

The Legacy of Otto Stein—New Evidence

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The demand for the so-called “Aufarbeitung” of the NS-period in German Indology has produced fairly large volumes on those figures that have been identified as the strongest and most active supporters of the regime, and the volumes dealing with HAUER and WÜST,¹ which are indispensable reading for everyone interested in the period, may not have exhausted the topic. Nevertheless, the focus on the culprits has one drawback. It is likely to leave those in the dark who are mostly enumerated as the victims. While we know quite a deal about HAUER’s strange world view, we have only a very basic idea of the lives of the the Jewish Sanskritists who were forced into exile (SHEFTELOWITZ, SCHERMAN) or killed in the holocaust (STRAUSS, STEIN). We have four hundred pages on WÜST, but only seven on OTTO STEIN. From the perspective of the history of Indology this is to be regretted and one can only hope that more can be found out about the two Jewish scholars of Sanskrit in Prague, MORIZ WINTERNITZ² and OTTO STEIN. A short biography of OTTO STEIN by FRIEDRICH WILHELM appeared recently in 2013 in the *Neue Deutsche Biographie* but is merely an excerpt of his introduction to the *Kleine Schriften* of STEIN,³ which remains the best source. STEIN had studied Greek and Sanskrit in Prague, was drafted in 1916, but deemed unfit for combat when diagnosed in hospitals in Marburg and Graz of disorders not unheard of in small subjects like Sanskrit study, as becomes clear from the notes of the doctors:

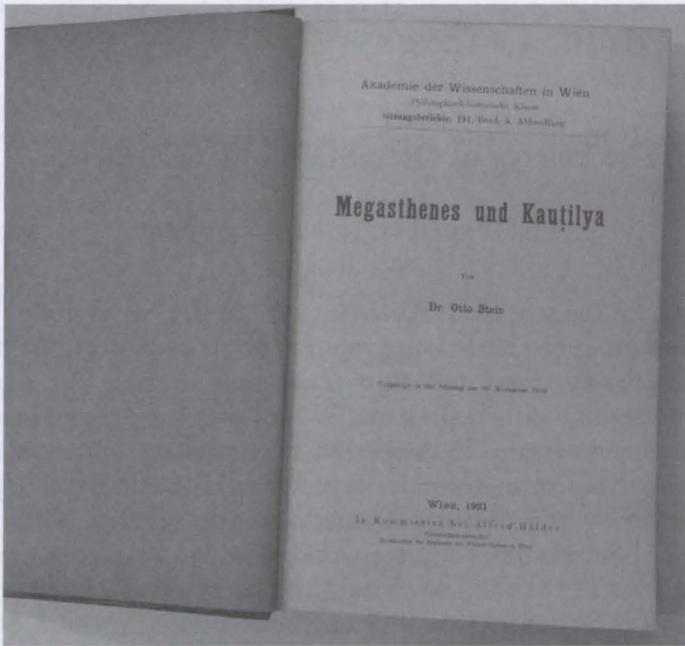
Thinks, he has overexerted himself, heard lectures, was at the same time assistant teacher. Much work during night [. . .] Was partly the only hearer and consequently had to work very hard [. . .] Lives only for his academic studies, which he thinks is his religion.⁴

¹ HORST JUNGINGER: *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft: das Fach Religionswissenschaft an der Universität Tübingen von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende des Dritten Reiches*. Stuttgart 1999. MAXIMILIAN SCHREIBER: *Walther Wüst. Dekan und Rektor der Universität München 1935–1945*. München 2008.

² See MARGOT KRAATZ / MARTIN KRAATZ: *Carl Cappeller, Moriz Winternitz, Theodor Zachariae. Drei Biographien berühmter Indologen*. München 2010.

³ OTTO STEIN: *Kleine Schriften*. Hrsg. von FRIEDRICH WILHELM. Stuttgart 1985.

⁴ My translation from the German original, for which see WILHELM 1985, Vorwort, p. V.

