

THE “TURFAN FILES” IN THE MUSEUM OF ASIAN ART, BERLIN

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The so-called “Turfan Expeditions,” led by the German scholars Albert Grünwedel and Albert von Le Coq into the province of Xinjiang in China from 1902 to 1914, have supplied scholars with ample research material. More than 9,000 acquisition numbers in the former Museum of Ethnology (Museum für Völkerkunde) in Berlin register the finds of fragments of wall paintings, temple banners, and manuscripts as well as archaeological objects and other artifacts. But they also contain records that document the purchase of contemporary textiles, coins, and pottery from the local Muslim population.

These objects have been a source of scholarly studies for about one hundred years now. The result is a broad enlargement of our knowledge about Silk Road cultures, languages, and arts. Less well known, however, are the documentary materials of the expeditions themselves, which are today housed in the Museum of Asian Art (Museum für Asiatische Kunst) in Berlin.

The collection includes the preservation of about 500 photographs on glass negatives, which show places, people, and landscapes visited by the German scholars on their four expeditions before World War I. They feature rare depictions of working conditions on the sites as well as everyday life with the locals. As such, they are increasingly sought for scholarly research.

Less well known than the photographs, however, are the so-called “Turfan Files.” Containing 21 files consisting of 6,428 handwritten and printed pages, the Turfan Files document all kinds of activities related to the expeditions, such as scholarly results and preservation and display of objects in the museum. These papers have been scanned and will hopefully be available online sometime after the upcoming Humboldt Forum in 2022. On top of this, the newly augmented Cross Asia project of

the Berlin State Library will publish a database of the files. This article is intended to give researchers an introduction to the collection by offering a rough overview of the contents of these files.

Organization and Time Frame

Of the 21 files in the collection, the documents in files 1-15 and 17 were collected by the former Museum of Ethnology. Files 16 and 18-21 contain papers collected by the so-called Lokalkomitee zur Erforschung Zentralasiens (Local Committee for Exploring Central Asia), also known as the Turfan-Komitee. Though the Central Committee was based in St. Petersburg, after 1904 various “national committees” were also established in different European countries. The idea was to combine forces of research and build upon pre-existing multifarious Russian efforts in securing research material from Central Asia. The Berlin Local Committee maintained particularly close contact with the Central Committee in Russia and submitted applications to the Russian government for diplomatic permissions and visas. This was necessary because all four of the German expeditions traveled to Xinjiang through Russian territory and its railways. The German Turfan Committee at Berlin operated continuously until 1924, when all hopes for a fifth expedition were dashed, thus leading to the end of the committee’s work.

The Turfan Files

Der Akademiker Prof. Dr.
Radloff und Prof. Dr.
Salemann aus Petersburg
brachten gestern Proben
der im Turfan gefundenen
Höhlengemälde nach Berlin
(erner Handschriften und
Druckproben) welche sie
vom Congress in Rom vor-
legen wollen. Sie legen
nahe, ob eine Beteiligung
an einer größeren Expedition
der Akademie seitens der
preussischen Regierung
möglich sei und wünschten
im Notfalle eine wenigstens
wissenschaftliche Unterstützung
der Sache durch Hinweis
auf die Bedeutung der
ganzen Sache

26. Sept. 99. Grünwedel.

Fig. 1. Announcement of the visit on September 26, 1899 of the Russian scholars Wilhelm Radloff and Carl Salemann to the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin, with the aim of procuring the contribution of German colleagues to a large expedition to Chinese Central Asia. TA 029. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

