

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Fall 2018
Desert Encounters: Arts, Cultures and Kingdoms of the Silk Roads
Sponsored by The Society for Asian Art

Imag(in)ing the Silk Roads
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This introductory lecture to the fall 2018 Arts of Asia Lecture Series entitled “Desert Encounters: Arts, Cultures, and Kingdoms of the Silk Road,” will focus on the *Silk Road* as a construct that emerged in 19th century Eurocentric imaginings of the Great Game era and the ensuing race for antiquities by (mostly) European scholars who built the large Central Asia collections of museums in London, New Delhi, Paris, and Berlin, among others. In addition, the lecture will address the usefulness of the term in advancing cross-disciplinary and cross-regional area studies. And, most importantly, while providing a historical background to the region, the lecture will outline how the topics addressed in this semester-long lecture series will highlight the rich artistic and archaeological heritage of Central Asia.

Terms

European Exploration of the Silk Roads in the Taklimakan Region

The Great Game – 19th century battle between the British and Russian Empires for influence and territory in Central Asia

Seidenstraße (Silk Road) – Term coined in 1877 by Ferdinand von Richthofen, a German professor of geology who travelled to China in the 1860s and 70s.

Sven Hedin – Swedish geographer and student of von Richthofen, who led four expeditions into Central Asia between 1893 and 1935

Marc Aurel Stein – British-Hungarian archaeologist. Led four expeditions to Central Asia between 1900 and 1930

Paul Pelliot - French Sinologist. Led an expedition in Central Asia from 1906-1909.

Albert von Le Coq – German archaeologist who worked in Central Asia from 1904-1914.

Central Asia in Historical Context (only listing terms you may not be familiar with)

Central Asia – Here defined as the five former Soviet republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, as well as Afghanistan and Xinjiang province in China but at times also including Mongolia and Tibet.

Indo-Iranian – Descendants of proto Indo-European speakers, whose homeland stretched from (roughly) the Caspian Sea in the west to the Tarim Basin in the east.

Achaemenids – Persian dynasty that ruled parts of western Central Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) from the 6th to 4th century BCE.

Scythians/Sakas – Eurasian pastoral nomadic tribes of the first Millennium BCE

Bactrian Greeks – Successors of Alexander the Great who ruled in western Central Asia during the 3rd and 2nd century BCE

Yuezhi/Kushans – Erstwhile nomadic tribe (Yuezhi) that from the 1st to 3rd century ruled an empire (Kushan) in western Central Asia

Kingdoms of the Tarim Basin (three largest of the early Common Era mentioned in the Chinese chronicles)

Shanshan – 1st century BCE – 7th century CE

Kucha – 1st – 8th century

Khotan – 1st – 10th century

Sasanian Dynasty – 3rd – 7th century Persian dynasty that controlled western Central Asia in the 3rd and 4th century

Sogdians – From the 4th-8th century, the most important mercantile community of the Silk Road in Central Asia and China

Uyghur Khaganate – 8th – 9th century CE, situated in the grasslands north of China

Qocho (Uyghur) kingdom – 9th – 12th century CE, centered on the oasis of Turfan

Central Asia Religions

Zoroastrianism – Iranian religion founded in the 1st millennium BCE

Shamanism – Belief system of the pastoral nomads of Central Asia

Buddhism – Spread into Central Asia with the Maurya expansion, proliferated in the early Common Era, and retained its prominence until the 10th century CE in some parts of the region.

Manichaeism – Spread into Central Asia from ancient Persia in the 3rd century

Nestorian Christianity – Declared a heresy in the 5th century after which followers started to move east

Islam – Spread into western Central Asia in the 7th and 8th century and was gradually adopted in eastern Central Asia from the 10th to the 13th century

Useful Sources

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