

An English Boy in Chinese Turkestan: The Story of Orlando Hobbs

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During the first decades of the 20th century, Chinese Central Asia became the scene for archaeological enterprises led by foreign explorers and scholars. Besides exploration carried out by leading European powers, the Japanese also joined the race for antiquities with a series of ambitious expeditions organized by Count Ōtani Kōzui 大谷光瑞 (1876–1948), the head of one of Japan's largest Buddhist organizations. The last of these expeditions was lead by a young monk called Tachibana Zuichō 橘瑞超 (1890–1968), coming to Central Asia from London with a 16-year old English assistant, Orlando Hobbs (1894–1911). Within a few months of their arrival, however, Hobbs contracted smallpox and died. Although practically nothing was known about who this teenage boy was and where he came from, the accidental discovery of his *alma mater* in the town of Swindon (Wiltshire) made it possible to locate some unknown material related to the expedition. This paper presents this material and points out its significance for the study of the history of Japanese exploration of Central Asia. In addition, Hobbs' background provides a glimpse of the human side of these events.

1 *Tachibana and the Ōtani Expeditions*

The 'Great Game' played between Britain and Russia for dominance over Central Asia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries is a fascinating episode in modern history. One of the last regions where British and Russian interests

clashed was China's westernmost province of Xinjiang 新疆 ('New Dominion'),¹ at the time commonly known in Western literature as Chinese Turkestan. This vast area with high mountain ranges, the Taklamakan Desert and a loose chain of oasis cities along its perimeter, was nominally under the rule of the waning Qing dynasty (1644–1911) but the imminent collapse of the empire left few resources for exercising actual control. This was yet another reason why the region was becoming a strategic target of both British and Russian colonial aspirations, ostensibly in an effort to protect their own domains against the expansion of the other. There is a recurrent theme in contemporary English literature on Central Asia and Tibet that British India was increasingly threatened by Russian military expansion. It is of course no coincidence that these two empires were also the nations that contributed most to the exploration of the Silk Road—the colonial motivation of geographical exploration and Orientalism is a subject that has inspired a host of studies in the past decades.²

In addition to the geographical interests that dominated the 19th century, the early years of the new century were characterized by a cultural and archaeological direction with a focus on the ancient Buddhist cultures that had once inhabited this part of Central Asia. The expeditions by Sir M. Aurel Stein (1862–1943), Albert von Le Coq (1860–1930), Albert Grünwedel (1856–1935), Sergei F. Oldenburg (1863–1934), Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) and others acquired a wealth of archaeological material, including medieval manuscripts written in different languages. Beside European explorers, other early foreign participants in the race for antiquities were the Japanese. Count Ōtani Kōzui, the 22nd Abbot of the Nishi Honganji 西本願寺 branch of the Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 sect of Buddhism, organized and sponsored three expeditions between 1902 and 1914. As a hereditary heir to the abbotship of a large religious organization with over ten million believers, Ōtani had both the resources and the motivation for exploring the remnants of Buddhist civilizations along the Silk Road. He felt, with good reason, that his own religious and cultural background made him

1 Although Xinjiang used to be a province, today it is designated as an autonomous region.

2 An interesting addition to this is that not only colonial powers were interested in exploration. Tuska Benes gives a compelling account of how German intellectual interest in the Orient was motivated by national self-definition and the desire to locate the original homeland of Germanic tribes in Central Asia. At the same time, many of the early German Orientalists went into Russian service to explore the languages and cultures of newly acquired territories. See Tuska Benes, »Comparative Linguistics as Ethnology: In Search of Indo-Germans in Central Asia, 1770–1830«, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24,2 (2004), 117–132.

particularly suitable for such a task, even if the archaeological expertise of his team fell behind that of his European competitors.

From 1900, Ōtani spent two years in London and other parts of Europe, studying the religious infrastructure of Western countries. When it was finally time to go home, he decided to return to Japan by the overland route through Central Asia and take part in the exploration of the region. This was in part due to the influence of Aurel Stein, who had just returned from his first trip to Khotan (1900–01) and already published a preliminary report of his journey and was quickly becoming a famed explorer in England. Ōtani left London in August 1902 with a small group of followers. They traveled to St. Petersburg and from there farther on to Western China. This was the first expedition (1902–04) which was partially completed without Ōtani, who had to return to Japan early because of his father's death. Four years later, he directed the second expedition (1908–09) remotely from his headquarters in Kyōto and his private retreat at a luxurious villa above the Bay of Kōbe. The team on the ground consisted of the 18-year old Buddhist monk Tachibana Zuichō as the leader and the older Nomura Eizaburō 野村栄三郎 (1880–1936) who, although not part of the clergy himself, grew up partially within the Nishi Honganji Temple and was a devoted follower of Ōtani. The two of them traveled through Mongolia and entered Xinjiang from the north. They carried out excavations at sites around Turfan, then split up and went along different routes, eventually meeting up in Kashgar. Here they ran into trouble with Captain Shuttleworth, the acting British consul, who, as a result of allegations communicated to him by the Russian consul, gradually became convinced that the Japanese men were spies.³ The implications of this did not become apparent until a few months later after the two of them had traveled to India; Nomura wanted to return to China for the spoils of the expedition that had been deposited at the British consulate. The Indian government denied him permission to cross the border and thus he was unable to re-enter Xinjiang.⁴