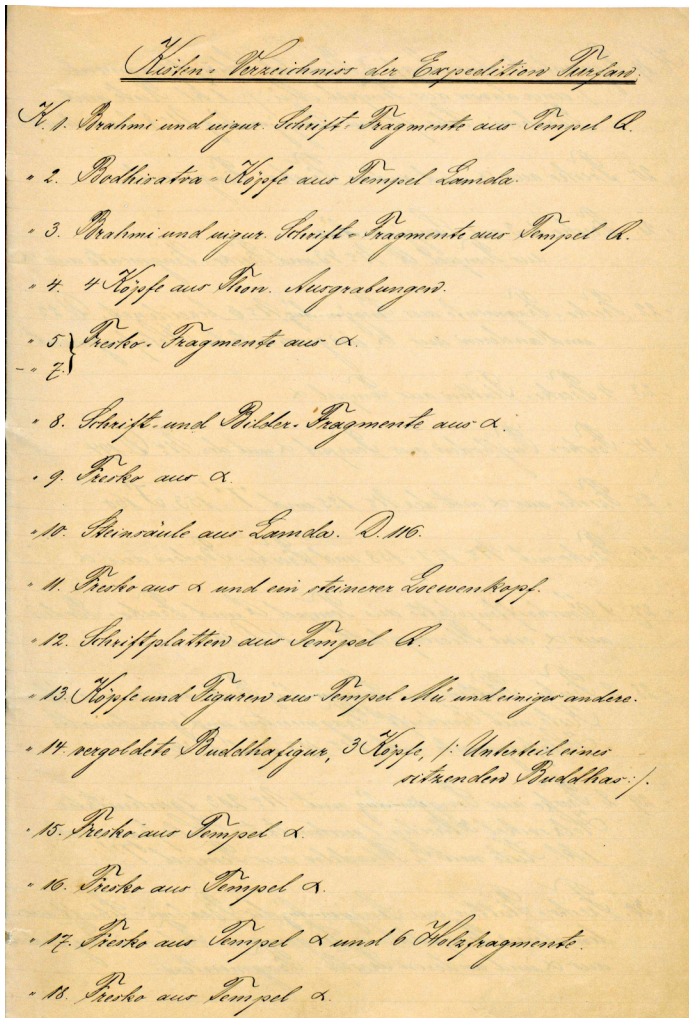
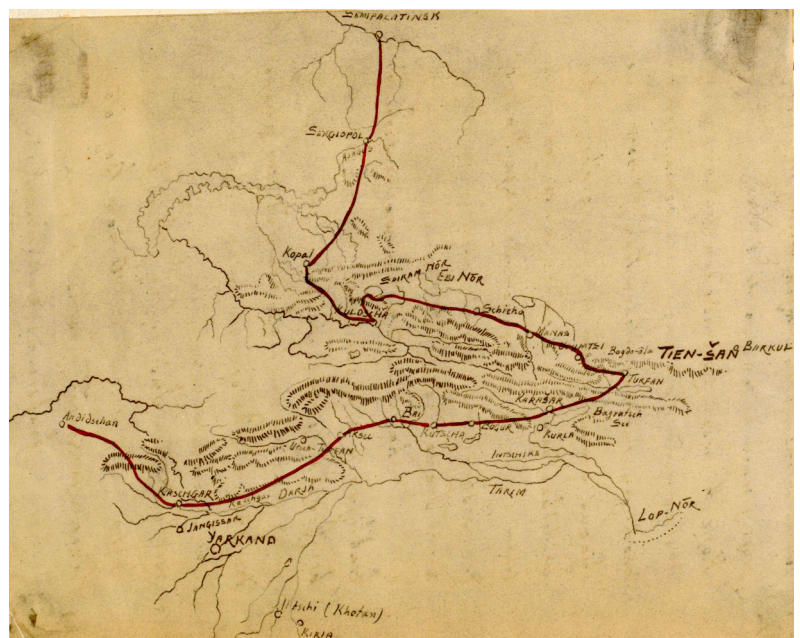


Fig. 2. First page of a list of finds transported to Berlin in 1903 with the return of Grünwedel's first expedition. TA 249. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

are part of the vast set of files that once belonged to the former Museum of Ethnology and are arranged according to their accession dates in the archives of that museum. Papers treating the same subject are registered under the accession date of the first letter of the subject heading, even if their dates are months apart. No other organizational scheme is followed: thus a personal letter may be followed by a bill or an estimate for museum furniture.