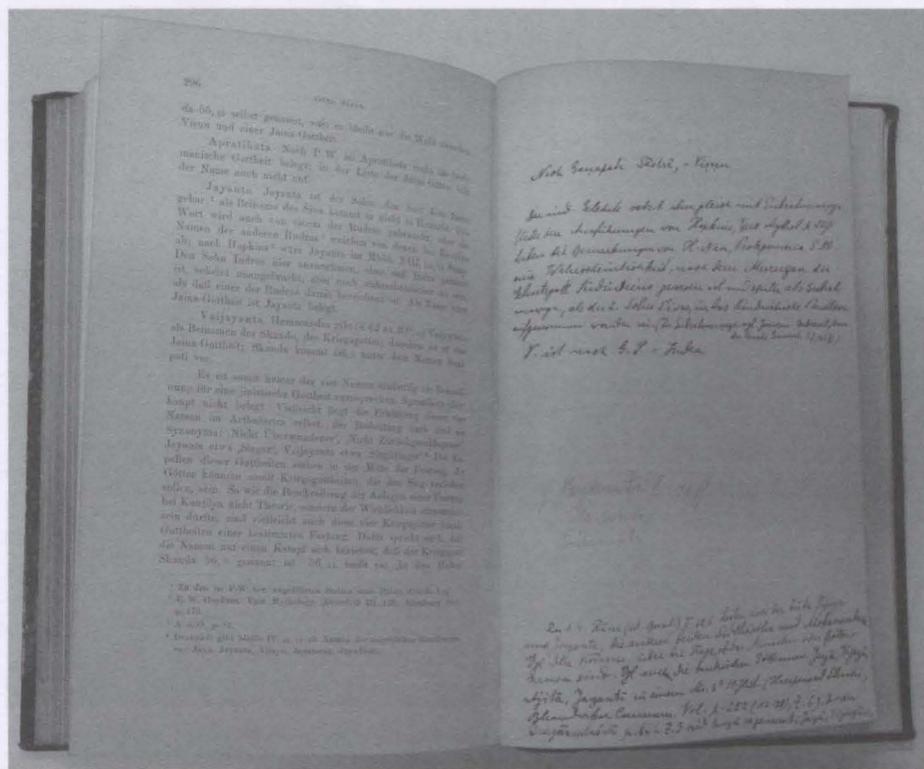


His dissertation *Megasthenes und Kautilya* (1918) was published by the Vienna Academy in 1921. He wrote on a wide variety of topics, travelled to India to give lectures in 1931/1932, but from 1938 he had to report to his friend RANDLE, librarian to the India Office Library, the increasingly difficult situation in Prague under German threats. At the end of January 1939 STEIN thanks RANDLE for his offer to assist him in escaping to England and giving him a job as a manuscript cataloguer which remains the last sign of life. STEIN and his wife had probably waited too long: In March 1939 Germany occupied Prague, STEIN could send his books to England in April, but the couple failed to get visas, were deported, and the last information we have is that of the death of Gertruda Stein in 1942. WILHELM closes his biography with the following words:

The destruction of Otto Steins existence has been accomplished by the Nazis in two ways—academically and physically—and they have thereby multiplied their guilt, but his intellectual bequest they could not in the least diminish. Stein's publications survive in all the great libraries of this world, each and every of his works survived the holocaust.⁵

And he adds the remark that he would be thrilled if his edition of STEIN's *Kleine Schriften* would spark further inquiries.

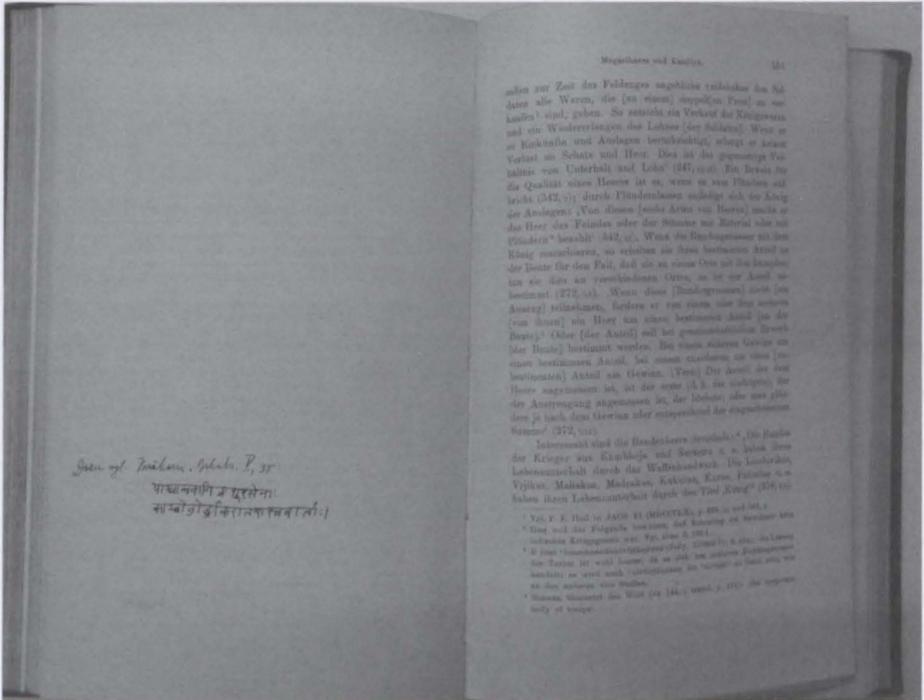
⁵ WILHELM 1985, p. X.



