

16. The Chinese Slam the Door

Although the Americans were slow to realise it, the archaeological free-for-all in Central Asia was almost over. During the thirty years since Sven Hedin's first daring journey into the Taklamakan desert, access to the lost cities and ruined monasteries of the Silk Road had been virtually unrestricted. Masterpieces of Buddhist art had been acquired for next to nothing. To men like Stein and von Le Coq it had been one long field day. But now time was fast running out for foreign archaeologists. From the intense xenophobia he had encountered when trying to get his sick colleague to safety in the winter of 1924, Langdon Warner should perhaps have sensed that the door was beginning to close, and thought twice before deciding to return.

But on May 30, 1925, something happened which no one could have foreseen. A British police officer in the treaty port of Shanghai, faced by rioting Chinese students who refused to disperse, ordered his men to open fire. Eleven students died – most of them, it was said, shot in the back. A wave of anger against foreigners swept across China. Warner, who had recently arrived in Peking at the head of a larger expedition, reported: 'News of the Shanghai shooting on that day travelled like wild-fire through the interior.' Missionaries and other foreigners in remote stations had to be evacuated to the coastal cities. When Warner's party reached Tun-huang, where they had planned to work for eight months, they were met by a menacing mob of peasant farmers – the same people who had welcomed Warner the previous year.

The man from the Fogg had clearly been hoping this time to relieve Tun-huang of more of its frescoes, as well as to conduct art-historical studies in the painted caves. Apart from

bringing with him what Jeannette Mirsky refers to a little unkindly as 'barrels of glue', he had included in his seven-man expedition Daniel Thompson, the young fresco expert who had supplied him with the recipe for his fixative the previous year. To avoid any risk of Thompson's concoction freezing again, Warner had timed this visit for the spring.

Although in Peking no objections had been raised to the expedition, the Americans now suddenly found themselves harassed at every step by the local authorities, as well as by a hostile populace. Forced to abandon any hope of working at the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, let alone removing anything, they had no choice but to retreat to another site of far less importance. But even here they met with a hostile reception. 'The situation', Warner wrote, 'was one of extreme delicacy on account of the presence of a dozen villagers who had left their ordinary employments, some fifteen miles off, to watch our movements and to try by a thousand expedients to tempt us into a breach which would warrant an attack or forcible expulsion from the region.' It took great self-restraint on the part of the Americans to avoid violence, such was the intensity of feeling directed against them. 'A single slip, even an angry look,' Warner adds, 'would probably have brought the whole hive about our ears and might well have cost us our lives.' Friends in Peking had by now begun to send telegrams imploring them to abandon the expedition. Hostile and inflammatory rumours, moreover, were being circulated about their intentions. A whole year later the Russian-born artist Nicholas Roerich, passing through Urumchi, noted in his diary: 'Strange information reached us about the pillage of the frescoes at Tun-huang.' The rumour claimed that some American art dealers had visited the caves and carried away 'many cases' of frescoes.

But long before this wild version of events reached Roerich in Urumchi, Warner had been forced to call off the second Fogg Museum expedition, and to concede that it had been little more than a fiasco. All that he had to show for it were

photographs of other cave temples, of minor importance compared to those at Tun-huang. Warner's anger was directed less towards the hostile local peasantry than against Dr Ch'en, a medical man and scholar who had travelled with the expedition from Peking ostensibly to aid them in deciphering inscriptions at Tun-huang and to handle any problems which might arise on the journey. Two days after their arrival he had suddenly insisted on returning at all speed to Peking where, he said, his mother was ill. Ch'en later published a slanderous book about the expedition in which he claimed that he had accompanied the Americans for the sole purpose of keeping an eye on them and preventing them from pillaging. Warner had good reason to suspect that it was Ch'en who had incited the local villagers to anger against them, then left for home knowing that his work was completed.

But despite this major set-back, the Fogg Museum had not yet abandoned hope of adding to its collection of Chinese Central Asian treasures. The trustees were perhaps encouraged by the unexpected success, some two years after Langdon Warner's return, of a German geological expedition in removing some objects (today in Bremen) from the remote and unguarded sites of Rawak and Dandan-uilik. They had only managed to get away with this because, it seems, anti-foreign feeling had still not penetrated as far west as this farthest-flung corner of the Republic. It did, however, while the Germans were still there, and they had to leave hurriedly, although the Fogg trustees may have been unaware of this.