According to the original plan, Tachibana and Nomura made the long journey to India in order to meet with Ōtani, who was spending a couple of months there before visiting Europe the second time. He was traveling to London to attend the Japan-British Exhibition of 1910, which was going to be

3 Captain Allen R. B. Shuttleworth was temporarily replacing George Macartney, who at the time was on leave in Britain.

4 On the circumstances and consequences of this incident, see Imre Galambos, »Japanese “Spies” Along the Silk Road: British Suspicions Regarding the second Ōtani Expedition (1908–09)«, *Japanese Religions* 35 (2010, 1–2), 33–61.

held at Shepherd's Bush. No doubt the visit was also important for publicizing the results of his expeditions, and he planned to take Tachibana along and introduce him to learned societies in Europe. Since Tachibana had found in Xinjiang some extremely valuable manuscripts, including a series of administrative letters dating to the first half of the 4th century, he was well-known in Orientalist circles before arriving in London. Nomura, the other member of the expedition, was to go back to Kashgar, pick up their baggage from the British consulate, and travel to China's coast and take a boat to Japan. The Indian government's refusal to give him permission to cross the border made this impossible and Ōtani instructed him to return to Japan by boat directly from India without the baggage. Instead, a new plan was formulated: as they could not re-enter Xinjiang from the south, they decided to approach it through Russian territory. A new team was assembled that would travel from London to St. Petersburg, and farther on to Central Asia. Someone, however, must have leaked to Ōtani that the Indian government suspected his followers of espionage and this was the reason why Nomura was not allowed to cross the border. Ōtani realized that he had to modify the plan to address the problem; otherwise this new expedition would not be successful either. First, he abandoned the idea of an all-Japanese team. Instead, he decided to send only Tachibana, who was becoming a celebrated explorer and was even elected member of the Royal Geographical Society. In addition, to de-emphasize the Japanese nature of the expedition, Ōtani decided to hire an English and a Russian member (but not scholars and famous explorers, who could potentially become difficult to work with) as young assistants to follow Tachibana's instructions.

2 *The Fatal Expedition*

The English assistant was the 16-year old Orlando Hobbs, fresh out of school. Most of what we have known about him so far is based on Tachibana's accounts, which he published after he returned to Japan in 1912.⁵ According to this account, the young Englishman was hired through a classified ad in a London newspaper. The expedition left London in mid-August 1910. Hobbs left a few days earlier on

5 For Tachibana's account of his travels with Hobbs, see Imre Galambos, »An English Participant in the Japanese Exploration of Central Asia: The Role of A. O. Hobbs in the Third Otani Expedition«, in *Russian Expeditions to Central Asia at the Turn of the 20th Century*, ed. by Irina F. Popova (St. Petersburg: Slavia, 2008), 188–202. In the present article, I do not repeat the details of what has been retold there and only summarize some of the main events.

a boat to St. Petersburg with most of their baggage. Tachibana took the train and stopped on the way in Berlin to see the German explorer Le Coq. After reuniting in St. Petersburg, they hired the third 'member' of the expedition, a 17-year old Russian boy who was expected to work as their interpreter. Before reaching the Chinese border, however, they had to let him go because they realized that although he spoke Russian perfectly well with everyone around them, he had no way of communicating with his employer. A monolingual interpreter was but a liability. Thus, by the time they arrived in Chinese Turkestan, the team was once again down to two people. First they stopped at the provincial capital Urumchi and then began excavations near Turfan. Here the two of them split up as Tachibana wanted to survey the unmapped regions of the Taklamakan and explore the vicinity of Loulan 樓蘭, where he had found those 4th-century manuscript fragments on his previous trip. In an effort to look after Hobbs, he decided to leave him out of this obviously dangerous enterprise and instead sent him with their baggage westward to the city of Kucha to wait for his return. This was in early December 1910.