Documented is the period from 1899 to 1930, that is, between the earliest consideration of a German expedition to Central Asia and the year after the inauguration of the last exhibition rooms containing objects acquired in

Fig. 3. A draft of Grünwedel's route for the first expedition (1902-3) in Xinjiang, from the final report of his journey to the head office. TA 332. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.



Central Asia in the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin. The main reason for creating separate files apart from the general museum files were the four expeditions (1902-14) to Central Asia under the guidance of Albert Grünwedel and later Albert von Le Coq. Though there were also preparations for a fifth expedition under Albert Tafel during the interwar era, that expedition never materialized.

Contents of the Files

The difficult start of the first expedition is documented in detail, including the almost desperate attempts to gain support and funding for a journey into the heart of Asia that could lead to new discoveries. Albert Grünwedel and Georg Huth, a linguist and scholar of Buddhism, eventually managed to go on this first trip, accompanied by the technician Theodor Bartus. They were all supported by Russian colleagues who had expressed an earnest desire to join the party. All of these early activities are well documented by the applications and letters in the files. Also well documented is the return of the party with boxes full of new study material and the promise of fresh findings. It is exciting to read in how short a time F.W.K. Müller, a linguist and head of the Chinese Department at the museum, concluded that the enigmatic illuminated manuscripts in a Syriac script had been made by the followers of Mani.

While language experts were dealing with the textual remains, Grünwedel drew his maps and lobbied for the swift organization of a second

Zu dem Turfan Aeltern
 11/10/08
 Polu, Keriya District:
 abeoq
 gesehen. Grünwedel. Aug. 8, 1908.
 C. 62126
 108
 Hochgeachteter Herr,
 Ich komme erst jetzt
 knapp vor dem Aufbruch zu
 einer Gebirgsexpedition im Kun-
 lun dazu Ihnen für die freund-
 liche Zusendung Ihrer publica-
 tion über ein manichäisch-avghur
 fragment meinen besten Dank
 abzustatten. Ich empfang sie
 in Khotan, wo mich das Packen
 meiner Sammlungen durch lange
 Wochen beschäftigt hielt. Ohne
 Turkologe zu sein habe ich Ihre
 wichtigen Mittheilungen doch
 mit viel Interesse gelesen &
 erwünsche Ihnen Arbeiten erfolg-
 reich.
 Turfan 8

reichen Fortgang.
 Unter meinen MS. Funden
 vom Lop-nor & Tun-huang befin-
 det sich ziemlich viel Manichäisches
 Material, auch recht umfang-
 reiche Texte. Köh. turki scheint
 gleichfalls vertreten zu sein.
 Es freute mich im Herbst
 auf dem Rückweg via Hami-
 Turfan die Stätten Ihrer & Prof.
 Grünwedel's intensiver Thätigkeit
 kurzen Besuch abstatten & mir
 von den local-geographischen Ver-
 hältnissen persönlich einige Kennt-
 niss holen zu können. Falls mir
 die Aufarbeitung meiner Resultate
 ermöglicht wird, hoffe ich gegen
 Jahreschluss England zu erreichen.
 Mit dem Ausdruck aufrich-

liger Hochachtung grüßt Sie
 Ihr ergebener
 M. Aurel Stein

Fig. 4. Letter from Aurel Stein to Albert von Le Coq on August 8, 1908 thanking him for sending a publication and announcing his arrival in Turfan. TA 2394, 2395, 2395-1. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

expedition, certain that more knowledge and new discoveries could be unearthed. Even today we can read in the files the excitement with which the newly founded Turfan Committee carried out plans to send the Turkologist Albert von Le Coq to Turfan in order to find new manuscripts in the remains of ancient houses and temples at the site of Kocho. But the letters also show Grünwedel's dilemma: as head of the scholarly team, he should have consented immediately in returning to Cen-

