html) (in German).
- 37 MS Stein.91 folio 47–48.
- 38 MS Stein.91 folio 51r.
- 39 MS Stein.91 folio 47v.
- 40 MS Stein.91 folio 51r.
- 41 MS Stein.91 folio 64v.
- 42 MS Stein.91 folio 145v.
- 43 MS Stein.91 folio 150v.
- 44 MS Stein.91 folio 157r.
- 45 MS Stein.91 folio 158r.
- 46 MS Stein.91 folio 150r.
- 47 MS Stein.91 folio 52.
- 48 MS Stein.91 folio 48v.
- 49 MS Stein.91 folio 79v.
- 50 MS Stein.91 folio 82r.
- 51 MS Stein.91 folio 123r.
- 52 Waldschmidt, 'Albert von le Coq', 1930, p. 53.
- 53 MS Stein.91 folio 109.
- 54 MS Stein.91 folio 121v.
- 55 MS Stein.91 folio 172r.
- 56 'Mourning envelopes' are used in Germany until this day. They are usually printed with a black frame and sometimes the lining tissue of the envelopes is black, too.
- 57 Pelliot, 'Albert von le Coq', 1930, p. 243: 'Quand von le Coq sentit approcher l'heure de la séparation suprême, il acheta des enveloppes de deuil, à l'insu de sa femme, et nous, ses amis, avons reçu les lettres de faire-part dont l'adresse est écrite de sa propre main.'
- 58 MS Stein.91 folio 157r.
- 59 MS Stein.91 folio 156v–157r.
- 60 MS Stein.91 folio 156v.
- 61 MS Stein.91 folio 158v.
- 62 J. Kritzeck, 'Albert von Le Coq', *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1962), pp. 115–20.
- 63 MS Stein.91 folio 153r.
- 64 MS Stein.91 folio 129v.
- 65 MS Stein.91 folio 66r.
- 66 MS Stein.91 folio 152v.
- 67 Unfortunately, the letters kept in Budapest could not be taken into

account to write this article. They will be analysed separately at a later time.