Hedin in “disguise” as a Buddhist pilgrim but without his makeup; accompanied by the Buriat Shagdur and Shereb Lama, July 1901. (Central Asia and Tibet, II, p. 311)

The size and complexity of the famous Swedish explorer Sven Hedin’s bibliography rival the scope of his explorations. His books were excerpted, translated and republished in dozens of locations and languages. For the uninitiated, figuring out which version of a Hedin title may contain something of interest and be different from which other title is very difficult. My purpose is to assist in such efforts, not to provide a scholarly research tool for the specialist. A complete bibliography by Willy Hess is listed in section IV below.

The material here includes primarily his books and in the first instance their English editions. No effort has been made to exhaust the list of non-English editions. However, I devote considerable space to the Swedish and German ones, the former generally being the originals (most published by the firm of Albert Bonnier in Stockholm). His works in German were published almost exclusively by F. A. Brockhaus in Leipzig; the demand for his work in German seems to have been insatiable. Brockhaus often issued full, shorter, and yet shorter versions of the same work, all under the same title, many in popular series for young readers. There were frequent reprints, which I have not attempted to track systematically. Generally I try to identify the first edition; for others, I will cite first of all that which I have been able to examine. I make no attempt to cite, among others, the numerous translations of his work into Japanese or Chinese; it strikes me as even less likely that any readers of this page would prefer their Hedin in Yiddish (yes, such translations do exist!). Reprints of Hedin’s works continue to appear--several relatively inexpensive ones having been published in recent years in South Asia.

For those interested in the numerous photographs and maps Hedin published, unfortunately many
of the translations (including some of the standard English ones) and most of these recent reprints are quite inadequate. The best reproductions tend to be in the original Swedish editions and in some of the early “full” translations.

Those wishing an overview of Hedin’s expeditions (at least through 1908) should begin with the summary account in his memoir, My Life as an Explorer. Large sections of the multi-volume accounts of individual expeditions make for dry reading. Hedin was trained in physical geography; I am not sure he figured out or cared how much of his soundings of lakes and measurements of river flow would really interest the average reader. Part of the problem also lies in the nature of much of the exploration--if one floats down the Tarim or slogs across the Tsaidam Plateau in the autumn rains as he did, there is a certain inevitable monotony. It is not always clear how one can best write about that if at the same time one wishes to chronicle the journey.

An additional problem for the modern reader is that our cultural sensitivity is different from Hedin’s. In some ways he is oblivious to many of the aspects of history and culture that so fascinated someone like Aurel Stein. At times Hedin’s European arrogance is more than annoying; in our politically correct age, he would be censured. Finally, today’s reader may respond unsympathetically to the litany of the cost of his expeditions to his pack horses, mules, and camels, not to mention the wildlife: yaks, camels, asses and antelope. Rare was an expedition in which more than a handful of his pack train came back alive. And he managed to lose more than a few of his human staff as well.

Where possible, I have examined the books de visu. I have yet to read more than a fraction of them (we are told his published works amount to more than 30,000 pages!). My annotation in many cases is based on information in library catalogues; I have also drawn upon the at times extended descriptions of the publications in the biography by George Kish listed below. Over time, I hope to add some notes and perhaps expand this bibliography into categories not yet covered. These limitations notwithstanding, I hope the material will provide a reasonably thorough guide for the interested reader who wishes to traverse Asia (and some aspects of twentieth-century politics) with Hedin. Suggestions for corrections and additions would be welcome.

The material is divided into four parts:

I. Accounts of his Asian travels and exploration, organized by the dates of the expeditions. I provide a brief indication of where the expedition went, and/or what some of its accomplishments were. References include the “full” (usually multi-volume) texts of his accounts intended for general audiences, condensed variants of the same volumes, and the publications of the “scientific results.”

II. Other writings, including books based on his travels which may cut across the chronological boundaries of single expeditions; contributions by him to the history of exploration; correspondence, even if addressed only to Hedin and not from him. It is possible that some of the books listed here should be connected with a specific expedition listed in part I.