tral Asia. But the first expedition had been hard on his physical health, and administrative obligations in the museum threatened to prevent him from embarking on a return journey. In addition, Grünwedel wanted to organize and publish his notes before leaving on another trip. He later became bitter about the excitement with which his colleagues pressed Le Coq to go, to the point even of risking their friendship with Russian colleagues by rushing to a place that had first been explored by them. Grünwedel insisted that Le Coq would be sent as the head of an advance party and would be in charge only until Grünwedel's arrival in Central Asia about a year later. The files name both Le Coq's initial solo activities and the joint excavations undertaken later by himself and Grünwedel after the latter's arrival (1906-7) as the "Second Turfan Expedition." After their return to Berlin, Le Coq and Grünwedel agreed to split the materials of this one lengthy expedition into two separate ones (1904-5 and 1906-7) for administrative purposes. As a result, the much later expedition of 1913-14,

Der Generalverwaltung der königlichen Museen
 gestatte ich mir ganz gehorsamt anzuzeigen,
 dass von der seit 27. November 1907 geschlossenen
 Indischen Abteilung im Laufe der nächsten
 Woche wieder die folgenden Säle dem
 Publikum zugänglich gemacht werden können
 Vorsaal: Turkistan
 1. Saal: Indien, mit Ausnahme zweier
 abgesperrter Stellen.
 2. Saal: Assam und Himalayaländer,
 3. Saal: Hinterindien.
 16. Dezember 1908.
 Grünwedel.

Fig. 5. Grünwedel's announcement to the General Director of Museums on December 16, 1908 regarding the reopening of three halls of the Indian Department, which had been closed for more than a year for storage and treatment of the finds of the second and third expeditions after their arrival in November 1907. TA 2440. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

which was undertaken by Le Coq, was called the fourth.

Interspersed between private letters from Central Asia and correspondence with colleagues concerning the transport of crates through Russia and work on their new archaeological finds, we frequently find letters to the head of the Turfan Committee, the director-general of the museums in Berlin, and the Ministry of Culture. These letters mostly concern the facilitation of travels and mail, customs, and permissions. They are accompanied by photographs, preliminary and printed reports, small articles, and other newspaper clippings that demonstrate the importance and international recognition of their expeditions. Preserved in these files are incoming letters, telegrams, and copies or drafts of outgoing letters.

There are documents such as passports and royal permissions to receive funds and accept medals. We also find expense estimates, receipts and money orders, bills for expedition equipment and final accounts, and payment receipts for laborers, photographers, and printers.

With the arrival of more than 200 crates from the second and third expeditions and another 150 crates from the fourth expedition, the files show a marked increase in notes concerning the mountings of wall paintings in metal frames, of bills for workers with gypsum and lac, of orders for carpenters to

build shelves and vitrines, and of orders for glass plates to frame manuscripts. There are also long lists of the measurements of objects to be curated, along with records of payment to various suppliers and workers.

