

# ON ANCIENT CENTRAL-ASIAN TRACKS

BRIEF NARRATIVE OF THREE EXPEDITIONS IN  
INNERMOST ASIA AND NORTH-WESTERN CHINA

BY

SIR AUREL STEIN, K.C., I.E.,

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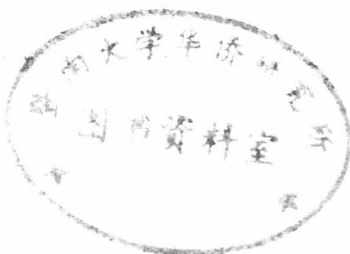
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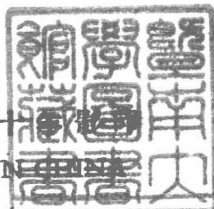


WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS, COLOUR PLATES, PANORAMAS  
AND MAP FROM ORIGINAL SURVEYS

中華民國三十一年

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AN ANCIENT

# CENTRAL ASIAN TRACKS

WITH NARRATIVE OF TRAVEL EXPEDITIONS IN  
CENTRAL ASIA AND NORTH-WESTERN CHINA

SIR HENRY AVON, K.C.L.

ANCIENT BUDDHIST PAINTING ON SILK, RECOVERED FROM  
THE 'CAVES OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS,' TUN-HUANG.  
IT SHOWS THE BODHISATTVA AVALOKITESVARA, AS SEEN  
IN A DREAM, GUIDING A PIOUS SOUL TO HIS HEAVEN.

SCALE ONE-FOURTH.

WITH A NEW ILLUSTRATION OF THE PLACES VISITED  
AND A MAP OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN TRACKS

THE END OF THE WORLD

THE END OF THE WORLD

TO THE MEMORY OF  
SIR THOMAS ARNOLD

SCHOLAR, 'SAINT', AND INCOMPARABLE FRIEND

WHOSE INSPIRING SYMPATHY EVER  
FOLLOWED AND BRIGHTENED MY TRAVELS  
THIS RECORD OF THEM IS INSCRIBED IN  
UNCEASING AFFECTION AND GRATITUDE

## PREFACE

THIS book is meant to present a succinct account of the explorations, antiquarian and geographical, which I had the good fortune to carry out in Chinese Turkistan and adjacent parts of innermost Asia. The years spent on hard travel in those little-known regions, difficult of access and trying in their physical features, remain among the happiest memories of my life. But more strenuous still and longer were the years needed for the elaboration of the abundant scientific results which my three Central-Asian expeditions had yielded.

By the publication of personal narratives on the first two journeys and of eleven heavy quarto volumes of detailed reports on all three (see p. xii) I may well believe my duty done in the matter of record. But with the exception of *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, containing a full account of the personal experiences on my second expedition (1906-8), all the above publications have long ago passed out of print and are now difficult to secure.

Since the last of those labours were disposed of, fully twenty-seven years after my return from the first journey, I have been free to turn to new fields of archaeological exploration farther south. But my recollections of those fruitful years spent in the deserts and mountains of inner-

most Asia are still as fresh and cherished as before. So when the President of Harvard University kindly invited me to deliver a course of lectures at the Lowell Institute, Boston, I gladly availed myself of the opportunity offered to describe the travels and discoveries of those years in a condensed form suited for a wider public.

Considering the great extent and varied character of the explorations, it would have been still more difficult to achieve the requisite condensation, had I not been able adequately to illustrate my account of them on the screen. This need made itself felt also when presenting here these lectures in print with suitable additions and changes. Hence I must feel grateful for the discerning consideration of my publishers which has rendered it possible to provide sufficient illustrations both of the scenes of my explorations and of the finds that rewarded them at ancient sites.

Before taking the reader to the distant region of Asia over which those explorations extended, it seemed necessary to sketch in broad outlines its characteristic physical features. Equally helpful it appeared to give a summary account of the history of which that region had been the scene for the last two thousand years, and for which it was destined mainly by its geography. For these introductory chapters I was able to avail myself largely of what I had occasion to set forth in my lecture on "Innermost Asia: its Geography as a factor in History", delivered in 1925 before the Royal Geographical Society.

In the course of three long expeditions carried over a vast area where practicable routes are limited by great natural obstacles, it was unavoidable that geographical considerations and archaeological tasks should cause certain

parts of it to be visited by me more than once. This circumstance has made it advisable to order my account of the chief phases in my exploratory work according to the localities which witnessed them, instead of adhering to strict chronological sequence.