However, by the time Tachibana reached Kucha (after nearly three months of extensive desert exploration) Hobbs had died of smallpox and his body had been sent to Kashgar on the request of the British consul, George Macartney (1867–1945). Tachibana rushed to Kashgar and arrived there just in time for the funeral, which took place on March 21, 1911. After this, Tachibana mailed Hobbs' salary and personal items to »his family in Wales«. He also paid for a tombstone for the grave.

The consular diaries of Macartney describe the tragic death of Hobbs in brief statements.⁶ We learn from these that on January 13, 1911, the young man, after realizing that he was in serious trouble, but apparently unaware of the nature of his malady, had sent a telegram to the consul asking for help. The same day the British *aksakal* in Kucha also sent a telegram to Macartney, informing him that a British traveler by the name of A. O. Hobbs had contracted smallpox. Macartney immediately dispatched his Indian hospital assistant to Kucha and telegraphed the boy about it. But within a couple of days he received another telegram, this time from the Chinese authorities in Kucha, saying that the young man had died on January 15. Macartney made arrangements for the body to be brought to Kashgar where a proper burial could be arranged.⁷

6 These documents, also known as the »Kashgar diaries«, are part of the Political and Secret Files of the India Office Records, and are kept today at the British Library.

7 The local Chinese archives also mention Hobbs (written as »Haobusu« 好不蘇) while reporting on Tachibana's movements in the province, but provide little additional information to the

This is what has been known to us so far about Hobbs and his participation in the third Ōtani expedition. Curiously, his name is more known in Japan than in his homeland, as most of the information about him comes from Tachibana's accounts of his journey. The only mention of him in his homeland that was possible to track down is a short quote allegedly taken from the *Lloyd's Weekly News*, where he is referred to as being from Swindon and superintending excavations near Turfan. He describes the wall paintings in the caves, saying that »half way up the rock of the walls and ceilings of the caves are covered with remarkably preserved paintings of Buddha.«⁸ Although I could not locate the original story in the said issue of the newspaper, it was the fact that Hobbs was identified as coming from Swindon that eventually allowed him to be traced further.

The first obvious place to look was a genealogical database, and this helped to locate his family.⁹ It turned out that the initials A. O. in his name used in the consular reports stood for Alfred Orlando. The England Census records of 1881, 1891 and 1901 document the family during these three decades. According to these records, he was born in Swindon, Wiltshire, on January 24, 1894. His father, Thomas Hobbs, was a butcher who had married a Swiss woman by the name of Emma L. Together they had six children and of these Orlando was the youngest. The father died early, when Orlando was very small, and his mother—by then a naturalized British citizen and a widow with two adult and four smaller children—operated a post office at Westcott Place in Swindon.¹⁰

The next piece of information came from newspaper archives. When the National Library of Singapore digitized part of their newspaper holdings, and

story. A report from March 14, 1911, for example, tells us that Hobbs passed away due to smallpox shortly after arriving in Kucha and that his body had been sent to the British consulate, along with all of his baggage and possessions. See *Jindai waiguo tanxianjia Xinjiang kaogu dang'an shiliao* 近代外國探險家新疆考古檔案史料 [Archival and Historical Material About Early Modern Foreign Explorers Doing Archeological Research in Xinjiang], ed. by Zhongguo Xinjiang Weiwu'er zizhiqu dang'anguan 中國新疆維吾爾自治區檔案館, Riben Fojiao daxue Niya yizhi xueshu yanjiu jigou 日本佛教大學尼雅遺址學術研究機構 (Ürümqi: Xinjiang meishu sheying chubanshe, 2001), 229.

8 Quoted in James McKay, *The Origin of the Xosas and Others* (Cape Town: J. C. Juta, 1911), 60. According to the book, the story appeared in the January 1 (1911) issue of the *Lloyd's Weekly News*, but I have not been able to find it there even though I leafed through that issue and the ones before and after it.

9 This database is <ancestry.co.uk>.

10 This post office existed until recently but is now a stationery shop.

these became indexed in major search engines, the name of »Hobbs from Swindon« came up in a short notice in *The Weekly Sun*. This article, titled Boy Explorer: English Lad of Sixteen Excavating in Mongolian Desert was presumably taken over from an English paper (possibly the *Lloyd's Weekly News*) and was based on a letter Hobbs had written to his mother. The story also describes some of the circumstances of how the young man became involved in the Japanese expedition: »When at the beginning of the year Mr. Hobbs left the Swindon and North Wilts Technical School, he advertised for a situation, adding travelling was not objected to. This brought a reply from Mr. Tachibana, and when Hobbs was asked if he would care to go to Central Asia, he replied, with a beaming face: »Well, I would rather like the chance.«¹¹

