



Plate 1 The Palace of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in the 1860s. Lithograph by Adam Slowikowski



Plate 2 The Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, at the time of its opening in 1867

Sir Aurel Stein and his Hungarian Background

MARK AUREL STEIN
OF THE INDIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY
SCHOLAR, EXPLORER, AUTHOR
BY HIS ARDUOUS JOURNEYS IN
INDIA CHINESE TURKISTAN PERSIA AND IRAQ
HE ENLARGED THE BOUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE
BORN AT BUDAPEST 26 NOVEMBER 1862
HE BECAME AN ENGLISH CITIZEN IN 1904
HE DIED AT KABUL 26 OCTOBER 1943
A MAN GREATLY BELOVED

This inscription on a tomb in the Christian cemetery of Kabul records the life and death of a tireless student of Asia, and one of the greatest personalities of the twentieth century archaeologists who specialized in Indian and Iranian studies.¹ Born in Hungary one hundred and forty years ago, Aurel Stein was a scholar, explorer and geographer of whom his native country, Hungary, and his second homeland, Britain, are justly proud.

His activities covering a period of almost sixty years have enriched museums and libraries around the world: from London to Tehran, to Lahore and Harvard University, there are collections of materials of inestimable value originating from Stein's expeditions. These include his archaeological finds, the paintings and manuscripts from the cave temples at Dunhuang, and his surveys and studies at sand-buried cities. Manuscripts written in the various languages of the Middle Iranian period which were previously unknown, such as the fragments of Khotanese Saka, Sogdian and Tocharian, continue to be subjects of scholarly research.

His oeuvre extends over a rather broad spectrum of scholarly interest and knowledge. His activities were organized around three vast areas of concern: the archaeology and historical geography of North India; the paths and commercial routes, along with cultural contacts, between classical India and China; and the meeting of the classical civilizations in the Asian landmass reaching from Mesopotamia to the Indus Valley. In modern parlance, he was looking at cultural and economic relations between the Classical West and the East.

Closest to my heart are those parts of Stein's research that are related to Iranian studies. Whilst this is just a small part of the whole Stein oeuvre, it is none-the-less a scholarly area covering an extensive geography. It would appear that the field of Iranian studies offers a well-defined framework to Aurel Stein's entire scholarly work. The young author completed his studies at the Piarist Grammar School of Budapest and Kreuz-Schule of Dresden, and finally at the Lutheran Grammar School of Budapest. He continued his education, attending university in Vienna, Leipzig and, lastly, Tübingen, where he attended courses given by the most eminent scholars of Iranian and Indian studies of the period,

in particular the lectures of Rudolf von Roth. After this he was able to continue his studies in Britain on a Hungarian scholarship, at the universities of Cambridge, Oxford and London, and focused increasingly on Iranian and Old Iranian studies. It was during his time at Trinity College, Cambridge, that Stein wrote his first paper 'Az ó-perzsa vallásos irodalomról' [On Old Persian religious literature], published in Hungarian in the *Budapesti Szemle* [Budapest Review] in 1885. Stein was twenty-three and was hoping to land a job at the University of Budapest. The eminent scholar of Islamic studies, Ignác Goldziher, had encouraged him to write the paper prior to presenting himself in Budapest. In the article he summarized the history of research into the *Avesta*, the holy book of Zoroastrian religion, on the basis of the work of Anquetil du Perron, Silvestre de Sacy, and Burnouf. However, Stein's native country could not offer him adequate conditions for university research. Stein acquired British citizenship in 1904, when he was already in his forties, and therefore almost his entire academic career was under British colours.

His last major work was the book entitled *Old Routes of Western Iran* (1940), which was re-published under my editorship by the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences for the fiftieth anniversary of Stein's death.² Research into the territory of historical Iran represents a clearly identifiable branch of Aurel Stein's expeditions in Iran between 1926 and 1936. The main focus of the expeditions was the study of contacts between the Mesopotamian and Indus Valley civilizations, the reconstruction of the marching routes and battles of the Macedonian leader, Alexander the Great, the conquest over the Achaemenid Empire, a re-examination of the Late Roman-Parthian *limes*, and a definition of the western terminals of the Silk Road, having crossed over the Asian landmass.