The results of those expeditions, extending altogether over close on seven years, could not have been achieved had I not from their start, and all through the years which the study and record of the results claimed, enjoyed very willing and effective help from many sides. Preceding publications have afforded me welcome opportunities to acknowledge these manifold obligations in detail. Here I must be content with the briefest record of gratitude.

To the enlightened support of the Indian Government, which I was privileged to serve first in its Educational Service and later in its Archaeological Survey, I owe my largest debt for requisite freedom and means to carry out my chosen tasks. The authorities of the British Museum, besides providing a share in the cost of my second expedition, gave very valuable help by granting accommodation for the arrangement and study of the antiquities brought back from all my journeys and allowing expert scholars on their staff to aid in these tasks.

On the geographical side I feel greatly indebted to the Survey of India, which provided me in the field with well-trained and hard-working Indian Surveyors and at considerable expense published the results of the topographical surveys, carried out by them under my direction and with my assistance, in successive large series of maps. In the same direction the Council of the Royal Geographical Society has at all times accorded me generous help and

encouragement, as attested by their grant in 1909 of the Founder's Gold Medal.

It would have been quite impossible for me to do justice to the varied interest and importance of the antiquities discovered, including abundant relics of ancient arts and crafts as well as early manuscript remains in a dozen or so of different languages, had not a large number of distinguished Orientalist scholars and students of Eastern art most readily offered their expert collaboration. The names of such valued helpers are far too many for individual mention in this place. So I must rest content with the references made in some chapters to those scholars to whom the elucidation of particularly important classes of documentary finds is due.

In connexion with the present volume I have to record my special thanks to the Government of India in the Department of Education, Lands and Health for permission to use here a selection of photographs taken by me on my journeys, as well as to the High Commissioner for India in London who authorized the reproduction from my detailed reports (*Ancient Khotan; Serindia; Innermost Asia*) of plates illustrating certain antiques. For the accompanying map I am obliged to the Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, who kindly allowed it to be reproduced from the one published with the above-quoted paper in the *Geographical Journal*. With regard to the arrangement of the illustrative materials it affords me special gratification to acknowledge the same valuable help which my artist friend and assistant, Mr. Fred. H. Andrews, O.B.E., has kindly rendered me for all my previous publications. To Mr. George A. Macmillan I owe sincere gratitude for his kindness in



looking over my text with special regard to the needs of the general reader. Nor ought I to omit mention of the excellent work of Messrs. Henry Stone and Son, Banbury, on the colour plates, which affords a guarantee for the faithfulness of these reproductions.

For the last thirty years the tasks entailed by the results of my explorations have imposed upon me prolonged periods of desk work in civilization, more exacting to me in some ways than efforts in the field. That most of this work could be done under the sheltering care and with the constant encouragement of those kindest of friends under whose ever hospitable roof I now write is a boon for which I cannot feel too grateful.

AUREL STEIN.

AT THE PRESIDENT'S LODGINGS,  
CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD.  
*September 18, 1932.*

**Preliminary Report of a Journey of Archaeological and Topographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan.** London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1901.

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• London, Macmillan and Co., 1912.

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# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF INNERMOST ASIA . . . . .	PAGE I
---	-----------

## CHAPTER II

CHINESE EXPANSION INTO CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CONTACT OF CIVILIZATIONS . . . . .	17
---	----

## CHAPTER III

ACROSS THE HINDUKUSH TO THE PAMIRS AND K'UN-LUN . . . . .	37
---	----

## CHAPTER IV

FIRST EXPLORATIONS AT A SAND-BURIED SITE . . . . .	54
--	----

## CHAPTER V

DISCOVERIES AT THE NIYA SITE . . . . .	71
--	----

## CHAPTER VI

THE NIYA SITE REVISITED AND THE REMAINS OF ENDERE . . . . .	96
---	----

## CHAPTER VII

THE RUINS OF MIRAN . . . . .	109
------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER VIII

EXPLORATIONS AT ANCIENT LOU-LAN . . . . .	129
---	-----

## CHAPTER IX

TRACKING THE ANCIENT ROUTE ACROSS THE DRIED-UP LOP SEA	PAGE 145
--	-------------

## CHAPTER X

DISCOVERY OF AN ANCIENT BORDER LINE	163
-------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XI

FINDS ALONG THE ANCIENT CHINESE <i>Limes</i>	177
--	-----

## CHAPTER XII

THE CAVE SHRINES OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS	193
--	-----