Clearly there was little point in sending their own man Warner back to China, for he was now to all intents and purposes *persona non grata*. But then someone had a bright idea. Why not approach Sir Aurel Stein, the Grand Old Man of Central Asian archaeology, now aged sixty-seven and retired, and see whether he could be persuaded to go on behalf of the Fogg? If *he*, with all his friends and contacts in Chinese Turkestan, could not pull it off then no one could. Stein agreed

to try. Some £20,000 was raised (despite the Wall Street crash) and in April 1930 the Englishman arrived in Nanking, the Republican capital, to try to talk the authorities into allowing him to take one final expedition into Chinese Central Asia. Despite fierce resistance from the self-appointed 'National Council for the Preservation of Chinese Antiquities' in Peking – a pressure group determined to keep all archaeological exploration out of foreign hands – Stein managed to extract from the Nanking authorities permission to visit and excavate in Turkestan. Considering the indignation that his and Pelliot's removal of the Tun-huang manuscripts had engendered among Chinese scholars, this was perhaps surprising. However, encouraged by his apparently easy victory, Stein hurried back to India, from where he set out for Kashgar in the summer of 1930.

But meanwhile, unknown to him, a vigorous campaign had been launched in China among the intelligentsia to try to put a stop to his expedition by getting his visa cancelled. The Chinese press, too, was demanding his expulsion and scurrilous stories about him were being circulated. Although Stein was a far tougher nut to crack than Warner, with long-standing and well-placed friends in the local Chinese administration, his adversaries eventually won the day. But not before he had travelled some two thousand miles around the Taklamakan oases, mapping and gathering for his sponsors what meagre archaeological material he could, in the face of continual obstruction. But the price of his entry to Turkestan had been a last-minute condition that everything he found must be submitted to the authorities for inspection before agreement could be given to its removal from China. Thus his few acquisitions, which included third-century manuscripts from his favourite site of Niya, had to be left behind in Kashgar when after seven months he was finally forced to abandon his expedition and return to India. It was the last that Stein would ever see of them – or, for that matter, of Chinese Central Asia. The Chinese had closed the door on him at last. His swan

song had ended in failure. However, he could hardly complain when he looked back at his years of unbroken success during which he had made his name and more than satisfied all his sponsors save for the Fogg.

In retrospect, before hiring Stein the Fogg trustees should perhaps have heeded not only Warner's experience but also that of another distinguished explorer, Sven Hedin. In the winter of 1926 the Swedish traveller had returned to China at the invitation of the Government and at the expense of Luft-hansa, the German airline. While his principal task was to reconnoitre a route for a new Berlin-Urumchi-Peking air link, he took with him, in addition to aviation experts, a small scientific team equipped for meteorological, geological and other work, including archaeology and palaeontology. On reaching Peking, Hedin and his men were astonished to find themselves the target of extreme hostility from Chinese scholars and press. The Chinese, they were told, did not need any help from foreigners to explore their own country. Hedin's plans to use aircraft had to be abandoned entirely after reports began to appear in local newspapers claiming that these would be used to airlift secretly out of China large quantities of art treasures. In all, it took Hedin nearly six months to renegotiate terms before the expedition could proceed. Less determined men would have packed up and gone home. In the end the Chinese had insisted that he take with him ten of their scholars in addition to his own, that the expedition be renamed the Sino-Swedish Expedition, and finally that any archaeological material he found would remain the property of the Chinese Government. By now the political turmoil in China had become so dangerous that each member of the expedition had to take with him a rifle, a revolver and eight hundred rounds of ammunition (they were to need them). Even so, Hedin's long-drawn-out expedition was to suffer a total of eight deaths from various causes. Despite their many difficulties, though, his archaeologists did make a number of finds – mainly manuscripts and textiles. But these,

of course, they were not allowed to keep. The day of the free-booter was over. From now on, if one dug at all one dug for China. There were few, if any, takers.

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One of the strangest episodes in Central Asian history was now at an end, but the story is not quite finished. Two questions have still to be answered. Where, today, are the vast quantities of wall-paintings, sculptures, manuscripts and other antiquities which Stein, Pelliot, von Le Coq, Tachibana, Warner and others removed *en masse* from the ancient cities of the Silk Road so many years ago? And what befell that handful of archaeological heroes (or villains, depending on your viewpoint) who devoted so much enterprise and effort and, not infrequently, sheer courage to removing it all?