III. Reportage and propaganda not connected with his Asian travels. Hedin was outspoken about Swedish politics and foreign policy and both in World War I and World War II, he sided with the Germans. The listings here cover the most important of the writings reflecting this aspect of his activity; I dwell upon them primarily to identify the titles those who would wish to focus on other issues might prefer to avoid. It is possible that one or two books listed in this category belong in Section II (or vice versa).

IV. Works about Hedin. This section is still embryonic and will eventually be supplemented with references to resources other than full books on him. I also expect to add some links to
on-line resources.

I. Travels and Exploration.

1885

Travel through Russia, Caucasus, Persia, Iraq, to Istanbul.


1890-1891

Istanbul, Persia, Central Asia (Bukhara, Samarkand), Osh, Kashgar, Torugart Pass, L. Issyk-kul, Caucasus, St. Petersburg; initially as a member of a Swedish embassy to Persia; then travelling independently.

- *My Life*, Ch. 6-14.
- *Der Demavend, nach eigener Beobachtung*. Halle, 1892. “Inaugural Dissertation,” which fulfilled one of his requirements for the Doctory of Philosophy degree from the University of Halle. He climbed Mt. Demavend in the Elburz range; see My Life, Ch. 9.
- *Genom Khorsan och Turkestan: minnen från en resa i Centralasiern 1890 och 1891*. 2 v. Stockholm: Samson & Wallin, 1892-1893. (Also apparently serialized in 14 issues by Central-Tryckeriet.) Very nicely produced, with photos (of varying quality) and many of his often exquisite sketches. He was a skilled draftsman and artist; some of his best drawings are portraits and panoramas that capture what in a photograph might have been less compelling.
The “Camp of Death” in the Taklamakan, 1894. A later artist’s depiction.

(Through Asia, 1, p. 557)

1893-1897

Traveled through Russian Central Asia, crossing the Pamirs through what is today Kyrgyzstan; spent substantial time exploring around one of the major peaks, Mustagh Ata, making several unsuccessful attempts to climb it. He was probably the first person ever to attempt it and did so with no serious mountaineering background. Explored in the Tarim Basin, in the process again showing his impetuosity and at this stage of his career lack of careful planning. In crossing part of the Taklamakan Desert to the Khotan River, only he and two other members of his expedition survived, and that just barely. Was the first Western explorer to see some of the desert ruins later studied by Aurel Stein (notably at Dandan-oilik and Karadong). Artifacts from these and other locations are now in Stockholm; since he himself knew little about what they were, in certain of his works he quotes the observations of the experts who studied them on his return. Crossed the Taklamakan along the Keriya River, began exploring the lower Tarim in the direction of Lop-Nor, and then traveled through previously uncharted areas of the Tsaidam Plateau in Northern Tibet and on to Beijing.

- My Life, Ch. 15-31.


This is one of the better reads among his travel accounts, despite the fact that his descriptive
prose at times is floridly Victorian. Although the result is a kind of romanticization of some of the more foolish adventures, here as in other volumes, artists not on the expedition drew illustrations of dramatic moments (Hedin says they worked carefully with him for accuracy though).

- *Die geographisch-wissenschaftlichen Ergebnisse meiner Reisen in Zentralasien, 1894-1897*. Gotha: J. Perthes, 1900 (=Petermanns Mitteilungen, Ergänzungsheft Nr. 131). Scientific reports of the expedition, with contributions by K. Himly et al. As Kish notes in his *To the Heart of Asia* (pp. 56-57), Hedin’s most significant achievement was in his discussion of the Lop Nor problem and in his list of place names. The accompanying maps were based on his 550 separate sheets drawn from the sketches he made while riding; relatively little involved covering really unexplored territory.

**1899-1902**

Floated down the Tarim until stopped by ice; explored further around and in the dry Lop-Nor basin, visiting the deserted site of ancient Lou-Lan. This work was important for his confirmation of von Richthofen’s hypothesis about the “movement” of the lake with the shift in water flow out of the Tarim. Spent significant time mapping new areas of Northern Tibet, but failed in his attempt to reach Lhasa rather poorly disguised as a pilgrim. Exited Tibet via India.