## CHAPTER XIII

DISCOVERIES IN A HIDDEN CHAPEL	203
--------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XIV

BUDDHIST PAINTINGS FROM THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS	217
--	-----

## CHAPTER XV

EXPLORATIONS IN THE NAN-SHAN RANGES	238
-------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XVI

FROM THE ETSIN-GOL TO THE T'HEN-SHAN	246
--------------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XVII

AMONG THE RUINS OF TURFAN	256
---------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XVIII

FROM THE KURUK-TAGH TO KASHGAR	271
--------------------------------	-----

# CONTENTS

xv

## CHAPTER XIX

FROM KASHGAR TO THE ALICHUR PAMIR . . . . .	PAGE 286
---	-------------

## CHAPTER XX

BY THE UPPERMOST OXUS . . . . .	303
---------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER XXI

FROM ROSHAN TO SAMARKAND . . . . .	317
------------------------------------	-----

INDEX . . . . .	332
-----------------	-----

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Ancient Buddhist painting on silk, recovered from the  
 'Caves of the Thousand Buddhas', Tun-huang. It shows  
 the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, as seen in a dream,  
 guiding a pious soul to his heaven (colour) . . . *Frontispiece*

	<i>Face page</i>
1. Muz-tagh-ata peak seen from southern end of Little Kara-köl Lake . . . . .	4
2. Eroded ranges of outer K'un-lun, seen from above Yagan-dawan . . . . .	4
3. Head of Kashkul Glacier with its névé-beds, looking towards north-east . . . . .	6
4. View to south from forest-clad ridge above Khazan-gol Valley . . . . .	10
5. Entrance to Bazar of Borache, Khotan Oasis . . . . .	10
6. Panoramic view taken in southern portion of Niya Site, showing remains of ruined dwelling after excavation . . . . .	12
7. My caravan marching over high dunes in Taklamakan Desert, south of Tarim River . . . . .	22
8. My camels crossing salt-encrusted bed of dried-up Lop Sea . . . . .	22
9. Kharoshthi document on rectangular double-tablet, from hidden archive . . . . .	28
10. Baltit, chief place of Hunza, with Mir's Castle and glacier-clad peaks above Ultar Valley in distance . . . . .	38
11. My companions of the second expedition and myself in the desert north of Chira . . . . .	39
12. View from Malakand Fort, looking north into the Swat Valley . . . . .	40
13. View of Lowarai Pass from approach on south . . . . .	41

# ILLUSTRATIONS

xvii

*Face page*

14. Panoramic view of the Darkot and Chatiboi Glaciers taken from the foot of the Rukang Spur, looking south and south-west . . . . .	44
15. Oxus source glaciers seen from mouth of Wakhjir Valley . . . . .	46
16. Afghan escort with baggage preparing to cross affluent of Oxus . . . . .	46
17. Chinese fort of Tash-kurghan, seen from near left bank of river . . . . .	47
18. Ruined wall and bastion of Kiz-kurghan, seen from south-west . . . . .	47
19. P'an Ta-jên, Tao-f'ai of Aksu, my old patron and friend . . . . .	48
20. Chiang Ssü-yeh, my Chinese secretary on the second expedition . . . . .	48
21. Exiled malefactors from Khotan and Taghlik herdsmen, Karanghu-tagh . . . . .	49
22. Pakhpo hillmen anthropometrically examined at Kök-yar . . . . .	49
23. Panoramic view of end portion of Otrughul Glacier, at head of Nissa Valley, taken from detritus slope facing the western flank of the glacier . . . . .	51
24. Panoramic view taken from snowy col on watershed of main K'un-lun range, north of the uppermost Kara-kash Valley . . . . .	52
25. Head of Nissa Valley seen from Tam-öghil grazing ground . . . . .	56
26. Fragments of terra-cotta figurines and decorated pottery from Yotkan . . . . .	57
27. Frescoed walls of passage enclosing Buddhist shrine, Dandan-oilik . . . . .	60
28. Cella of Buddhist shrine, Dandan-oilik, with pedestal for stucco image . . . . .	60
29. Mural painting of legendary scene and stucco image of 'Guardian of the North' in Buddhist shrine, Dandan-oilik . . . . .	61
30. Painted panel representing legendary king of sacred rats, excavated at Dandan-oilik . . . . .	62
31. Painted panel representing legend of Chinese 'Silk Princess', excavated at Dandan-oilik . . . . .	62
32. Painted panel representing Persian Bodhisattva (Rustam) . . . . .	64
33A. Leaf of Buddhist canonical text in Khotanese language . . . . .	68