The treasures and manuscripts of Serindia – to borrow Stein's term – are today divided among the museums and institutions of a dozen countries. Within those countries the material is further spread through a total of more than thirty institutions. The collections range from the very large ones – like those in London, Berlin and Delhi – to those, like the Cernuschi Museum in Paris and the Nelson Gallery in Kansas, with only the odd painting or sculpture to show. And yet, despite this incredible wealth of material from the Silk Road in the West and elsewhere, how many people have ever heard of Serindian art, of Tun-huang or even of Sir Aurel Stein? How many of us have ever seen the great Buddhist murals from Miran or Kyzil, the delicate polychrome silks from which the world's oldest trade route takes its name, or the magnificent T'ang sculptures, banners and scrolls from its temples, monasteries and shrines?

The answer, sadly, is extraordinarily few. The reason is that, with one notable exception, the few museums which possess important Silk Road collections lie beyond reach of most people. For they include the National Museum in Delhi, the Museum of Indian Art in West Berlin, the Tokyo National

Museum and the Hermitage in Leningrad. And yet the one institution within reach of almost everybody at some time or other – the British Museum – with its huge Serindian collection, has the most meagre display of all. The great bulk of Britain's share of Stein's discoveries lies, unseen by the public, in boxes in storerooms, and not a single fragment of figured silk from the Silk Road can be seen in the small Central Asian section.

All this is not so much a scandal as a sad fact of museum life. For the bigger the museum and the more comprehensive its contents, the smaller the space it can devote to any particular collection or culture. Had Stein been working for the small but ambitious young Fogg Museum, one can imagine the spectacular display his treasures would enjoy today. As it is, one cannot help feeling that he merely dug them up in China only to see them buried again in Bloomsbury. There is a strong case, it could be argued, for a museum returning to the country of origin all antiquities – like these – which it has no prospect of putting on display. For a national museum (as against an international one) can always devote more space to collections of its own culture, and often more resources to their conservation.

The Germans, on the other hand, can hardly be accused of concealing von Le Coq's treasures. Indeed, he himself was able to dictate the arrangement of his finds in the old Ethnological Museum when he became its director. Eventually he added a total of thirteen extra rooms to house what has become known as the Turfan Collection. The biggest wall-paintings, some of which stood over ten feet high, were, alas, cemented to the walls in iron frames. At that time nobody could have foreseen that this would be the direct cause of their destruction some fifteen years later during World War II. When hostilities broke out, all the movable objects, including the smaller murals and sculptures, were packed away in crates. Some were deposited for safety in the huge bunker in the Berlin zoo, others at the bottom of coal mines in western Germany,

while others still were stored in the museum's basement which had been specially reinforced for the purpose.

The very largest of the wall-paintings could not, however, be moved to safety. Not only were they cemented firmly into place, but removing them would have meant first cutting them into pieces once again. Instead, the museum staff placed iron covers and sandbags over them to shield them from the effects of blast. 'Apart from that,' a senior West Berlin museum official told me, 'there was nothing they could do but pray that no harm would befall them.' Their prayers were not heeded, however. The museum, which lay close to today's Berlin Wall, was hit no fewer than seven times by Allied bombs between November 23, 1943, and January 15, 1945. Twenty-eight of the largest wall-paintings – almost all of them from Bezeklik – were totally destroyed after surviving wars, earthquakes and iconoclasts for well over a millennium. All that remains of them today are the plates in von Le Coq's great portfolio of the paintings from his first expedition – and the gaping holes in the walls of the rock-hewn monastery overlooking the Sangim gorge.

The horrifying loss of these huge Buddhist masterpieces from Bezeklik has led to the widely held belief that *all* von Le Coq's treasures were destroyed during the Allied bombing of Berlin. The Chinese themselves appear to believe it, and cite the loss bitterly to refute any suggestion that men like von Le Coq and Stein were really *rescuing* the antiquities they removed from the Silk Road. Just how much then of the Berlin collection was lost? The German art historian Dr Herbert Härtel, today director of West Berlin's splendid new Museum of Indian Art where the surviving part of the collection is housed, estimates that about sixty per cent escaped destruction. Anyone who doubts this figure should visit West Berlin, drive out to the leafy suburb of Dahlem where Härtel's museum stands, and see for himself just how much survived. Of all the collections I have seen of Chinese Central Asian art – and that includes almost all of them – the one in West

Berlin is by far the largest and most imaginatively displayed. Even the secondary pieces are well displayed in the basement, where they can be seen by arrangement.