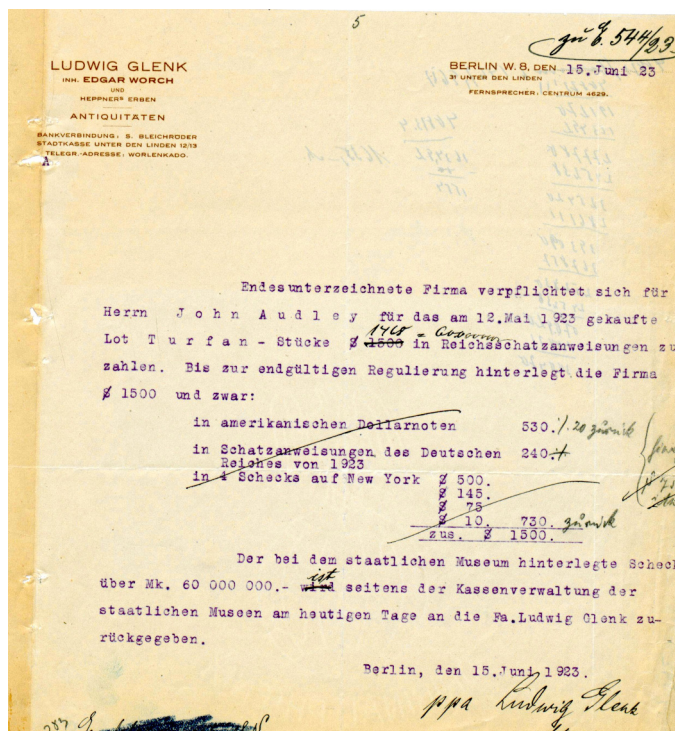
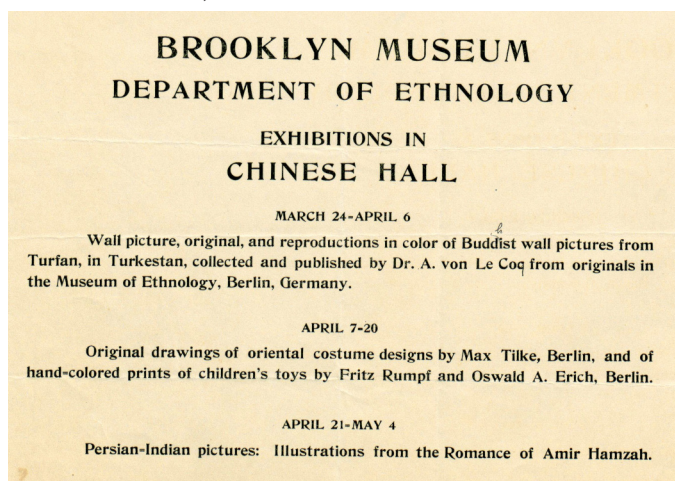


Fig. 6. Guarantee of antiquities dealer Ludwig Glenk, dated June 15, 1923, to pay \$1,468 for a collection of objects from Turfan that he purchased on behalf of John Audley on May 12, 1923. TA 4400. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

Fig. 7. Announcement on April 24, 1924 of a small exhibition of wall pictures (originals and reproductions) at the Brooklyn Museum. TA 4481. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.



The addition of more than 9,000 new objects, some quite large, into the museum's collection within just twelve years raised a new set of problems that are mirrored in the files. In short, the Museum of Ethnology, which had opened its new building in 1886 and held objects from all over the world, had almost no storage facilities and very limited personnel. As a result, in 1914 the Indian Department, which had overseen the Central Asian expeditions, asked for more space in the thirty-year-old building. A large portion of the papers after 1904 deal with the restructuring of col-

lections and the separation of instructive or historically important pieces of art from others that were considered of less importance for the general public. Plans for a new museum complex with addi-

tional space were shattered in 1918 with the German defeat in World War I. Work came almost to a standstill, scholars and employees had to make up for lost time spent in military service, and then the big recession of the 1920s eliminated all funds. The archival papers reveal the desperate attempts to keep work going. Because they were too old to serve in the military, Grünwedel and Le Coq remained

Rec 2 7 p.m. 13-7-13
局 報 電 國 中

17 發 鈔 報 來 8 20
Macaraneyn British Consul
Ceneral Kashgar am Bown
Infesdnal catareh with
blootnized discharges some
Alncause Ehposure To
Icy storm On 30
In Adll you Consult
ngbero as To whcker
am To Iry reach
Kashgar on Iry weathr
17 live fyod gnael frog
state diet greetings Lecog

Fig. 8. Telegram from Kucha to Kashgar July 13, 1913 requesting the assistance of British consul Sir George Macartney in procuring the medical aid of Dr. Högberg for Albert von le Coq. TA 5076. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

busy publishing their finds. But these hard times left their mark on them as well: each lost close relatives in the war and later their assets in the financial crisis. When Grünwedel retired in 1921, Le Coq was in the middle of publishing his multivolume *Die Buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien* (*Late Buddhist Antiquity in Central Asia*). In order to cover the cost of printing, he had to reallocate funds originally earmarked for the cancelled fifth expedition.