Fortunately, the archives of Hobbs' school are accessible at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham, a wonderful new facility frequented by genealogy enthusiasts.¹² The school files tell us that young Orlando entered the school in September 1907 and graduated at the end of June 1910. After graduation, he became an assistant to an explorer and died in Chinese Turkestan in January 1911. But the most important part of the material related to the school is the copies of the school's newsletter, called *The Swindonian*. The summer and autumn issues of the 1911 volume published two letters related to Hobbs' experiences and death. Both letters were provided by Hobbs' mother. The first one is from Theodora Macartney, the wife of the British consul in Kashgar, informing her about the death of her son. The other is an earlier one from Hobbs himself, while he was still well and healthy and overseeing the excavations near Turfan. Both of the letters are of interest and contain new information; thus they are reproduced here in full.

In addition, the Autumn 1911 issue of *The Swindonian* also contains two photographs about the funeral that took place in the newly designated English Cemetery where Hobbs was the first person to be buried. These photographs are important documents of the life of the foreign community in Kashgar, of

11 *Weekly Sun* (Jan 28, 1911), 7. Another press notice from the newspaper database of the National Library of New Zealand gives a much shorter description of the same story: »Boy among the Mongols: Asiatic Adventures of an English Lad«, *Hawera & Normanby Star* (Thursday, Feb 23, 1911), 2.

12 I visited the archives in Chippenham in September 2010. I would like to thank the staff there for their help and efficiency in locating material related to my research.

which we know relatively little.¹³ The first photograph, *The Arrival of the Coffin* (Plate 1), shows a number of native Muslims—possibly British subjects—near the coffin. The second photograph, «The funeral ceremony» (Plate 2), also shows a number of foreigners standing a bit farther and listening to someone who, according to Lady Macartney's letter, must be the Swedish missionary Mr. Myström. George Macartney is seen half-covered (4th from the right) in the background. On the extreme right, we see a thin slice of Tachibana as he stands with a hat and walking stick in his hand. In the foreground, the woman in a hat is probably Lady Macartney, although it is impossible to positively identify her from this angle.



Plate 1

Funeral of O. Hobbs at Kashgar. The arrival of the coffin
(Courtesy of Swindon Collection, Central Library).¹⁴

¹³ The summer 1912 issue of *The Swindonian* contains an editor's note, informing the readers that »the photographs of the funeral of O. Hobbs, published in the «Swindonian» last Autumn, were taken by Miss Annie Cresswell, of South-Lincolnshire, and now residing at Bexhill-on-Sea.«

¹⁴ I am grateful to Darryl Moody of the Swindon Collection, Central Library (Swindon) for providing large scans of these two photographs from their copies of *The Swindonian*. The captions here are the original ones as published in the newsletter.



Plate 2

*Funeral of O. Hobbs at Kashgar. The funeral ceremony
(Courtesy of Swindon Collection, Central Library).*

Hobbs' grave seems to have disappeared since then or at least cannot be identified anymore. Most likely the entire cemetery ground was demolished in the wave of construction that accompanied the expansion of the Kashgar's population. Yet a photograph of Hobbs' grave was taken only three years after the funeral by Yoshikawa Koichirō 吉川小一郎, the new member of the same expedition, who came to relieve Tachibana in 1912. According to his diary, he visited Hobbs' grave outside the northern gates of the town and this is where he took the photograph (Plate 3).

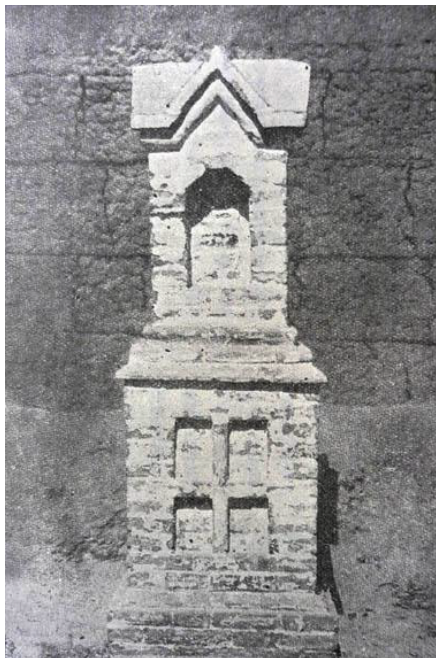


Plate 3

*Hobbs' grave in the British consular cemetery
outside the northern gates of Kashgar.*