Dr Härtel, a distinguished Indologist and former Luftwaffe pilot, estimates the wartime losses as follows. Of the six hundred and twenty complete frescoes or fragments brought back by von Le Coq and Grünwedel, some three hundred have survived in varying states (much of the damage has since been put right). Of the two hundred and ninety clay sculptures in the pre-war collection, some one hundred and seventy-five have survived. Of the remaining objects such as terracotta figures, bronzes, wooden sculptures, coins, and paintings on silk, paper and wood, Härtel estimates that some eighty per cent have survived. Very few of the manuscripts brought back by von Le Coq and Grünwedel were kept in the old Ethnological Museum, the great bulk having been deposited in the Prussian Academy for study. These were removed to safety during the war and are today in East Berlin.

However, not all the losses to the collection during World War II were due to American bombing (Dr Härtel, incidentally, spares the RAF from blame). When the bunker at the zoo, where some of the treasures were stored, fell into the hands of the Russians in 1945, its secrets were quickly discovered. It is now known that at least eight or nine packing cases of clay sculptures – only the Russians know the exact number – were removed and driven away on lorries. They also looted many important Indian sculptures, again from the Ethnological Museum, which had been deposited there for safety. Like the gold from Troy, neither the sculptures from Turkestan nor those from India have been seen or heard of since, despite West German requests that they be returned. Yet the great bulk of other art treasures looted by the Russians – particularly the European paintings – were sent back long ago. Who knows, perhaps the Russians are holding them in exchange for something they might one day want from Germany or – more appropriately – from China.

The third largest collection of antiquities to be removed from Chinese Central Asia was that amassed by the three Otani expeditions. Whatever else the Japanese may or may not have been up to, they certainly dug feverishly – usually with more energy than knowledge. Even Japanese scholars have had difficulty in piecing together what happened to the collection after its arrival at Count Otani's villa in Kyoto. Indeed, the whereabouts of part of it is still something of a mystery today (although some items, as we shall see, could well be in Soviet hands). The man who knows more about the fate of the Otani treasures than anyone is Dr Jiro Sugiyama, Curator of Oriental Art at the Tokyo National Museum. It was he who first hinted to me that Otani's men might have been carrying out other tasks besides archaeology – a suggestion which caused me to search the political and secret files in the India Office Library and thus come upon Captain Shuttleworth's curious reports.

No one knows for sure, Dr Sugiyama points out, just how large the original collection was. Otani's men – none of them trained archaeologists – kept no proper records of their discoveries and the collection was never catalogued in its entirety. Although Count Otani himself published a two-volume work on it (a sort of Japanese coffee-table book containing pictures of many of the items) there was no accompanying text, and it is therefore of little value to modern scholars. Possibly as a result of the excitement caused in Japan by Stein's discoveries at Tun-huang, part of the Otani collection – mostly frescoes and sculptures – was exhibited in the Kyoto Museum as early as 1910, although by then only two of the Count's three expeditions had been to Central Asia. As no copies of the exhibition catalogue have survived, scholars have had to rely upon the memories of those who saw or heard about it at the time to work out what was shown.

Before very long the collection began to be broken up (already Tachibana had kept back some of the finds for himself). The main reason for this was the sale by Count Otani

of his villa, where the bulk of the treasures were stored, owing to sudden financial pressures. Although he personally kept some hundred pieces and gave a further two hundred and forty-nine to the Kyoto Museum, the larger part of the collection became the property of the villa's new owner, a former Japanese finance minister and a wealthy man. In exchange, it is said, for mining rights there, he in his turn gave it to the then Japanese Governor-General of Korea for the new museum in Seoul. Presumably because he had nowhere to store or display it himself, Count Otani next presented much – but not all – of what was still in his possession to the Governor-General of Lushun (Port Arthur) in Manchuria for exhibition in the museum there. As a result of these two transactions, more of the original collection was now outside Japan than remained at home. Dr Sugiyama estimates that roughly one-third went to Korea, another third to Manchuria and the rest stayed in Japan, although even the latter portion was gradually dispersed, some finding its way into private collections.