Because of the financial crisis, General Director Wilhelm von Bode ordered all museums to identify objects that could be sold to art dealers in exchange for gold currency. The Turfan Files have preserved these correspondences and thus show how some of the wall paintings found their way into American museums.

The Museum of Ethnology

The Turfan Files present a compelling picture of how a big museum with important objects worked in difficult times when funds were scarce. They

Telegraph (Despatched 8 a.m. on 14-7-13)
Koocha, German Traveller LeCoq

Your telegram dated eighth received mutilated today thirteenth. Much concerned at your illness. Högberg advises following treatment: move if possible to cool hill climate; lie in bed; compress on stomach; for diet, rice water, boiled milk, tea, red wine, almond emulsion in small quantities. Högberg thinks risky to travel to Kashgar in your condition. My Hospital Assistant leaving fourteenth for Koocha to attend you and bring you back to Kashgar, if you wish. If you recover soon and need not Hospital Assistant, please get Koocha Amoon to telegraph in Chinese to Aksu Taotai to stop him. Encourage Macartney.

N.B. The Hospital Assistant, who has been trained in India and speaks English, left with medicines for Koocha on the morning of July 14. 9 p.m.

Fig. 9. Macartney's telegraphic reply to Le Coq, dated July 14, 1913, informing him of the doctor's recommended diet and the dispatch of a medical assistant to Kucha. TA 5077. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

also show how dedicated employees planned for better days in the future by discussing solutions to intractable problems, writing applications for funding, and fighting for support for their work. It seems like a miracle that in 1923, Le Coq, then serving for a short time as curator of the Indian Department, eventually found such support from Wilhelm Wille, the director of construction for the museums, who took his side in convincing the head office and treasury of the museums to consent to an enlargement and refurbishing of exhibition space for the Indian and Central Asian objects. Thus did Grünwedel's and Le Coq's dream come true when in 1928 all objects that they had collected on their four expeditions (1902-14) in Xinjiang with the knowledge of the Chinese authorities go on display for the European public. While Chinese warlords and the Nationalists and Communist parties struggled for power in China, the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin opened an exceptional art show displaying the lost heritage of China's troubled far west.



Fig. 10. Front of the Museum of Ethnology, 1905. No catalog number. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