*Photo taken by Yoshikawa Koichirō
on July 8, 1913.¹⁵*

3 Letter from Lady Macartney

Lady Macartney is primarily known to us from the book *An English lady in Chinese Turkestan*, which she had written about her and her family's life in Kashgar and their journey to and from there. She also appears in some of the travel accounts by explorers or visitors who had passed through Kashgar and stayed at their home in Chini Bagh, the consular residence. This letter documents how a tragic event like this was handled by the consulate and the resident foreigners in this remote region. At the same time, the compassion and sympathy conveyed in the letter shows the unusual nature of this incident, since the deceased person was so young. This would have also been the reason why Macartney's wife wrote this

15 Uehara Yoshitarō 上原芳太郎, *Shin Saiiki-ki* 新西域記 [New Record of the Western Regions] (Tōkyō: Yūkōsha, 1937), 668.

letter rather than Macartney himself. We also learn about the establishment of an English cemetery, a detail not mentioned elsewhere.¹⁶

British Consulate,^[17]

Kashgar, via Osch, Fergana, Russia

March 22, 1911

My Dear Madam,

I am the wife of the British Consul General at Kashgar, and I am taking the liberty of writing to you, as yesterday we buried the remains of your dear son, who died at Kutcha in January. May I offer you our most sincere condolences and sympathy in your sad loss. I thought, perhaps, you would like to hear about your son's funeral and that we did our best in this out of the way place to give him a Christian Burial. The coffin only arrived the day before yesterday. We had already acquired a piece of ground from the Chinese, a corner of their own graveyard, which will be enclosed now as an English Cemetery. We covered the coffin with a black cloth to hide the bare wood, and as there were no flowers, and not even a bit of greenery to be found, we could only put a white cross on the black. At 3.30 the Russian Consul and his Secretary and some Swedish Missionaries, Mr. Tachibana, the Jap, with whom your son was travelling, our Consulate Staff, and a number of British Subjects met at the graveyard. My husband read the lesson from I. Cor. xv., and Mr. Myström, one of the Missionaries, read the rest of the Burial Service from the Prayer Book. I am sure the sympathy and prayers of all present went out for you far away in England. Although, of course, your son was unknown to us personally, we have all felt the sadness of his death very keenly.

On the 13th January my husband received a telegram from him asking for medical help and describing his symptoms, which we at once recognised as smallpox—a disease that is very prevalent in this country. Our Indian Hospital Assistant started at once for Kutcha, which is nearly three weeks' journey from here. But two days after another telegram came to say that he had passed away. My husband insisted on the coffin being brought here together with his belongings, as in Kutcha there are no Europeans whatever, and there would have been great difficulty to get either the Chinese or Natives to give it a place in their burying grounds, and we should never

¹⁶ Yoshikawa Koichirō mentions in his diary that it was outside the northern gates of the town (Galambos, »An English Participant in the Japanese Exploration of Central Asia«, 199).

¹⁷ *The Swindonian: The Magazine of the Swindon Secondary School, Past and Present*, New Series 1,7 (Summer Term 1911), 97–98. The letters are presented here in their original orthography, even when it spells proper names in a non-standard way.

have known how it had been treated. Mr. Hunter, a Missionary from Urumchi,¹⁸ who was staying here with us at the time we received the sad news, met the cart with the coffin at Aksu on his return journey, and turned and followed it some distance, he said, with a very sorrowful heart and many prayers for Mr. Hobbs' family at home. And at Kutcha he went to the room in which your son died, and said it was a comfort to him to see his Bible lying there, which evidently had been used to the end. He told us, too, how there was one Chinese Telegraph Official who visited your son several times, as he was the only man there who could speak any English. Mr. Tachibana came back immediately he heard of his death, and has now come here with his belongings.

I enclose two photos we took yesterday, we thought perhaps you might like to have them. I don't know whether you would like anything erected over the grave. It would be impossible, I am afraid, to send out anything from home; but we could, if you would care for it, get a large slab of granite from the mountains when we go up to our hill station in July and have an inscription cut into it. Anything of wood or iron, etc. would be stolen at once. The only thing is a slab of stone too heavy for anyone to move. I am afraid the reading of this will be very painful to you, but I felt that all the same you would like to know what I could tell you. Again assuring you of our deepest sympathy,

I remain, your sincerely,
Theodora Macartney

4 *Letter from Hobbs*

The second letter appeared in the next (autumn) issue of *The Swindonian*, although it was actually the earlier one, written by Hobbs himself shortly after separating from Tachibana. Apparently, he had written other letters but this is the only one we have today. The editors seem to have left out parts of it—presumably the less interesting ones—in order to limit the length of the text. What makes this letter interesting is that it provides some details about the expedition which we do not know from other sources. Unfortunately, Tachibana

18 George W. Hunter (1862–1946) was a Scottish missionary with the China Inland Mission, who had been working in Xinjiang since 1906. He habitually features in the Kashgar diaries of the British Consulate as a source of information. For a short biography of Hunter, especially on his role as a missionary, see Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *George Hunter: Apostle of Turkestan* (London: China Inland Mission, 1948).

only published some brief and highly popularized accounts of this journey and the more detailed scientific report that had been planned never came out.¹⁹ In addition, most of the documentation related to the expedition was later destroyed by fire when his family temple in Nagoya burned down. Thus, we have little information about the details of this expedition and the circumstances of where and how many objects were found remain unclear.

