

# Aurel Stein and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Much has been written about Sir Mark Aurel Stein, the most prominent archaeological explorer of Asia in the twentieth century. His life and professional achievements are described in two notable biographies and in a number of memoirs and appraisals. From his correspondence and extensive oeuvre, we can obtain an accurate picture of the man and the scholar alike. My paper, which aims to discuss Stein's relationship with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, will throw light upon a little known aspect of his life.

While Stein took pride in being a citizen of the British Empire and made available all his knowledge to his adopted country, he did maintain close ties with his native land throughout his life. These ties are perhaps best reflected in his nearly six-decade-long relationship with the organization and members of the Hungarian Academy.

To understand this, we must ask: for what purpose and in what historic circumstances was the Hungarian Academy of Sciences established? In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, a reform movement was emerging in Hungary under the oppressive rule of the Habsburg Emperors of Austria. The reform movement set a dual goal and aimed to achieve civil progress as well as national independence. When the Hungarian Diet was convened in 1825 an initiative was made to promote the cause of the national language. Count István Széchenyi, who is called the 'greatest Hungarian' on account of his reform activity and foundations, offered one-year's income from his lands for the establishment of a Hungarian scientific society. The nobility endorsed his offer, and thus it can be claimed that the Academy came into existence by public intellectual will. The Society set the objectives of developing the Hungarian language and of pursuing and disseminating sciences and arts in the Hungarian language. The organization of a library one year after the founding of the Academy contributed to the enrichment of the Society and to the creation of conditions for scientific work. The 30,000-volume library of the Teleki Counts, offered by József Teleki, the first president of the Academy, laid the foundation for Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The revolutions sweeping through Europe reached Hungary in 1848 and gave rise to a War of Independence. It was put down and the country was brought under military occupation, a move which significantly restricted the operation of the Academy as well. At that time it was practically the only place where the national spirit could manifest itself, and efforts were made to create an adequate home for the Society. Generous grants and public donations provided enough funds to build a neo-Renaissance palace for the Academy. It was inaugurated in December 1865 on the Pest side of the Danube, just a few metres from the Chain Bridge, the first bridge over the river connecting Pest and

Buda. Like the Society, the Chain Bridge was also created at the initiative of Count István Széchenyi.

A new situation was created in the life of the country by the historic Compromise between Austria and Hungary in 1867, involving the regaining of statehood in a limited form and the restoration of constitutional life. As a result of the formation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, large-scale development began in economic, cultural and scientific terms. Pest, Buda and Óbuda, which had hitherto existed as three separate towns, were united in 1872, resulting in the establishment of the new capital, Budapest, which soon became the political, economic and intellectual centre of the country, and one of the most dynamically expanding towns in Europe.

The position of the Academy also changed. From 1868, it received state aid, albeit a modest amount of funds. It was also expanding its links with foreign academies and scientific societies. The Library played a pivotal role in this expansion, by developing and maintaining overseas contacts. By 1880 it had exchange relations with as many as one hundred and fifty institutions. Indeed, from the very beginning of its activities the Library has paid great attention to following up developments in the world of learning abroad, and to introducing knowledge conveyed through foreign publications to the Hungarian scientific community.

In the late nineteenth century, oriental studies came to the forefront of interest throughout Europe, and scientific societies and university departments were established in oriental fields. In the history of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, oriental studies have always been given a high priority. There are a number of reasons for this: first, the historic roots of the Magyars were believed to lie somewhere in the East and finding the original home and origins of the language of the Magyars was an important issue. Scientific interest was attracted to the East by the prehistory of the Hungarians, their thousand-year-long wandering before the final settlement in the Carpathian Basin and the intricate web of oriental relations established in the course of these peregrinations. Scholarly curiosity was further intensified by the co-existence for nearly a hundred and fifty years of Ottomans and Hungarians as part of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and by the presence of Islamic culture in Hungary. Clarifying the origin of the Hungarian language, namely proving that the Hungarian language is of Finno-Ugric origin and that the Turkish elements found in its lexis are loan words, as well as promoting prehistoric research, led to a clash between differing, and sometimes scientifically unfounded, views. From the outset, the Academy was instrumental in providing a forum for discussing different views and in publishing related studies. The investigation of Turkish ties gave birth to

Turcology which had no connections with the research into Hungarian relations and, for further interpretation, to Altaic studies. The search for the deeper motives of migrations into Eastern Europe focused scholarly attention on Central Asia.

The Academy also covered other areas of oriental studies: from Egyptology through the linguistic and historical problems of the ancient Near East to Persian studies. In 1873 a new chair in Indo-European comparative linguistics was founded at the University of Budapest, with the study of Sanskrit as one of its aims. In the same year Hungarian academics also attended the first International Congress of Orientalists held in Paris.