- *My Life*, Ch. 32-46.


1905-1908

Despite British and Tibetan opposition to his project, managed to sneak into Tibet, and explored extensively in its southern and western regions. Claimed the discovery of a “previously unknown” major mountain system, the “Trans-Himalaya,” and the sources of the major S. Asian rivers, although these claims were then disputed. Explored extensively on and around Lake Manasarovar. Not by his own choice, spent significant time in Shigatse, where he interacted with the Panchen Lama.

- *My Life*, Chs. 47-64.


explorations of 1906-8. As Kish notes (pp. 78-79), the book “faithfully mirrors [the] monotony… of a dreary, prolonged journey across an empty landscape.”

- **Southern Tibet: Discoveries in Former Times compared with my Own Researches in 1906-1908.** 9 v. text; 3 v. atlas. Stockholm, 1916-1922 (repr. Delhi, B.R. Pub. Corp., 1991). Includes: v. 1. Atlas of Tibetan Panoramas; v. 2-3 Atlas of maps; v. 1-2: Lake Manasarovar and sources of the great Indian Rivers; v. 3. Transhimalaya; v. 4. Karakorum and Chang-tang; v. 5. Petrographie und geologie (von Anders Henning); v. 6, in 5 pts. with separate titles; v. 7. History of explorations in the Kara-korum Mountains; v. 8 in 4 pts. with separate titles; v. 9 in 4 parts with separate titles and pt. 5, General index. While clearly he has an agenda here, to emphasize the significance of his own contribution, there is much of value in his extensive review of earlier travels and maps; one of the more interesting volumes (Vol. 8) contains an extensive treatment (in German) of early Chinese and East Turki maps, written by orientalists Albert Herrmann and Albert von le Coq. The atlas volumes enable one to compare his numerous panoramas with the finished maps and see details identifying the places at which he made precise observations. A detailed description of this edition is in Kish, pp. 99-104.

- **Eine Routenaufnahme durch Ost-Persien.** 2 v. text; 1 v. atlas. Stockholm: Generalstabens litografiska anstalt, 1918-1927. The illustrations and cartographic results of his journey through Persia to India. Included are his photographs, panoramas and detailed maps along with larger summary maps in the atlas.

1923

In November and December travelled from Peking to Moscow: by Dodge automobile through Mongolia (including Urga—the present-day Ulan Baatar) to Verkhne-Udinsk on the Trans-Siberian RR, and then by train to Moscow (and eventually through St. Petersburg and back home).

- **Från Peking till Moskva.** Stockholm: Bonniers, 1924. (Ger. ed.: Von Peking nach Moskau. Leipzig: Brockhaus.) Some interesting photos illustrate the difficulties of motor travel in Mongolia, and towns along the way. He met the famous Russian explorer Kozlov there. The last third or so of the book is a description of Moscow and various aspects of Russian history and culture, including art and architecture; the final chapter is on St. Petersburg. He had some interest in describing what things were like under the still young Bolshevik regime.

1927-1935

The most elaborately equipped of Hedin’s expeditions—an army of scholars and others, whose main geographical focus was in Mongolia and the northern and eastern parts of the Tarim Basin. At the outset experienced difficulties with the Chinese authorities, who were beginning to resist Western incursions in China (the matter was solved by adding Chinese scholars to the group); later became a captive during the Dungan rebellion in Xinjiang. One of the sponsors of the expedition was Lufthansa, which was hoping to open air routes across Inner Asia to China; some of the exploration was avowedly with the idea of re-opening the Silk Road by determining the best routes for motor traffic.

Was able to prove convincingly his theories about the “movement” of Lop-Nor, since the rivers fed by the Tarim had changed course in 1921; the lake was now back in its northern basin. Explored by motor vehicle the routes through the mountains west from Dunhuang, showing that
one branch of the historic Silk Road undoubtedly had run in that direction and to Lop Nor in its northern location until the rivers shifted course. The various specialists in his team often worked on separate itineraries; this was the first of his expeditions which had scholars properly trained to carry out archaeological work.