What has happened to it all now? The Seoul treasures today lie in packing cases in the storeroom of the National Museum after surviving the Korean War, during which the museum twice changed hands. They consist of some four to five hundred objects, the most important of which are sixty or so frescoes or fresco fragments. Dr Kim Che-won, who was director of the museum from 1945 to 1970, believes that the Seoul murals are the third most important collection in the world after the Berlin and Delhi (Stein) ones. There are long-term plans to build new galleries in the museum. Eventually, it is hoped, the Otani material will be displayed there. But the Koreans, less confident than von Le Coq of man's peaceable nature, have decided that the wall-paintings must remain movable and not, as in the old Berlin museum, be fixed irrevocably to the walls.

Little is known (among western scholars, anyway) of the fate of the Port Arthur treasures, or even what they consisted

of. Dr Sugiyama told me that he believes they may all have been removed by the Russians when in May 1955 they finally handed Manchuria back to the Chinese. His enquiries in Moscow and Leningrad, however, have met with silence. But not all the painstaking digging done by Otani's mysterious young monks was completely wasted. If one goes to the Tokyo National Museum and visits the fine new air-conditioned Toyokan, or Gallery of Eastern Antiquities, one can see, beautifully displayed there, the remaining third of the Otani collection. It comprises those objects which stayed in the Count's personal possession as well as those deposited by him at the old Kyoto Museum. These were purchased over several years by the Japanese Government on behalf of the Tokyo National Museum after being tracked down to those private collections and institutions which in the meantime had acquired them. Finally, in 1968, they were all reunited in a special exhibition to celebrate the opening of the museum's new oriental gallery. Since then they have been augmented by a number of silk banners and clay figures brought back from Tun-huang by Pelliot and obtained from the Musée Guimet by exchange. Thus, some twenty years after Count Otani's death, he and his energetic young acolytes acquired (somewhat undeservedly, in view of their combined incompetence) a fine memorial to their archaeological zeal.

In the Hermitage, where Russia's Silk Road treasures are displayed in eight rooms, the work of Koslov, Oldenburg and the two Beresovsky brothers is similarly commemorated. In the Guimet, where a gallery is named permanently after him, Paul Pelliot too has his memorial. At the Fogg Art Gallery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Langdon Warner's enterprise is handsomely acknowledged and his Tun-huang frescoes proudly displayed. In Stockholm, Hedin's treasures are to be given a permanent home in the city's fine new Ethnographical Museum. Only in Britain is there a complete failure to recognise the remarkable achievements of her man, Sir Marc Aurel Stein. Even the Indians have taken the trouble to hang a por-

trait of him in the dingy galleries in Delhi where his great Central Asian murals are to be found, while in the Indian National Museum nearby, where his smaller finds are displayed, he is generously acknowledged. Perhaps Britain – his adopted country – will one day do justice, not only to him, but also to the many unnamed Buddhist artists and sculptors whose work he rediscovered.

But it was not only paintings, sculptures and other works of art that he and the others carried off from the temples and monasteries of Turkestan and Kansu. What has happened then to the vast archive of Central Asian manuscripts and ancient block-printed books which were also removed before the Chinese finally put a stop to it? The man responsible for removing the largest quantity of these was Stein. Today the manuscripts and books from his three expeditions are divided between the British Library and that of the India Office in London. The Chinese, Sogdian, Uighur and Tangut works are in the former, while those in Tibetan, Sanskrit and Khotanese – to name just some – are in the latter. Understandably, apart from the British Library's celebrated Diamond Sutra, these are not on view to the public, for to the layman one oriental manuscript looks much like another. Moreover prolonged exposure to ultra-violet light and to the pollution of Bloomsbury (or Blackfriars) would only hasten their deterioration.

The highly prized (and still contentious) Chinese-language manuscripts and books from Tun-huang, after being stored in cardboard boxes in the British Museum for many years, have now been transferred to the British Library. There, some thirteen thousand of them live in a row of specially built cabinets amid a benign atmosphere of filtered air and in a carefully controlled temperature. Some seven thousand of them – all those that are complete – have been catalogued. The remainder, most of them little more than scraps, have still, in many cases, to be identified. Although no further work is being done on them at present by the British Library, many

Japanese scholars come to London to pore over these ancient texts, including one man who has devoted a lifetime just to the study of the Lotus Sutra. In order to protect the manuscripts from further deterioration, the British Library has embarked on a programme of conservation. In the past, the condition of many of them has been a sore point with the Chinese who undoubtedly regard the Tun-huang manuscripts – particularly those in Chinese – as their rightful property. However, relations have improved to the point where advice has been sought and obtained from Peking on what methods and materials should be used for conserving Chinese manuscripts. Experiments with ovens specially designed to accelerate ageing by as much as one hundred years in twenty-four hours have shown that man-made fibres are short-lived and generally inferior to the natural materials used by the ancient Chinese.