When Aurel Stein in his early youth crossed the gate of the Academy for the first time, he was received by a dynamically developing institution, which had a relatively short history, but which was led by enthusiastic patriots. Thus, it secured an opportunity for the young man interested in Oriental studies to make his preparations for an academic career.

Aurel Stein's childhood home stood in the immediate vicinity of the Academy, and with an introduction from his uncle, Professor Dr Ignác Hirschler,<sup>1</sup> a Corresponding Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the young Aurel Stein was able to visit the Library while still at secondary school. He later wrote:

Many pleasant memories of my youth are connected with the fine library of the Academy. Apart from the paternal home I spent my happiest hours there and it was there that I began my studies to become an orientalist taking pains to learn the Sanskrit grammar etc.<sup>2</sup>

Stein left Hungary to study and, later, work overseas. Yet, even with the great international recognition he received, he never forgot his native land, and throughout his life continued to recall with gratitude

the effective support I had been given at the outset of my Oriental studies both from the Hungarian Royal Ministry of Public Education in the form of grants and, through its Library and great Orientalist scientists, from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.<sup>3</sup>

His gratitude was reflected in the spiritual, moral and financial support that he accorded to Hungarian academic and scientific society throughout his career, and in the significant bequest he made to the Library. He would, for example, have a copy of each of his books delivered to the Library immediately upon publication.

In 1921 Stein donated his family letters to the Academy. The correspondence between Ernő Stein, his older brother and Professor Ignác Hirschler, his uncle, discussing the literature of Goethe, was deposited at his request for preservation in the Goethe Room of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. At the general meeting of the Academy held on 30 January 1922, the chief librarian reported that the Library had received a copy of Stein's *Serindia* and gave details of a letter from Stein, dated 24 December 1921, indicating his intention to donate part of his library to the Academy. The letter starts with the words quoted above about the 'fine library' and continues:

so I do not have to give reason why I have bequeathed my books to the Library of the Academy in my will made many years ago. It is a rather small collection consisting of about 2,000 volumes mostly on subjects like Indian and Central Asian philology and

archaeology. I do not know whether this donation will be of much use to the Library. Notwithstanding, I have arranged that these books should be transported free of charge to Budapest and no terms whatsoever should prevent the Library from selling undesirable works to its own benefit.<sup>4</sup>

The library consisted of those books on the subjects of Indology, Iranian studies, Central Asian linguistics and archaeology, with which Aurel Stein could dispense. There was also a small number of works in Hungarian and several annual volumes of periodicals. This first donation also contained manuscripts, including his school and university notes, notes to his Ph.D. thesis, and the manuscripts for several of his own publications, for example 'Memoir on the ancient geography of Kashmir, Jammu – Sanskrit manuscripts – Rough inventory list', his Personal Diary from 1887, and 'Notes on Rajatarangini'.

The second major donation was the bequest. In Aurel Stein's will, dated 28 July 1934, there were two sections which concern Hungary: he wished to bequeath his printed books to the Academy and to establish a fund to support British and Hungarian scholars in the exploration of Central Asia. The fund, known as the Stein-Arnold Fund, is still administered by the British Academy. Stein gave the following specifications:

I give all my printed books (other than those selected as hereinafter provided) to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences at Budapest to be added to its Library in token of my grateful remembrance of the help I received from the latter as a student and of the encouragement which the Academy accorded me as one of its Members.

I direct that besides my book-plate a mark or label with a suitable Latin inscription showing that the books were bequeathed by me shall at the expense of my estate be placed in or upon each book before being sent to Budapest.

The instructions may have been simple, however the execution of the will was a lengthy process, further compounded by international politics, which prevented the bequest from reaching Budapest before October 1957, fourteen years after the death of Aurel Stein. The bequest added 2,300 books and reprints and 180 volumes of periodicals to the Library of the Academy.

Analysing the composition of Stein's library, we can conclude that it contains a great many works received as complimentary copies from the numerous academic organizations of which he was a member, and from colleagues, who sent their publications to him. The scientific and academic evaluations of his expeditions were carried out with the assistance of the most eminent scholars in the various fields of expertise, and Stein enjoyed friendship with many of them. Stein's travelling was extensive, and it was necessary that he should hold on to only those books which he needed for his work. For this reason, some of the multi-volume publications in his library are incomplete. However, this does not undermine the great importance of this collection, as it contains countless standard books which are indispensable for research on Central Asia, Indology and Iranian studies. Many of them were published between the two World Wars when the Academy spent only a minimum amount on the acquisition of foreign books. Stein's library filled essential gaps.