The initial volumes concerning the expedition were published piecemeal, as it was going on, with the result being some updating between the appearance of one edition and its translation and a certain amount of overlap in contents.


  Covers 1927-1928 explorations, with addition in the English ed. of chapter “Lop-Nor, the Wandering Lake,” pp. 360-392, and a note from July 1931 on further Lop Nor exploration in early 1931. Mentions a film by Paul Lieberenz, who accompanied the expedition: “With Sven Hedin Across the Deserts of Asia.”


  Sequel to *Across the Gobi Desert*. It was Höner and Parker Chen who carried out the definitive survey around the new Lop Nor.


  A copy of the main Buddhist temple in Jehol (Chengde) was built as an exhibition for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago; Hedin was involved in the project.


  Covers events from departing Beijing, October 1933, through return to Xian in February 1935.


  One of the more interesting volumes in this series on the 1927-35 expedition: observations on the changing ecology with the movement of the rivers and the lake and a discussion of what previous geographers and mappers had written. Hedin rather repetitiously proclaims
his solving of the riddle of Lop Nor as one of his most important achievements. The shift in the river flow which led to the re-establishment of the lake in its former (northern) location occurred in 1921.


Hedin was caught up in the Dungan rebellion led by Ma Chung-ying, the “Big Horse” of the title. Those events also figure in the well-known account by Peter Fleming, *News from Tartary. History of the Expedition in Asia 1927-1935*. 4 v. Stockholm, 1943. Parts 1-3 written in collaboration with Folke Bergman: I. 1927-1928; II. 1928-1933; III. 1933-1935. Pt. IV. General Reports of Travels and Fieldwork, by Folke Bergman, Gerhard Bexell, Birger Bohlin, Gösta Montell. (=Reports from the Scientific Expedition to the North-Western Provinces of China under the Leadership of Dr. Sven Hedin--The Sino-Swedish Expedition. Publications 23-26).

This is the descriptive summary of the expedition, part of a projected 55 volumes of scientific reports authored by the various specialists on the expedition and published in various subseries.


**II. Other books connected with Hedin’s explorations; correspondence.**

**A. Varia, on his travels; popular books on explorations, etc.**

- *Till Jerusalem*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1917 (German eds: *Jerusalem*. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1918; in both long and condensed versions.)
- *Bagdad, Babylon, Nineve*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1917. (Ger. eds.: Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1917 [apparently a short preprint]; 1918 [long, but apparently condensed] eds.) Original, 806 pp. with many illustrations. Fr. anthology of what it labels German propaganda includes excerpts from this (see below). It seems that Hedin expressed criticisms of British imperial policy in the Middle East, an area on which Germany also had designs. This and the preceding title were based on his travel through the Middle East in 1916.
Material taken from Durch Asiens Wüsten and Im Herzen von Asien.


Tsangpo Lamas vallfärd. 2 v. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1920-1922: I. Pilgrimerna, II. Nomaderna. (German ed.: Tsangpo Lamas Wallfahrt. 2 v. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1922-1923.) Fiction, which Kish glowingly describes (p. 106) as "‘not a novel. Rather it is a series of magnificent vignettes of the people, the animals, and the nature of Mongolia and Tibet.’"


B. Works on Explorers and the History of Exploration.


Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld. Minnesteckning. Uppsala, 1926. An obituary. For various explorers including Nordenskiöld, see also Hedin’s Stormän och kungar in sec. C.

C. Correspondence; memoirs; drawings.


Alma Hedin, Min bror Sven: brev och minnen. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1926. (Ger. eds.: Mein Bruder Sven Nach Briefen und Erinnerungen. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1925; abbreviated popular eds. with same title, 1926, 1927.) Alma was very close to her brother and among his most vigorous advocates.