In 1932 and 1933 Harvard University and the British Museum sponsored two journeys in the area called Makran (according to Tabari, now Pakistan), once the most neglected province of the former Achaemenid Empire, and known in Greek as Gedrosia. Alexander the Great had withdrawn from India via this area, enduring enormous suffering and heavy losses to his army. In 1934 Aurel Stein followed Alexander's route from Susa to Persepolis, from the administrative centre of the Achaemenid Empire to the sacral capital, in the south-western part of contemporary Iran, a journey from modern day Shush to Shiraz. Today this area is in the province of Fars, known as Parsa in Old Persian and Persis in Greek, the 'land of the Persians', from which the name Persia derives. It was here that the two major Persian dynasties, the Achaemenids of the Classical Age, and the Sasanians of the Middle Ages, had their origins. Nurturing a strong and rather idealistic image of Alexander, in 1935 Stein set out from Shiraz and proceeded

through the present provinces of Khuzestan, Lorestan, and Kermanshah up to Lake Rezaiye (then known as Lake Urmia), and questioned the fields of ruins. The ultimate outcome of these expeditions was the book *Old Routes of Western Iran*. Next, the aged scholar set himself to the discovery of the Roman-Parthian *limes*: he learned the secrets of aerial photography and investigated the area of present-day Iraq and Syria aboard an aircraft of the British Royal Air Force.

It was not only his discoveries on the historical geography of Iran that promoted Iranian studies; he found manuscripts of supreme importance. On an earlier expedition to Khotan, in Chinese Central Asia, Stein had found a Jewish-Persian fragment, which was then studied and subsequently published by Margoliouth in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1903.³ The fragment is among the earliest recorded Persian texts, being the notes of a Persian-speaking Jew, who was living in Khotan. The fragment is written in the Hebrew script, and has Chinese characters along the edges. Indeed, Stein's excavations in Inner Asia brought to light the linguistic remains of a very eminent people of the Middle Iranian period, the Sogdians, including the so-called Ancient Sogdian letters. The Sogdians pursued extensive trade east of Sogdiana as far as China, and the Sogdian language was a veritable *lingua franca* throughout this vast territory. Furthermore, it was Stein's work that uncovered the famous statue of the Parthian Prince, which stands today in the Iran Bastan Museum of Tehran.

These are just highlights among Stein's enormous contribution to Iranian studies. I need not introduce Aurel Stein's researches and expeditions here, and, after this brief digression, allow me to talk rather about things that are surely less well known, namely his family background and the social environment in his birthplace, Budapest, which enabled Stein to grow to prominence in the world of learning.

Aurel Stein was born in 1862 into an educated, wealthy bourgeois family in Pest. He was born in a house at 2, Tüköry Street, in the present heart of the capital. The house stood just next to the site of the headquarters of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the building of which also commenced in 1862. Both buildings stood in the Lipótváros quarter, named after Emperor Leopold II in 1790. But while the Academy has survived, the house where Stein was born was reduced to rubble under the bombing of World War II. Its location is now marked by a memorial plaque.

At the time of Stein's birth, the city of Pest was entering into a period of rapid and very dynamic development. In 1867 a political accord, known as 'The Compromise', was reached between Austria, which inevitably had been weakened by war and its intentions of expansions, and Hungary, which was regaining its self-esteem after the 1848 War of Independence. The Compromise regulated the legal relationship between the two countries as the confederation of two countries of equal standing under the name of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph and his wife, Elizabeth, known under the name Sisi, were crowned as King and Queen of Hungary in Buda. The Coronation Mass was created by the Hungarian composer, Franz Liszt. Apart from the shared areas of defence, foreign affairs and finances, each country could retain, or to be more precise, regain its autonomy. A period of vivid, eventful and

energetic bourgeois development ensued. In 1872 the royal free boroughs of Pest and Buda, and the agricultural market town of Óbuda were united, Margaret Island was included, and the capital city obtained its present name of Budapest with its current legal status. Buda and Pest lie on the two banks of the River Danube, and the first structural move leading to their unification had been the construction of the Chain Bridge between 1842–49. The bridge was funded by Count István Széchenyi, who was also the Founder of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and was constructed by two British men, Adam Clark and T. William Clark.