In addition to the books, the bequest contains one Turkish, two Sanskrit and three Persian manuscripts of more

recent date, and his important photographic collection, containing over six and a half thousand photographs, many arranged in albums. It also contains Stein's correspondence, including over 1,400 letters written between 1897–1943, received from about three hundred different people and institutions. There are both private and official letters, and some have a carbon copy of Stein's letter or reply attached. This correspondence reveals new biographical details and also contains the complete documentation for the resolution of certain scientific and academic matters. The rest of the bequest is very diverse, comprising maps, captioned prints usually found together with related correspondence, proof-sheets, manuscripts of some of his works, anthropometric notes, two passports, expedition invoices, bank papers, medical correspondence and prescriptions, photos of family members and friends, distribution lists for his publications, diaries, photographic notebooks and diploma certificates. Stein subscribed to Durrant's press-cutting service, and to the Authors' Syndicate, and there are several hundred press-cuttings concerning his expeditions and publications.

Throughout his life, Aurel Stein maintained contact with the leading scholars in Hungary, seeking their opinions and in many cases helping them to solve their problems. The correspondence attests to the diverse help he provided to his fellows in the Academy, including the acquisition of manuscripts and the forwarding of soil samples to a Hungarian geologist interested in Central Asian research. But the relationship was never one way. In particular, it is worth noting that Stein's most famous discovery, the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas at Dunhuang, was the direct result of his communication with the Hungarian scientist, geologist and geographer, Lajos Lóczy.<sup>5</sup> Lóczy had discovered the caves in 1879 as a member of an expedition led by Béla Széchenyi (the son of Count István Széchenyi, the founder of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences). Stein wrote:

It is a great satisfaction to me that the work during the last months was conducted in the Tun-huang region, an area where a Hungarian expedition deserves credit for its first systematic exploration. Lóczy, my highly esteemed friend drew my attention first to the Sa-chou 'Thousand Buddhas' grotto temples' and I believe he will be glad to know that their research has added many precious finds to my collection.<sup>6</sup>

Stein also knew he could count on the help of Hungarian scientists. Indeed, he availed himself of such opportunities, seeking advice for his research or helping with the work of his friends. For example, it was with Stein's help that his great friend P.S. Allen was able to include a previously unknown Hungarian-owned Erasmus letter in his complete published edition of Erasmus.

In 1895 Aurel Stein was elected as an External Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, one of the first academies to confer such an honour. The title of his inaugural lecture, delivered on 24 May 1897, was 'White Huns and Kindred Tribes in the History of India'. In his speech he expressed his thanks for the honour:

I feel the branch of science I study with modest talent barely offers me any opportunity to do work which would make me worthy of being an external member within the close meaning of the Academy's constitution referring to works 'explicitly interesting to Hungary or the Academy'.<sup>7</sup>

Yet in his letter written to the President of the Academy, Albert Berzeviczy, in 1912, however, he provided ample justification for his external membership:

I am sincerely delighted to know that with the help of the Indian Government I have had the opportunity to work in an area which is of close interest to Hungarian scientific research as regards the historic background of the migration of old Hungarian and Turkish tribes.<sup>8</sup>

On the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the Academy in 1925, the British Academy asked Aurel Stein to be its representative and to interpret its best wishes. He could not, however, be present at this solemn session because he was on assignment in India, so he greeted the Hungarian scientific society by letter. The President and Secretary, in turn, sent the following greetings:

The British Academy sends cordial congratulations to the Hungarian Academy on the occasion of the Centenary of its foundation, due to the far-sighted wisdom and bounty of the illustrious Count Stephen Széchenyi, whose ideals as reformer of social conditions were so largely derived from personal association with England.

The Fellows of the British Academy desire to join in acclaiming the many eminent scholars whose names adorn the Roll of the Hungarian Academy. They gratefully acknowledge the valued contributions by the members of the Academy to the advancement of learning, more especially in the domain of Oriental Philology and Archaeology.

Alexander Csoma de Kőrös<sup>9</sup> was the first to interpret Tibetan literature to the West. His heroic self-sacrifice in the cause of Buddhist lore is enshrined in the record of his life by another member of the Hungarian Academy, Theodore Duka, whose life-long devotion to the interests of his native land went hand in hand with deep-seated affection for England, his adopted country, to which he was linked by closest ties.

Vámbery, philologist and publicist, Ignatius Goldziher, the greatest authority of his time on Islamic culture, one of the first Corresponding Fellows of the British Academy, are gratefully remembered on this occasion.