So much then for what one major institution is doing with its collection, or rather with just part of it. Today the thousands of manuscripts brought back from Chinese Central Asia, written in a multitude of tongues and scripts, are divided among the institutions of at least eight different countries. Very many have still to be translated. The deciphering of one script, or the translation of one collection, can take a man's entire working life. One Indologist explained to me: 'Perhaps only twice in a century does a man emerge capable of such a task. Until then the manuscripts have to wait.' Such a man is Sir Harold Bailey, the British scholar, who has spent a lifetime unravelling the mysteries of ancient Khotanese. Anyone who wishes to understand the contribution these manuscripts have made to the study of Central Asian and Buddhist history can turn to the host of translations, catalogues, monographs and other specialist studies produced by scholars such as Bailey, Giles, Waley, Maspero, Levi, Konow, Müller, Henning, Hoernle, Pelliot and Chavannes, to name just a few.

Before leaving the subject of the manuscripts, there was one particular collection that scholars (Hoernle in particular) were

only too anxious to forget. These 'old books' had to be withdrawn hastily from the British Museum when Islam Akhun, the semi-literate treasure-seeker from Khotan, confessed to forging them. After being rediscovered in the British Museum basement in 1979 in two wooden chests labelled 'Central Asian Forgeries,' all ninety of them have now been catalogued and transferred to the British Library. Examining these long-forgotten relics today, one is astonished by their sophisticated appearance and the neatness and persuasiveness of their 'unknown scripts'. To the layman – and presumably to most scholars – they look all too convincing, with their well-thumbed appearance, ancient-looking paper, and faded but erudite-looking texts. It is surely not an exaggeration to describe this wily forger who so completely fooled the giants of his chosen field as something of a genius. He too has his modest memorial – that small corner of the British Library's oriental department, near the Tun-huang manuscripts, where his once-venerated 'old books' are preserved for posterity.

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We have now considered the fate of the main collections carried off from Chinese Central Asia – those 'caravan-loads of priceless treasures . . . for ever lost to China', to quote the words of Sir Eric Teichman. But the principal characters in this story have still to make their exits. Sir Aurel Stein, perhaps the dominant figure, today lies in the mud-walled Christian cemetery at Kabul, in the shadow of the Hindu Kush, surrounded by the graves of hippies for whom also Afghanistan was the end of the trail. This doyen of Central Asian archaeologists died in Kabul in 1943 at the age of eighty-two. It is a fitting resting place for him. For forty years he had repeatedly sought permission from the Afghans to explore their country – the missing link in his Silk Road travels. Finally, as he sat working in his tent on his beloved Kashmir 'marg', that permission arrived. But within a week of his arrival in Kabul he was dead – struck down by a chill which

turned suddenly to pneumonia. 'Seldom', wrote Sir Denison Ross, the orientalist, 'has there been combined in one man such qualifications for exploration.' He added: 'This great Hungarian is the pride of two nations and the wonder of all.' Although a British citizen, Stein never entirely forgot the country of his birth. His frugal lifestyle had enabled him to save some £57,000, and most of this he left to set up a fund to further Central Asiatic studies. His one stipulation was that, wherever possible, the work should be carried out by British or Hungarian scholars.

Stein's greatest rival (in terms of quantity, anyway) was von Le Coq, who had predeceased him by thirteen years. The German died in April 1930, just as Stein was arriving in Nanking to negotiate his ill-fated fourth, and last, expedition. During World War I, von Le Coq had been deeply affected by the death of his only son, killed on a battlefield in France. In addition he had to endure the sadness of suddenly discovering himself, a lifelong Anglophile, on the 'other side' from pre-war friends like Macartney and Stein. On top of that, as a result of the economic collapse of Germany, he had found himself financially ruined. His solace became the arrangement of his beloved treasures in the Ethnological Museum, and even after being struck down by a painful and incurable illness he would cheerfully struggle from his bed to show off the collection to a special visitor or friend. When he knew that death was very close, he managed, unknown to his wife, to obtain some black-edged stationery and address envelopes to his many friends. In an obituary of his German colleague, Pelliot refers to the moment when he opened one of these only to discover that it contained the news of von Le Coq's own death.