The letter is reproduced here in the form it came out in the school newsletter, including the introductory remarks of the editors. Because it is rather long, I occasionally interrupt it with notes and comments, in order to provide some background information about places, names and events mentioned in the text, or to draw attention to the significance of particular passages.

Life in Chinese Turkestan^[20]

(By the late Orlando Hobbs, 1907 Class)

Our readers will remember that in our last issue we published a letter from the wife of the British Consul at Kashgar conveying the melancholy news of the death of Orlando Hobbs from smallpox while acting as an officer of an exploring party in Chinese Turkestan. We publish in this issue the two photographs which accompanied that letter, but which we were unable to publish at the time. For an explanation of them reference must be made to the last issue, page 97. On the extreme right of No. 2 Mr. Tachibana, who took Hobbs to the East, can just be seen.

Before going out Hobbs promised to send an occasional account of his experiences for publication in The Swindonian, and by the further kindness of his mother we are now permitted to publish the following most interesting extracts from the last letter which he sent home: —

. In my last letter I started with a tale of woe. That tale is finished now; my health is good, as after I wrote that letter I visited a Russian doctor, and

19 Tachibana's main account of this journey came out as a popular book under the title *Chūa tanken* 中亚探検 (Tōkyō: Hakubunkan, 1912). In addition, there are several smaller writings (speeches and letters) related to the expedition, but no detailed report. The reason for this was that in 1914 Ōtani was forced to resign from his position and left Japan to live in China and Southeast Asia, and the archaeological collection became dispersed.

20 *The Swindonian: The Magazine of the Swindon Secondary School, Past and Present* New Series 1,8 (Autumn Term 1911), 97–98.

after about an hour made him understand what was the matter, and received some medicine which set me right. At Semipalatinsk we did seven days journey by post cart to Chugy Chack,^[21] from there on horseback 18 days average 40 miles per day, stopping at two large towns Seafor and Manass two days, making a fortnight riding, covering a distance of 560 miles—quite a long distance in riding, the same horses carrying us all the way. We shall start from here as soon as we can buy camels for our baggage, and go to Turfan (Chinese Turkestan), where, if I am well, I shall accompany Mr. Tachibana on his desert journey to Kashgar and back, lasting about three or four months; if not, I shall stay at Turfan and superintend excavations, and he will go alone. At Chugy Chack we visited two Chinese Mandarins. They are important persons. When you visit a Chinese Mandarin you have tea, rice cakes, sweets, and all manner of things offered you. When a Chinese Mandarin visits you, he sends one of his servants on, about 10 minutes before he arrives, with his card. He comes in a small cart with an escort of soldiers. At Chugy Chack we stayed at a Turkish Hotel. Everything was very comfortable, but the price was dear for China; 10 roubles a day, equal to £1 1s. 6d. At Urumutch,^[22] which is the capital of Chinese Turkestan, we are important persons. Of course I visit with Mr. Tachibana. I am introduced as his assistant, and I am treated the same as he is. I do nothing for him; the Chinese servants do everything. Of course occasionally there are things which Chinese are not trusted to do, and I do them. I take my meals with him, do what I like, and have what I like. I order the Chinese servants, of course by sign.

At Urumutch we visited a Chinese prince named Tsai-lan. He was one of the leading princes who tried to stop foreigners from entering China. Naturally, when he failed he left Peking and came to live at Urumutch. His reception rooms are very nice, in fact exactly like European, with nice chairs, beautiful ornaments on the table, English cigarettes, and Russian tea glasses, with the holders of silver. Of course, we had tea and all the rest of the luxuries. He takes photos very well; he took Mr. Tachibana and myself, and he has given us two, one each. He also gave us a photo of himself, and some views of the district around. The next one we visited was the Provincial Treasurer, and old friend of Mr. Tachibana; he is an important person in the district. When he visited us he had an escort of 20 soldiers. Another one we visited was the District Governor, another important person; tea and cakes at every place.

21 Chugy Chack is modern-day Tacheng 塔城, a crossing point on the Chinese-Kazakh border, commonly referred to in the Western literature of the time by its Uighur name, Chuguchak.