Happily, among its present Fellows, the British Academy numbers Sir Aurel Stein, who so well maintains this two-fold tradition of Hungarian scholarship in the field of Oriental studies.<sup>10</sup>

Aurel Stein published regularly in Hungarian periodicals and was a member of several Hungarian scientific societies. His very first article 'On Old Persian religious literature' was published in 1885 in the *Budapesti Szemle*, a review sponsored by the Academy. The Hungarian daily newspapers regularly printed accounts of his expeditions and there were always large audiences for his lectures in Hungary. A number of his books have been published in the Hungarian language, translated and reworked by Gyula Halász, and include *Sand-buried ruins of Khotan*, *Desert Cathay* and *On Ancient Central Asian Tracks*. Many of these books were issued first by the Academy.

From his youth, Stein had very close ties with Ignác Goldziher,<sup>11</sup> who is still recognised as the most prominent researcher of Islam. On the occasion of Goldziher's sixtieth birthday, Stein wrote a study entitled 'Note on Buddhist local worship in Mohammadan Central Asia' for inclusion in a memorial volume published in Budapest. Stein later played a major role in bringing the correspondence of this distinguished scientist to the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The Academy also invited Stein to write a memorial speech on Theodore Duka,<sup>12</sup> the first biographer of Alexander

Csoma de Kőrös, himself a medical colonel in the Indian Army and paternal friend of Stein. In 1914, Stein arranged for an English version 'In memoriam Theodore Duka' to be published in Oxford.

Stein was in regular correspondence with the principals of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and these letters show how he kept track overseas of the developments in the Hungarian academic world as well as his active participation in this work. He supported the Academy both in building up relations and in its scientific ambitions from which the Hungarian academic world might benefit and thereby extend its boundaries. In 1931, at the proposal of the President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Aurel Stein was presented by the Hungarian state with the Class II Medal with Star. Albert Berzeviczy wrote in his proposal:

Sir Aurel Stein, the world-famous Asia explorer, archaeologist and philologist, who was born in Budapest, most recently delivered a number of lectures again at the sessions of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences during my presidency and also gave many indications of his kind interest in and persistently kind disposition towards our country and in particular our Academy.

Aurel Stein showed constant interest in the Hungarian sciences also during his work abroad for forty years. At sessions of the Academy, he delivered lectures in the Hungarian language, of which he has full command both in writing and verbally, on the subject of 'Innermost Asia: Its Geography as a Factor in History' in 1925 and on the subject 'On Alexander the Great's Track to the Indus' in October 1929. He demonstrated his kind disposition towards our Academy by donating in 1921 his family correspondence and in 1928 a very remarkable part of his large library, namely 2,000 volumes to it.<sup>13</sup>

His gave his last lecture to the Academy on 'The prehistory of the Indo-Iranian Borderlands' in October 1934.

Sir Aurel Stein was deeply attached to two countries: to his native land, Hungary and to his adopted country, Britain. He had spent his formative years in Hungary, developing a strong academic foundation, which would enable him to attend the best universities in Europe and to unfold his talents. Britain provided him with the opportunity to work in areas in which he could make the best use of his knowledge and expertise. As Sir Denison Ross described him: 'This great Hungarian is the pride of two nations and the wonder of all'.

#### Notes

1. Ignác Hirschler (1823–1891) was an ophthalmologist, a Member of the Hungarian House of Lords, and Chairman of the Neolog Pest Israelite Community.
2. Aurel Stein to Kálmán Szily, *Akadémiai Értesítő* 1922, p. 38
3. Aurel Stein to Albert Berzeviczy, Mohand Marg, 12 Aug 1912, *Akadémiai Értesítő*, 1912.
4. *Akadémiai Értesítő*, 1922, p. 39
5. Lajos Lóczy (1849–1920) was Professor of Geology and Geography, a Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and President of the Geographical Society of Hungary.
6. Aurel Stein to Ignác Goldziher, Wang-fu hsia, Kansu, 30 June 1907. Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences [Goldziher correspondence, 41].
7. This was published in *Budapesti Szemle* XCI, August 1897.
8. *Akadémiai Értesítő*, 23/1912, p. 589.
9. Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (1784–1842) was the founder of Tibetology.
10. *Akadémiai Értesítő*, 36/1925, p. 302.
11. Ignác Goldziher (1850–1921) was an Orientalist, one of the founders of modern Islamic scholarship, and a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
12. Tivadar Duka (1825–1908) was a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
13. Albert Berzeviczy to Count Kunó Klebelsberg, Minister of Education, Budapest, 24 February 1930, Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences [RAL 397/1930].