In 2013 I received an e-mail by Dr. MICHAEL WEISKOPF from Berkeley, who had bought a copy of Stein's *Megasthenes und Kautilya* from an online antiquarian bookshop and was astonished that the book was an interleaved copy with annotations that seemed to be old. Such exemplars are frequently found of lexica or with copies of one's own works for collecting material for a second edition or just for private use. In the exemplar of *Megasthenes und Kautilya* these blank pages contained occasional notes and additions. There were also slips of paper with notes, one from a library in Prague and dated to 1925; these and other indications gave rise to the suspicion that this was the private exemplar of the author, which would mean that parts of STEIN'S library, which had been shipped to England in 1939 made it into modern antiquarian book-shops.

Here I shall just briefly present the evidence, also to facilitate the recognition of further items from his library.

Firstly, there are slips of paper used for additions that were added after 1926 and 1928, one is from an almanac which gives the date according to several reckonings including the Jewish and the Greek.



The writer of these additions was most probably a Sanskritist, at least he writes some of the Sanskrit parallels in Nāgarī script.

Furthermore the book contained a letter—dated 27.2.1929, but unfortunately without the addressee—by RAMACHANDRA DIKSHITAR, a historian from Madras, who had written on *Kautilya and Machiavelli* in 1927 and later became notorious for his belief in old-Indian aeronautics. STEIN, it has to be remembered, was member of the editorial board of the Madras based *Journal of Indian History*. In his letter DIKSHITAR requests a paper on Megasthenes, so we may infer that the person who has received the letter was working on the field, which—adding all arguments adduced so far—can only be the author STEIN himself. Proof beyond this point is, I think not necessary, merely one obvious check had to be made, and that concerned the handwriting. Since there is no bequest of STEIN in libraries I could check I ordered a copy of the only written document of STEIN kept in German libraries, a small postcard.⁶

⁶ OTTO STEIN writing from Prag to ALBERT REHM (10.4.1924) enquiring about the possibility to publish an article in the journal *Philologus*. Kept under “Rehmania IV A” in the *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek*, München.

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(Znak) (Strana, ročník, díl) (Průběh práce)

Dejevidná a univerzitní knihovna v Praze.

Uložka
na knihu, kterou si vyžádá v profesorské činnosti.

Název: *Meinungen*

V PRAZE, dne 18. 12. 1926

Titul: *Hof-Witz*

1025 MA 1 Montag

28

MONTAG MA 1 1926

Manuscript mit Kopie

aus dem Nachlass des Verstorbenen, des Arztes Otto Stein und Hefe des Reichsanstalts für die Erziehung der Taubstummen — einseitig bei nicht ausreichender Bezahlung — teilweise ungenutzt geblieben. Die Handschriften wurden an mich, weil ich die manuskripten Verarbeiten gegen Freigabe anderer Bücher in Salzburg. Unter die aus dem Nachlass des Verstorbenen kommen auch die von ihm für die Erziehung der Taubstummen, die Handschriften der Jahre des Dienstes in der Erziehung der Taubstummen.

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1912

V. R. RAMACHANDRA DIKSHITAR
M. A. — 101 BUCK
CALCUTTA IN INDIA
MADRAS UNIVERSITY

19th Dec. 1926
London, England
India

Dear Sir,

I am grateful to your letter of 6.2.27. I am glad to hear that you agree my translation is quite well. You refer to your revised copy in German. I think it would increase the size of your book. I have now too much work in the University & I am afraid I shall not be able to attend to translation. I have talked a lot of him.

If you have no objection I shall send to Dr. W. W. Lewis the first portion sent to you for publication in his Journal.

What is the paper on which you have written your paper a copy? I am sending you one of my own with your letter.

There is nothing in the handwriting to contradict STEIN's authorship of the notes, most importantly, he writes in latin hand, rather than cursive old german. Thus it seems that we have in our hands the private copy of the dissertation of OTTO STEIN, the only remaining item of his library discovered so far. The owner, Dr. MICHAEL WEISKOPF, when suspecting the above, expressed the wish that this book be kept in a German archive. The obvious choice was the archive of the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft*, of which STEIN was a member since 1917 and where it is at present the only item in the newly founded bequest of the great Prague Sanskritist.