The Chain Bridge was just one remarkable creation in an era of significant construction. The Greek Orthodox church on Petőfi Square was built at the end of eighteenth century. The Hungarian National Museum was built between 1839–46, a Classicist building, designed by the architect Mihály Pollack. Construction of the Basilica of St Stephen began in 1851, initially to the plans of József Hild, and was eventually completed by Miklós Ybl at the turn of the century. The Synagogue on Dohány Street was built between 1854–59. Designed by Ludwig Förster, it is the biggest synagogue in Central Europe. These impressive buildings were dominant structures in Pest and determined the creation of the new cityscape. The management of a conscious urban development, based on the old heart of Pest, was taken over personally by the Prime Minister, Count Gyula Andrássy, after The Compromise. The expressed aim was to make a newly created capital city suited to the political, economic, cultural and administrative tasks related to the governance of the country, both in appearance, as well as in outlay and technical facilities. The Council of Public Works had drawn up a master plan, on the basis of which a radial road (known today as Andrássy Road) was developed, together with the ring road, the embankments of the River Danube, and the second bridge over the Danube, Margaret Bridge, which was built between 1872–76. The development of the railway network was speeded up, and the railway bridge, linking the two sides of the country, was built between 1873–76. The main railway lines all met in the capital. The Budapest West Railway Station was built along the plans of the French Eiffel Bureau (see la Tour Eiffel in Paris) between 1874–77, and was followed by the Budapest East Railway Station in 1884. Other developments included enhanced postal services, the installation of a telephone system, the construction of public storehouses along the Danube, the opening of the Commodity and Stock Exchange in 1864, and the establishment of various banks and savings banks. Manufacturing industry flourished, and most branches of industry were visible in Budapest, including carriage and wagon works, mills, breweries and distilleries, brick, leather and textile industries, engineering and chemical industry.

Prior to unification, the combined total population of Pest, Buda and Óbuda was 280,000. By 1896 the population of the united capital had swelled to almost 700,000. There had been a substantial migration of the rural population to the capital. Whilst a large majority of the inhabitants of the capital city were Hungarian, there were a significant number of German (Swabian) and southern Slav inhabitants, and a smaller number of Armenians and Slovaks. In 1851 the population of the city included a bare 37% Hungarian, 56%

German, 6% Slovak, and a few inhabitants of other nationalities. By 1881, those proportions were reversed: the population was 55% Hungarian and 33% German. By 1891, this had risen to 67% Hungarian and 24% German. In terms of religious denomination, the majority were Catholic 64.4%, with Jewish 21%, Lutheran 6%, Protestant (Helvetian) 7.3%, and a smaller number were of Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Greek Orthodox, or Unitarian faith.

The headquarters of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which also housed the Library, were founded in 1825. The construction of this beautiful building on the banks of the Danube, next to the Chain Bridge, took four years, and it was opened on 15 December 1865. It was into this Classicist urban environment that Aurel Stein was born.

In the wake of a natural claim of a vivid intellectual life, characterising the bourgeois development, the number of schools multiplied, both at primary and secondary level. Many of the eminent grammar schools were run by the various churches, and from the 1860s the issue of public education was regarded as a priority. At the same time, the institutes of higher education were also being enriched. The Royal Hungarian University of Sciences of Budapest, which had developed out of the Episcopal College founded by Péter Pázmány (in Nagyszombat) in 1635, was given new buildings. It became a veritable university with four faculties: theology, law, medicine and arts. Subsequently renamed as the Eötvös Loránd University, it remains to this day the best university in Hungary. The Joseph Industrial School, founded in 1846, was transformed into the Joseph Technical University in 1871, and offered training in architecture, mechanical engineering, engineering and chemistry. The central Catholic seminary should also be considered as an institute of higher education, together with the Lutheran-Calvinist seminary, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of Budapest, founded in 1873, which had become an institution of the Hungarian neological Jews. The Academy of Music was founded in 1875 under the chairmanship of Franz Liszt, and the Royal Hungarian music theatre, the Opera House, was built between 1875–85. After several decades of antecedents, the Ludoviceum, or Ludovika Military Academy was re-opened in 1872, to train officers for the Hungarian army. It was here that Stein learned how to ride a horse and underwent military training, demonstrating his outstanding skill in cartography. The 1870s also saw the creation of new museums and libraries in the city.