22 This is an idiosyncratic way of spelling Urumchi (or Ürümqi), which at the time was called in Chinese Dihua 迪化 (also, Tì-hua or Tihwa).

Prince Tsai-lan, or Zailan 載瀾 (1856–1916), was a grandson of Emperor Daoguang 道光 (*reg* 1820–1850), and had been banished to Xinjiang because of his prominent participation in the Boxer Rebellion. George Ernest Morrison (1862–1920), the well-known Australian traveler and correspondent for *The Times*, also visited the prince in Urumchi about the same time as Tachibana and Hobbs. We know from his correspondence that the prince sought Morrison's help to return to the capital.²³ After the revolution, he was finally able to leave Xinjiang and settled in Manchuria until his death in 1916.

The Chinese Hotels are very dirty; the paper on the wall is black, the walls are of mud, the floor is mud, in fact all the houses are built of mud. One room for two persons has to serve as bed and sitting room; in fact I cannot describe a Chinese hotel by writing, as it is beyond all recognition as a hotel. Everything is so entirely different from what one sees in England. At Urumutch we were invited by two Chinese officials to take dinner. Of course I use chop-sticks. Mr. Tachibana says I use them like the Japanese, and they are very skilful with them. Well, at one place we had 20 different dishes, four dishes on the table at a time; at the other 36 different dishes, the dinner lasting two hours, all manner of food. I will send the photo I spoke of home later, as it is locked away At Turfan every day I go to superintend excavations, sometimes as many as nine labourers or »ketmen«, as they are called here. Every day I return with a dozen or so pieces of manuscript, about two inches square, written either in Chinese or Wigole, which is a mixture of Chinese and Turkish, a language not spoken now. At Urumutch the Provincial Treasurer had some very valuable documents in the dead language, similar to those excavated by Mr. Tachibana. At Turfan I have excavated, or there have been excavated while I superintended, old Chinese coins from before the time of Christ, and heads of Buddhas in perfect preservation. The ruins are about 2,000 years old, and are three miles in circumference. Along a ravine are six caves half way up the rock, and in two of them the walls and ceilings are covered with paintings of Buddhas on plaster. Some are perfect in preservation. Mr. Tachibana visited these caves on his last journey.

The site described here is most likely the ruins of the ancient city of Yarkhoto (Jiaohe 交河) about 10 km to the west of Turfan. The ruins are located on a high plateau which is an islet between two spreading branches of a river. The entire city is about a mile long, thus the three-mile circumference is more or less

23 George Ernest Morrison and Hui-Min Lo, *The Correspondence of G. E. Morrison*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976–78), 2: 491 n2.

accurate. The caves are not part of the city ruins but are carved into the loess wall of the southwestern river bank. In reality, there are seven of them, although it is possible that at the time of their visit the entrance to one of them was obstructed. Yet as all seven caves are clearly visible in Le Coq's photograph, presumably taken during the second German Turfan expedition in 1904,²⁴ it is also possible that Hobbs is simply mistaken.

The word »ketmen« used in the text to refer to workers, means »hoe« in Uighur. This must have been what locals called the diggers who were occasionally hired to help with excavations. The fact that Hobbs had up to nine people working with him on the site shows the scale of the project, a fact often overlooked. The »Wigole« language the letter mentions is Uighur which is, of course, a Turkic language and not related to Chinese. But the multitude of small manuscript fragments written either in Chinese or Uighur is an important part of the material that became known later as the Ōtani collection. The largest number of these are held today at the Lüshun 旅順 Museum in Port Arthur, the city where Ōtani lived for some time during the second half of the 1920s. But a number of fragments from Tachibana's expeditions have also been rediscovered recently. In light of this, it is possible that some of the fragments that are in Lüshun or the newly resurfaced ones were excavated by Hobbs at Yarkhoto.

Mr. Tachibana will leave Turfan at the beginning of December for a desert journey to Kashgar and back again. I shall be left with a Chinese servant for four months on my own; rather rotten, but I must stick it. By the time you receive this letter I shall be in the thick of it. Now for the most important thing of all, about receiving letters. I am enclosing an addressed envelope, which if registered will most probably reach me. All letters sent must be registered. When I receive your letter I will answer it, and enclose an addressed envelope, as part of the address has to be written in Chinese. I hope you are quite well. You must keep well, because when we get back to England, which if all goes well will be early in 1912, Mr. Tachibana says he will visit Swindon, and wishes to see you. If we have time when we reach London after visiting all friends he will come to Swindon, but not stay long. He also talks about making an expedition in Arabia and Persia on his way back to Japan, but this is not certain, as the Count must sanction this.