A long series of short sketches of famous men he met, based on materials in his diaries and often illustrated with quotations of their letters to him. Some were explorers (e.g., Vambéry, Nansen, Richthofen, Amundsen), many statesmen or rulers (e.g., Sultan Abdul Hamid II, Shah of Persia Nasr-ed-Din, Emir of Bukhara Seid Abdul Ahad, Emperor Franz Josef, President Theodore Roosevelt, Hindenburg, Lord Curzon, Lord Kitchener), and some distinguished for other reasons (e.g., Rabindranath Tagore, Henry Ford). Kish (p. 142) says “it is a more candid and far less pretentious autobiography than those Hedin had written earlier;” although “he only represents the thread that binds this array of imposing and different personages together.”

- **Life and Letters.** Stockholm: Statens etnografiska museum, 1962. Published by the Sven Hedin Foundation.

### III. Reportage, political pamphlets, propaganda, etc.

- **Sverige och den stora östern.** Stockholm, 1905.
- **Ett varsordsord af Sven Hedin.** Stockholm: Bonniers, 1912. 70 pp. pamphlet on the need to bolster Swedish defense in the face of the Russian threat. (German ed.: *Ein Warnungsrufl.* Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1912.) Printed in one million copies. See also **Försvarsstriden, 1912-1914,** listed in preceding section.
- **Andra varningen.** Stockholm: Norstedt, 1914. A new booklet analogous in content to the preceding.
- **Tal till ungdemokrater, borgare och bönder.** Stockholm: Bonniers, 1914.
- **Sveriges öde.** Stockholm: Bonniers, 1918. Swedish politics and WWI.
Ossendowski und die Wahrheit. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1925. Something to do with a work by Ferdinand Ossendowski, “Beasts, Men and Gods.”

Germany and World Peace. London: Hutchinson, 1937. (Tr. from German by Gerald Griffin) (In Swedish: Tyskland och världsfreden. 3rd ed. Stockholm: Medens, 1937; German ed., Deutschland und der Weltfriede, typeset by Brockhaus, but Nazis cancelled publication. According to Hedin, in his war diary, the reason was his refusal to alter a few mildly critical comments.)


Intended for publication in U.S. prior to American entry into World War II, in order to forestall that event. Indicts Roosevelt as the one responsible for the War. In his diary (see below), quotes approving letter from Hitler, to whom he sent a personally dedicated copy.


His dealings with Goering, Hess, Hitler et al., with ample quotation from their admiring letters to him. One of Hedin’s underlying concerns was Soviet expansion (the threat was very real during the “Winter War” with Finland); in part his trips to Germany were a kind of personal diplomacy to curry Nazi guarantees for neutral Sweden. Hedin apparently had genuine admiration for German culture and despaired at the destruction caused by Allied bombings. He was deliberately blind as to the real war guilt, and he mentions only in passing Hitler’s vicious anti-Semitism. One can read from the book either naivete or arrogance; in any event Hedin largely condemns himself in his own words.

IV. Works about Hedin.


George Kish, To the Heart of Asia: The Life of Sven Hedin. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Pr., 1984. Well informed but uncritical regarding some of the more controversial aspects of Hedin’s career. The only full treatment of Hedin in English.


Charles Allen, *A Mountain in Tibet: The Search for Mount Kailas and the Sources of the Great Rivers of India*. London: Deutsch, 1982. Chs. 9 and 10 are a description of the contretemps between Hedin and members of the Royal Geographical Society in 1909, and a careful critique of Hedin’s claims about finding the sources of the rivers.


Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia*. Washington, D. C.: Counterpoint, 1999. Esp. Chs. 13, 21. Follows the lead of Allen, introduces some new material on Hedin’s relations with the British geographers, and provides an acute and highly unflattering assessment of his character. The emphasis on the negative at times relies on somewhat unfair selectivity of evidence; Hedin suffers from the implicit comparison/contrast with Aurel Stein, who is treated in Chs. 14-15. One consequence is a failure really to resolve the question of what Hedin’s contributions may have been. Nonetheless, this discussion is a refreshing antidote to Kish’s rosy-hued treatment.

See also references under II.C.