Sir Aurel Stein, Archaeological Explorer by Jeannette Mirsky
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An impediment to information on Indonesia, its land and peoples, is the fact that part of the literature has up to now remained unknown. Scholarship in this respect should not, however, be judged harshly, since good listings and bibliographies on Indonesian subjects are either lacking or difficult to locate. A meritorious exception to the latter is the volume under review.

In his search for source materials, a scholar has two avenues of exploration open to him: a single-handed and halting search, or a joint venture, with others interested. P. Voorhoeve, who started the project in 1950, initially adopted the first approach. The second approach was adopted in 1970 when M. C. Ricklefs, at Voorhoeve’s request, joined the project. Since then, the authors unveiled more manuscripts than had been anticipated. An earlier listing of about 700 items expanded and finally became a catalogue of approximately 1,350 main entries. The time spent on the project also permitted a careful study of stray titles discovered in British public collections.

The convention which the authors applied serves to indicate the condition of a manuscript, the material it is made of, and the script utilized in it. In many instances, the main entries also include descriptive notes of high quality on the origins and contents of the manuscripts concerned, as well as references to relevant publications.

The manuscripts included in the volume were written in 26 IN [Indonesian] languages, including some language groups. Listed also are a few Cham writings. Malay manuscripts constitute the largest section, with approximately 620 items. Batak and Javanese, too, are well represented, with approximately 135 and 400 titles, respectively. Further included are 56 Buginese, 27 Makasarese, 27 Old Javanese, and 24 Balinese manuscripts. The remaining twenty languages are represented through less than 8 titles, each. The materials deal with subjects mainly relating to cultural anthropology, divination, history, language and literature, and medicine. The period in which the bulk of these sources was written varies from the 15th to the present century.

The merit of this superb work lies in the fact that it has made available to the student data which have been difficult to locate, being unindexed or in many instances unmentioned in the literature. The volume, moreover, includes an excellent bibliography. The many years of searching will have been even more rewarding if the catalogue stimulates others to further extend our control over Indonesian source materials.

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This is a full and detailed biography of the “archaeological explorer” Sir Aurel Stein, who brought so much of the material from the Tarim Basin to the attention of the world. The sources used by Miss Mirsky include not only Stein’s voluminous writings and reports, as well as official government archives, but also thousands of letters to his family and others. This allowed Miss Mirsky to put together a biography depicting not just the public figure of a most provocative man but of the private person as well. The description by Miss Mirsky of the campaign Stein had to wage against the bureaucracy to obtain support for his ventures almost matches the excitement of following the expeditions themselves. As so well expressed in a government report, “the Government find themselves required to provide for a white elephant in the shape of an educational officer, who turned out to be a very distinguished archaeologist.”

Any account of the Central Asian explorations of those years must deal with the fact of the removal of these archaeological treasures. The marvelous discovery of lost civilizations uncovered by Stein and his French, German, Russian and Japanese contemporaries is today overshadowed by the resentment of that recovery, or should one say looting. The exploration of Central Asia is as much a chapter in the history of Western imperialism and as revealing of its mentality as is the presence of the Elgin marbles in the British Museum. It can be understood in the context of its time and Miss Mirsky wisely does not attempt to justify it. But there still remains in one’s mind the thought that if Stein and the others had not brought these materials out, it would be only now that scholars would be able to study them.*

The book under review is obviously the result of many years of research. There are very few lapses; a rare example is that on p. 94 saying that the titles of Hsuan-tsang’s work and the novel about him were the same. But in a book of exploration maps are important and those included here are sorely inadequate. It would also have been useful to have a list of the writings of Stein. At times, too, one feels that the
narrow focus of the book, that is, Stein’s life as revealed in his writings, forces the vicissitudes of his career to assume too much dramatic import. But in the end one is grateful to Miss Mirsky for allowing us to become acquainted with this remarkable man in a remarkable age in the development of Oriental studies.

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* In this connection it may be of interest to note that Prof. T’ang Chang-ju is at present at work on a large amount of Chinese mss material recently found in Sinkiang. I also not long ago observed a large class of Uighurs being trained in Old Turkish by Prof. Keng Shih-min of the Central Institute for Nationalities, Peking, in order to enable them to handle Turkish materials which have been uncovered in Sinkiang.


The long-awaited revival of Manchu studies after the last world war, first slowly, and now accelerating, has finally put Manchu in its proper place—not only as a handmaiden to Sinology, but as a subject to be pursued on its own merits, both linguistically and historically. Being a devoted student himself of Hauer, Haenisch, and Simon, the author of this review has lived long enough to see Manchu rise from its comparative neglect to its renascence at present.

A precondition of this development has been an accurate survey of the treasures of Manchu literature still extant. These turn out to be gratifyingly larger than either Mollendorf or Laufer could know or suppose. Walter Fuchs and Erich Haenisch were the first to stress the importance of Manchu for the study of Ch‘ing history as source material. The present catalogue is the most important publication of its kind since Poppe, Hurwitz, and Okada presented the Catalogue of the Manchu-Mongol Section of the Toyo Bunko (1964). It shows the wealth of material available in London, and is a great step forward toward a union catalogue of all Manchu holdings in the Western world.

Some of the entries are real treasures, e.g., the Manchu-Latin dictionary (1.8); the Manchu-Latin grammar (1.10); and the original manuscript of Amyot’s famous dictionary. Other rarities include translations of the Bible (1.17-19); items relating to the rites controversy (especially II.83A); and historical jewels, such as the draft of the history of the Mongol dynasty (1.21), and the biographies of loyal officials (I. ), both manuscripts.

Thus the scope of Manchu literature represented in London libraries is quite remarkable and offers many opportunities of serious study. A similar catalogue of the unusually rich holdings in the Soviet Union and in Taiwan, together with a reprint of Li’s Union Catalogue of Manchu Books in the National Library of Peiping and the Library of the Palace Museum (1933), are urgent desiderata. In addition, there are reported to be large quantities of original Manchu reports and files of a military and administrative nature in Peking, which should likewise be catalogued and described. When all the holdings are known, the extant specimens of Manchu literature will surely be more numerous and important than those known hitherto. Perhaps even a complete Tripitaka, such as that seen by Walter Fuchs in Jehol in the 1930’s, will come to light again.

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THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY


Readers familiar with The Tibetan Book of the Dead published in 1927 by Evans-Wentz may be surprised at first by the use of the plural ‘books’ in the title of this volume, but there is more than one book of the dead. In fact, the bibliography of original Tibetan sources (pp. 250-52) lists 39 Buddhist and 7 Bon-po texts dealing with books of the dead and iconography, and even that list of Tibetan eschatological literature is not exhaustive.

Evans-Wentz’s book was based on an annotated translation of a Bar-do thos-grol (“liberation through hearing the intermediate period”) manuscript commonly used by the Dge-lugs-pa sect, a version in which all references to Padmasambhava and the Rnying-ma-pa sect have been expurgated. Laufer’s volume on the other hand is a comparative synopsis of various Tibetan traditions, presenting explanations of the symbols and visions associated with the after-death experience with a view to synthesizing “oriental wisdom and occidental thinking.”

Part I (pp. 1-12) surveys the traditions of the Tibetan Books of the Dead. Part II (pp. 13-96) is an extensive exposition of the basic element of Buddhist doctrines and tantric symbolism fundamental to proper understanding of
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