Grünwedel died some five years later, a sad and broken man. His distinguished career had begun to crumble when he became involved in quarrels with colleagues, including one with his subordinate Müller over which of them had been the first to recognise some of the Turfan manuscripts as Manichaean. Other German scholars took Müller's side and con-

sequently Grünwedel suffered a loss of reputation. He became increasingly isolated from his colleagues and soon his professional judgement began to be questioned. In the words of one obituarist, he sought refuge in obscure theories 'where the experts were not able to follow him'. It was a kind way of saying that he was approaching insanity. A less kindly reviewer described one of his later works on Buddhist Central Asian iconography as 'a religious historical novel of wild fantasy'. Grünwedel ended his days in a mental hospital, a deeply embittered, lonely and disappointed man. However, as his obituarist wrote: 'the confusion of his last few works should not be allowed to detract from his brilliant and reliable earlier works . . .' But at least he and von Le Coq – and even Engineer Bartus, who lived on until 1941 – were spared the anguish of seeing the destruction of their museum.

Paul Pelliot died of cancer in 1945, just two years after Stein, acknowledged not merely as France's foremost Chinese scholar but by all western sinologists as their master. 'Without him,' a French colleague wrote, 'sinology is left like an orphan.' That same year witnessed another death. Sir George Macartney, who was trapped by the war at his retirement home in German-occupied Jersey, died that May at the age of seventy-eight, just a few days after the German surrender.

Wang, the wily old Abbot of Tun-huang, had died long before, in 1931, and is buried close to his beloved caves. He ended his days an embittered man, aggrieved because he had been robbed of the money promised (and indeed sent to him) by the Government in compensation for the remaining Tun-huang manuscripts which belatedly it had had removed to Peking. Like so many of those manuscripts on their long journey eastwards, the money, in its turn, had been siphoned off *en route*, leaving nothing for Wang's restoration work. Perhaps Wang got the last laugh – if only from beyond the grave. During the 1940s, yet another cache of manuscripts which he had cunningly concealed from the authorities (with an eye no doubt for a rainy day) was discovered in the caves by Chinese

archaeologists. When Irene Vincent, an American art historian, visited Tun-huang in 1948 she heard rumours of manuscripts and paintings still 'cached away' in houses in the area, while as recently as 1977 a Swedish oriental bookseller was able to offer several Tun-huang manuscripts in his catalogue.

Today Wang's self-appointed guardianship of the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas has been taken over by the Chinese authorities, who have reinforced the crumbling cliff-face, treated the peeling frescoes, and discovered even earlier ones beneath many of them. Honour, it could be argued, has finally been satisfied. The funds which the authorities promised the old abbot for the restoration of his shrines have at last arrived. Tun-huang is saved.

There is little more to add. Sven Hedin, the man who began it all, outlived everyone who followed him except for Langdon Warner, who was some sixteen years his junior. A lonely and forgotten figure, the great Swedish explorer died in Stockholm in 1952 at the age of eighty-seven, surrounded by the mementoes of a long and remarkable life. Within three more years Warner, the last to enter the race and the only one who really lost it, was also dead.

Today the American would hardly recognise his 'long old road'. Monasteries and caravanserais have given way to communes and tractor plants. Modern highways link the oasis towns. A new road carries motor traffic over the Karakoram. Very occasionally from the heart of Marco Polo's demon-infested Desert of Lop is heard the distant thunder of a nuclear test. Even the Taklamakan, once the swallower of entire caravans and most dreaded of all deserts, has lost its terrors. Aircraft and satellites flush out its remaining secrets. Land reclamation schemes eat away at its edges. Chini-Bagh, so long the home of the Macartneys, has come down in the world. Today it is used as a hostel for long-distance lorry drivers, though its bathroom still has its British taps—and a lavatory called 'Victory'. But the end of that era, so rich in memories,

came in the summer of 1979. For that was when the first party of British tourists stepped down from their coach at the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, blinking in the fierce sunlight. The last shred of mystery and romance had finally gone from the Silk Road.