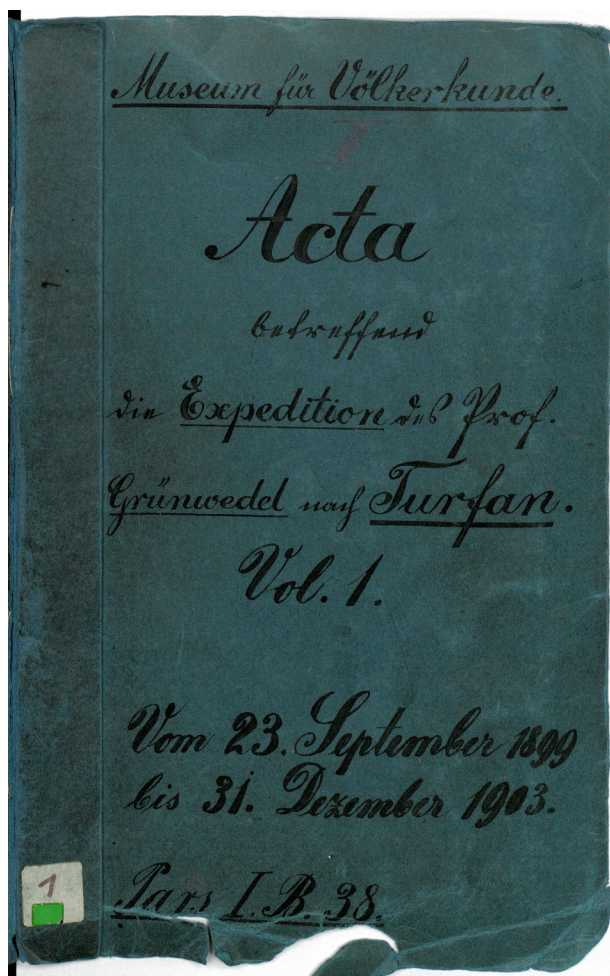


Fig. 11. Frontispiece of the first dossier of the Turfan Files, vol. 1, September 23, 1899 to December 31, 1903. TA 453. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.



Fig. 12. One of the large Buddhist wall paintings brought back to Berlin from Bezeklik by the second expedition in 1906 and assembled in Hall 10 of the Museum of Ethnology. This photograph, which was taken around 1932, shows curator Ernst Waldschmidt (right) and two Japanese visitors. These large paintings were destroyed during World War II. No catalog number. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.



Fig. 13. Photo of the entrance to the great ravine with the expedition house (a rented farmer's house) in front. Photo by Hermann Pohrt, 1906. B 1652. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

B1652

Aygul

The scholars in Berlin were proud of their museum and of the results of their research on the thousands of manuscript fragments that had been preserved since 1912 by the Oriental Commission of the Academy of Sciences in Berlin. Even before World War I, Berlin had already become a center of research for the northern Silk Road. With the resumption of scholarly activities in the 1920s and the opening of the new museum rooms—which highlighted magnificent Buddhist wall paintings—visitors from all over the world came to Berlin to view these exhibits.

Research

The Turfan Files bear frequent testimony to cooperation with national and international scholars. It was standard scholarly practice to share knowledge and information with

Fig. 14. Participants of the first expedition (1902-3) in Kocho (from left): Georg Huth, Albert Grünwedel, and Theodor Bar-tus. B 3054. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.



colleagues in their own field as well as experts in the natural sciences and even journalists. What we call networking today was a matter of professional habit in those days. Though such networking did not stop after Le Coq's death in 1930, the rise of National Socialism in Germany and the advent of World War II did put a damper on

further big plans for international research. That the Turfan Files were closed in 1930 suggests that, in the eyes of museum authorities, the handling of Central Asian objects and manuscripts ceased to be regarded as a priority.

After the destruction of World War II and losses of museum holdings through military confiscation and plundering, the Turfan Files suddenly became nearly the only first-hand source of information on the four expeditions, the formulation of scholarly

results after 1914, and conceptions of later conservation and exhibitions. Unfortunately, the diaries and logbooks of Georg Huth, Albert Grünwedel, Albert von Le Coq, and Hermann Pohrt, the chief expedition participants, are all lost. There must also have once been notes of measurements and observations that the scholars drew upon for their publications. In the early 1940s, Ernst Waldschmidt mentioned the many copy books containing the notes of Theodor Bartus, the technician that accompanied all four expeditions, as still extant. We are very fortunate that Grünwedel managed to publish his archaeological observations; otherwise we would know far less about archaeological sites in the Kucha oasis and the Turfan area. The Turfan Files fill part of that gap and supply us with all kinds of information concerning the history of science in Central Asia, German museums, and the history of archaeological expeditions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caren Dreyer works in the Central Asian Collection in the Museum of Asian Art (formerly Museum of Indian Art) in Berlin. She studied Indian philology, Indian art history, and Tibetology in Berlin and Hamburg, with a Ph.D. in Indian philology. She now specializes in the expedition history and archival materials of the four German expeditions (1902-14) to Turfan and Kucha. She is the author of several books and articles, most recently *Abenteuer Seidenstrasse – Die Berliner Turfan-Expeditionen 1902-14* (Leipzig, 2015), which has also been translated into Chinese as *丝路探险：1902-1914 年德国考察队吐鲁番行记*. E-mail: <mail@caren-dreyer.de>.