The phenomenal building activity was a spectacular aspect of the bourgeois boom. By the turn of the century it was reaching its peak: the educated bourgeoisie, doctors, wholesale merchants, large industrialists, bankers and lawyers were multilingual within their own families, the simultaneous use of German and Hungarian was common, and the grammar schools and church schools supplemented that practice with a strong training in Latin and Greek culture. The major printing presses and publishing houses, such as the Athenaeum and the University Printing Press were established at this time. The year 1883 saw the beginning of the construction of the new parliament building overlooking the Danube, modelled on Pugin's Houses of Parliament in London. It was a few minutes' walk from the Academy of Sciences and Stein's birthplace just to the north of the Academy.

This was the social environment into which Aurél Stein was born in 1862. The building at 2 Tüköry Street, Pest (known then as Spiegelgasse) was home to the rich Hirschler family: the wholesale merchant Márk Hirschler of Pozsony (today's Bratislava) and his wife, their son Ignác Hirschler, their daughter Anna and, subsequently, her husband Náthán Stein and their family. Mark Aurél Stein was born as a very late, fourth child of Anna Hirschler and Náthán Stein. His mother was already forty-five, his father much older. The family belonged to the Jewish bourgeoisie, and had thrown themselves whole-heartedly into becoming Hungarian.⁴ According to family legend, Aurél's father had fought throughout the 1848 Hungarian War of Independence, and an Uncle Zsigmond had fought for the liberation of Sicily in Garibaldi's army. The name Márk was given to him after his maternal grandfather, and the name Aurél was given to him in baptism, as 'the father, the educated merchant and citizen had him baptised in the evangelical religion right at birth as a sign of social assimilation'.⁵ This is how the name Márk Aurél was constructed, recalling the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, who was a symbol of religious tolerance.

The business enterprises of Náthán Stein did not prove to be excessively profitable, and the management of family affairs increasingly passed into the hands of Ernő Stein, Aurél's brother, who was twenty years his senior. Ernő Stein recognised his younger brother's talent early on, and affectionately guided Aurél's studies, with the help of their maternal uncle, Ignác Hirschler, who was able to lend more serious support to his education.

Ignác Hirschler (1823–91), an elder brother of Anna Stein, was a rather exceptional, enlightened person, who had the greatest influence on the intellectual unfolding of Aurél. Ignác was born in Pozsony, but his father, the wholesale merchant Márk Hirschler, had moved the family to Pest for the education of his son. Ignác Hirschler studied in the best schools in Vienna and Pest, and at the Piarist Grammar School in Pest. He trained as an ophthalmologist, undergoing his practical training in Vienna and Paris, in the latter as an assistant to the famous Professor Desmarres. He returned to Pest to become one of the best ophthalmologists in the city, publishing the scientific journal *Szemészet* [Ophthalmology] and becoming Chairman of the Association of Physicians. Between 1861 and 1863 he was also president of the Jewish community and remained its leading personality for a long time. He was convinced that the Jews of Hungary had to follow the path of assimilation: 'It was under his presidency that a resolution was passed that a Hungarian preacher should be employed in the Synagogue of Dohány Street. The Governorship annulled Hirschler's election because the eminent doctor was seen as a representative of Hungarian objectives'.⁶ After this, although the Jewish community elected him president again in 1865, he chose not to accept the office. Ignác lived right in the heart of the city – at 2 Tüköry Street until 1882, and thereafter at the neighbouring 6 Akadémia Street – and was active in the city's academic and political worlds. As an acknowledgement of his scientific work, Hirschler was elected as a corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1869. During the course of his public activities he became a member of the Upper House of the Parliament in 1885.