33B. Fragment of document in cursive Brahmi script, Dandan-oilik . . . . .	68
34. Chinese records dated A.D. 781-2, Dandan-oilik . . . . .	68
35. Portion of ancient residence, Niya Site, before excavation . . . . .	74
36. Ancient refuse heap within ruined dwelling, Niya Site, in course of excavation . . . . .	74
37. Ruined house, Niya Site, first find-place of inscribed tablets, after excavation . . . . .	76
38. Kharoshthi documents on double-wedge tablets from ruined house, Niya Site . . . . .	77
39. Kharoshthi document on rectangular double-tablet, from hidden archive, Niya Site . . . . .	80
40. Portion of coloured woollen rug from ruined dwelling, Niya Site . . . . .	84
41. Ancient wooden chair from ruined residence, Niya Site . . . . .	84
42. Kharoshthi documents on leather, from rubbish-heap within ruined dwelling, Niya Site . . . . .	88
43. Carved wooden double-brackets from ruined dwellings, Niya Site . . . . .	88
44. Clay impressions of intaglio seals on Kharoshthi documents found at Niya Site . . . . .	89
45. Ruin of sand-buried dwelling, Niya Site, before excavation . . . . .	100
46. Room in ruined dwelling, Niya Site, in course of excavation . . . . .	100
47. Ancient Chinese documents on wooden tablets, from ruins of Niya and Lou-lan Sites, and of Han <i>Limes</i> . . . . .	101
48. Central hall and office room in ruined residence, Niya Site, after excavation . . . . .	102
49. Remains of ancient vineyard with posts carrying trellis, Niya Site . . . . .	106
50. Interior of ruined Buddhist temple cella, Endere, after excavation . . . . .	106
51. Base of ancient Buddhist shrine, Miran Site, from north-east, after excavation . . . . .	112
52. South-east corner of interior of ruined Tibetan fort, Miran, in course of excavation . . . . .	113
53. Hall in ruined house of Western Site, Lou-lan, with turned wooden pillars, after excavation . . . . .	113



54. Frescoes of winged figures from dado of passage in ruined Buddhist shrine, excavated at Miran Site ( <i>colour</i> ) . . . . .	118
55. Portion of fresco composition showing scene from Buddhist legend. From frieze of ruined Buddhist shrine, excavated at Miran Site ( <i>colour</i> ) . . . . .	120
56. Portion of frescoed dado, with lower part of frieze, on south wall of rotunda in Buddhist shrine, Miran Site . . . . .	124
57. Portion of fresco frieze and dado on south wall of rotunda in Buddhist shrine, Miran Site . . . . .	126
58. View to the south-east from ruined Stupa, Lou-lan Site, across wind-eroded ground . . . . .	134
59. Ruin of ancient dwelling and of Stupa, Lou-lan Site, seen from south . . . . .	136
60. Remains of ancient woven fabrics from Lou-lan Site . . . . .	142
61. Fragments of decorative wood-carving, partly with classical motifs, from ruined house, Lou-lan Site . . . . .	142
62. Pieces of architectural wood-carving, decorated in Gandhara style, from ruined Buddhist shrine, Lou-lan Site . . . . .	143
63. Panoramic view of interior of ruined fort L.K., Lop Desert, taken from north corner . . . . .	150
64A. Drawing showing polychrome figured silk, from Lou-lan Cemetery . . . . .	152
64B. Drawing showing woollen tapestry of mixed Hellenistic and Chinese design, from Lou-lan Cemetery . . . . .	152
65. Piece of ancient woollen tapestry, representing head of Hermes with Caduceus. From grave pit, Lou-lan Site ( <i>colour</i> ) . . . . .	154
66. Head of dead man, found in grave on top of Mesa, Lop Desert . . . . .	156
67. Body of dead man found in grave on top of Mesa, Lop Desert . . . . .	156
68. Heaped-up blocks of salt on surface of dried-up Lop sea bed . . . . .	160
69. Spring of Lowaza with ice-sheet at foot of old lake shore, on route along southern edge of salt-encrusted Lop-nor bed . . . . .	160
70. Ruin of ancient watch-tower, T. III, near western end of Tun-huang Limes . . . . .	168
71. Line of Limes wall near watch-tower, T. XIII . . . . .	168
72. Ruin of ancient watch-tower, T. IV. C, on western flank of Tun-huang Limes, with view to north . . . . .	180