We know nothing about a planned Persian and Arabian expedition. Of course, almost nothing went the way it had been planned and the following months were to be disastrous not only for Hobbs but Tachibana as well. Shortly after burying

24 Albert von Le Coq, *Auf Hellas Spuren in Ostturkistan* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1926), 43.

his traveling companion, he received the news from Japan that Ōtani's wife Kazuko, with whom he was on close terms, died. He then attempted an ill-fated journey to Tibet where he got lost, robbed and beaten. After not having heard from him for months, Ōtani initiated an official search for Tachibana but this progressed very inefficiently as in the meantime the revolution broke out and the entire country was in turmoil. Similarly, nothing came of Tachibana's intended visit to Swindon. He never went back to England, but in 1912 left China via the Transsiberian railway and returned to Japan.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas. I am writing before Christmas, but you will not receive this until after. Still, I must wish the usual compliments, and a most prosperous New Year. How I wish I was home for Christmas, to have some good roast beef and potatoes, not forgetting the Christmas pudding. (We get none of these here; beef is very scarce, and potatoes are not grown, though mutton is as plentiful as bread in England; about 10/- for a whole sheep). Grapes and apples are very plentiful here; we have them every day You don't know what home is until you get in a foreign land and can't speak. You ask for fire, and the smoke that comes from the wood chokes you. I have had my room so thick that I had to go into the fresh air. So keep a little bit of fire for me when I come back. We get no butter, and milk is scarce, bread run out, and we are not just in Turfan, but about six miles out, so we get no bread for a day or two. I wish I was in Swindon; not that I am tired, for everything is most curious, and I am enjoying it. Of course one gets ups and downs, and I have often wished Mr. Tachibana somewhere else; still we are on the best of terms, and every night he tells me about his country. The Chinese soldiers are the worst freaks I ever saw, they have no uniform, they wear what they like, and they carry a small gun, with a hammer as large as a coke hammer, the barrel is so wide you could slip a halfpenny down. It is no use for war, but only for ornament.

I forgot to say that at Urumutch I met a Danish gentleman, Mr. Peterson, who speaks English, and holds an appointment in the Chinese Postal service. He has been in China for 20 years.

I am enclosing the visiting cards of some of the Chinese Officials who have visited us.

The Danish Mr. Peterson in Urumchi is Vilhelm Petersen who was appointed by the Telegraph Bureau to reorganize and manage the postal system in Xinjiang. When Morrison was visiting Urumchi in 1910, Petersen was the one who introduced him to Prince Zailan.²⁵ It is probable that he also acted as a middle

25 *The Correspondence of G. E. Morrison*, 2: 491 n1.

man in the case of Tachibana and Hobbs, who arrived in town about the same time. Petersen appears to have been at least partially of Asian descent, as can be seen on several photographs taken by Morrison.²⁶ He also features, for example, in the travel memoirs of the English naturalist Douglas Carruthers, who had been Petersen's guest while visiting Urumchi in 1910 or 1911, writing that at last thanks to Petersen's efforts letters could reach Peking in 45 days and London in 30 days.²⁷ Hobbs obviously mentions meeting Mr. Petersen because back home in Swindon his mother ran a post office and he thought that this information would be of interest to her.

5 Summary

What is the significance of Orlando Hobbs' story? On the most basic level, it is simply an interesting story; but at the same time, it also allows us to take a close-up look at the human side of the Great Game and the race for the treasures of the Silk Road. We learn how a young man from an industrial town in western England found his first job after graduation with a Japanese expedition, where his role essentially was to demonstrate that this was an international collaboration and thus alleviate difficulties with British and Russian authorities in Xinjiang. Lady Macartney's letter to Hobbs' mother, as well as the two photographs of the funeral, show that the tragedy of his death in this remote region was keenly felt by the foreign community in Kashgar. Hobbs' own letter is significant because it describes some of circumstances of the expedition, including the site where a number of manuscript fragments have been found, and thus complements the popular accounts published by Tachibana. In this regard, it is an important testimony about a little-known chapter in the exploration of Central Asia.

The British Library, International Dunhuang Project, London

26 These photographs are part of an album currently held at the State Library of New South Wales. Also available online at the library's website <www.sl.nsw.gov.au> under »Series 02: Pictorial material from the papers of George Ernest Morrison, Item 05: Photographs of China / from the papers of George Ernest Morrison«. Petersen appears on photographs Nos. 249–251.

27 Douglas Carruthers, *Unknown Mongolia: A Record of Travel and Exploration in North-West Mongolia and Dzungaria*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1914), 2: 445–446.