Ignác Hirschler had enjoyed a classical education in the Piarist Grammar School where Aurél Stein would also begin his secondary studies. He was an expert in classical education, had a broad outlook and great erudition, as well as an international reputation, and he paid careful attention to the studies of his nephew, Aurél. An insight into that intellectual school is offered by the correspondence between Ignác Hirschler and Ernő Stein. The correspondence is in German and tells of the travels of their extended family, their summer holidays, the affectionate family relations, about Aurél's first scholarships abroad and his studies of Sanskrit, Vedic and Old Iranian. In short, it offers a glimpse of Aurél Stein's intellectual development. The extensive family correspondence covering thirty years was presented to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences by Aurél Stein in 1921 and was published by Vilma Boross in 1970, who quoted lengthy passages from the letters.⁷ It makes extremely interesting reading. It reveals that the elder brother and the uncle were not unconditionally happy with the young man's travels to the East, and were concerned that at the age of twenty-six he was still studying, and had no decent job or occupation. Moreover, they regarded his journey to India as adventurism. Their intellectual objective was to ensure that the promising young man should find a scholarly concern that would suit his talents and interests. They also discussed their readings, with the German poet Goethe occupying a prominent place. The cultural interests of the two men were extraordinary and reached far beyond the borders of Europe. With the help of Rückert's translations and Goethe's *West-östlicher Diwan* they acquainted themselves with Sanskrit literature (e.g. *Sawitri*, *Nala und Damayanti*) and grew more tolerant of Aurél's lengthy Sanskrit studies. 'It is so lovely', wrote Hirschler, 'that it is worth spending ten years on learning Sanskrit'. They followed with careful attention Aurél's progress in his studies, and kept an eye on his written style in correspondence, which, in their view, was not sufficiently refined and cultivated as far as the use of German was concerned. Whether spoken or unspoken, Ignác Hirschler was the head and focus of the family. While Aurél was undoubtedly fondly attached to his parents, his education and intellectual development were the concern of his uncle and brother.

As early as during his grammar school days, Aurél Stein became acquainted with the research facilities of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences close to his home. With the help of his Uncle Ignác, a Member of the Academy, he gained access to the Library, and with the help of the

eminent scholar of Islamic studies, Ignác Goldziher, Aurél Stein was able to develop a friendly link to Ágoston Trefort, Minister of Culture, to whom he owed his first scholarship to Britain.

In this paper, I have tried to show the very significant roles played by individual initiatives, civil organizations, and even British contacts, in this period of very dynamic development in Budapest. The personal links, and the vision and achievements of individuals were remarkable. To give a couple of examples, the National Library was founded by Count Ferenc Széchenyi (today it is called the National Széchenyi Library), and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was founded by his son, Count István Széchenyi. The latter had also brought the idea of the Chain Bridge from Britain, together with its architects, Adam Clark and William Clark, and had introduced horse breeding and horse races in Hungary, again along the British model. The strong civil organizations were also remarkable: for example, the strong Jewish and Greek Orthodox communities, which adapted and played an important role in the development of Budapest. It is important to understand the family environment in which Aurel Stein was raised, and the role played by that family in the society of that time. From this background, a young man of extraordinary erudition, with talent and skill in both classical and modern languages, and a superb military training, came to Britain, where he was able to acquire the specialist professional knowledge he could subsequently use so successfully during the course of his expeditions and researches in Asia.

Notes

1. For a photograph of Stein's grave, see 'Sir Aurel Stein's grave in Kabul', *IDP News* (Newsletter of the International Dunhuang Project) no. 18 (Summer 2001), p. 5.
2. Aurel Stein, *Old Routes of Western Iran*, reprinted in the series Budapest Oriental Reprints B, by the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 1994.
3. D.S. Margoliouth, 'An early Judeo-Persian document from Khotan, in the Stein Collection, with other early Persian Documents', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1903.
4. László Szörényi (trans./ed.) of Aurél Stein's *Ázsia halott szívében* [In the dead heart of Asia], pp. 438–55. Budapest 1985.
5. Géza Komoróczy (ed.), *A zsidó Budapest* [The Jewish Budapest], p. 453 (Budapest, 1995).
6. Komoróczy (ed.), *A zsidó Budapest*, p. 358.
7. Vilma H. Boross, *Stein Aurél ifjúsága. Hirschler Ignác és Stein Ernő levelezése Stein Aurélról* [The youth of Aurel Stein. The correspondence of Ignác Hirschler and Ernő Stein about Aurel Stein], Budapest, 1970.