

# Silk Roads Archaeology Workshop

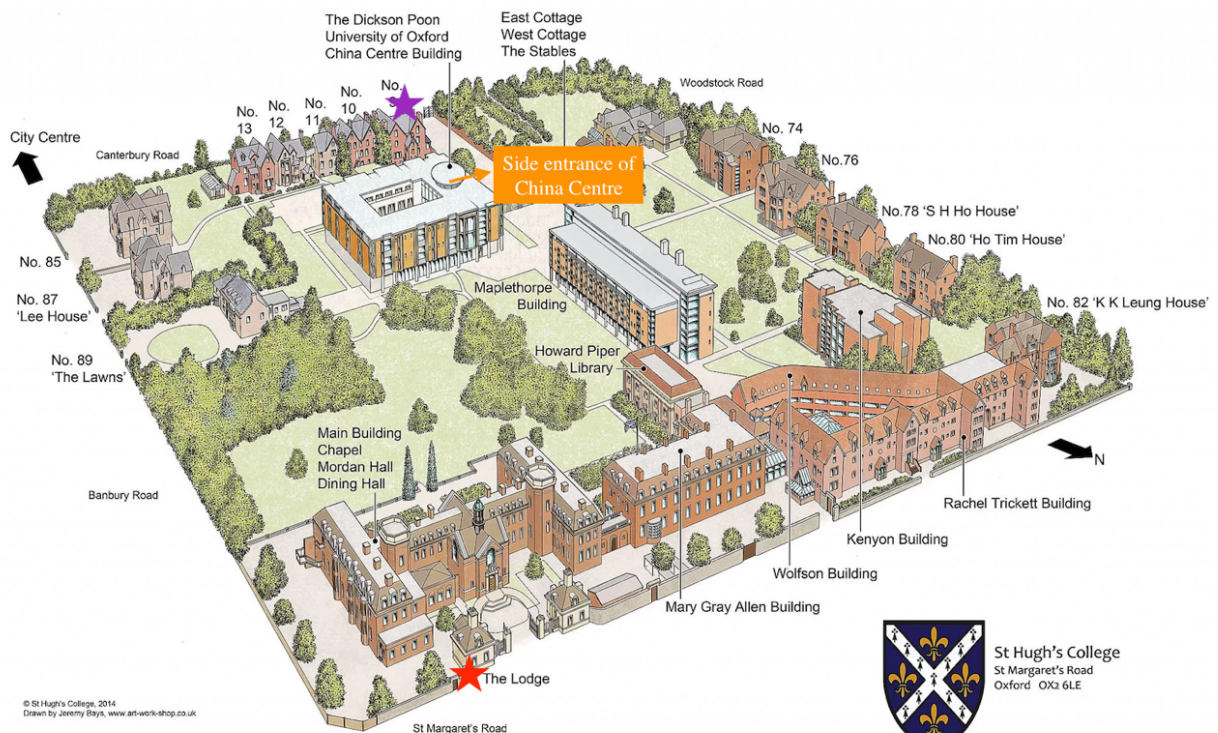
Date: 8 November 2024

Location: Louey Seminar Room, University of Oxford China Centre,  
Dickson Poon Building, Canterbury Rd, Oxford OX2 6LU, Oxford

Organizers: Dr Anke Hein and Siyi Wu  
under the Society for East Asian Archaeology (SEAA)

## How to get to the Oxford China Centre

You can enter via the main entrance, passing by the Porter's Lodge (please see the red star on the map below) of St Hugh's College on St Margret's Road, Oxford. Passing through the Main Building, you can walk south towards the courtyard, and then enter the China Centre located in the Dickson Poon Building (the entrance is on the side, please see the orange mark on the map below). The Louey Seminar Room is on the second floor of the Dickson Poon Building. Alternatively, you can enter via the iron gate on Canterbury Road (please see the purple star on the map below). Go Straight and the Dickson Poon Building is on your right.



## **Information on transport and accommodation**

### Transport:

The Oxford China Centre is about 25-minute walk from Oxford Train Station on Park End Street.

By Bus, it takes about 15 minutes. You can take the number 14 bus from the Railway Station (Stop R4) and get off at the St Margaret's Road (east) Stop (close to the main entrance). Or you can take the S3 Gold bus line from the Railway Station (Stop R5) and get off at Canterbury Road Stop (close to the iron gate).

By taxi, it is about 10-minute drive. The commonly used taxi company at Oxford is 001 Taxis Oxford. You can book online (<https://www.001taxis.com/>) or call 01865 240000. Pre-booking is recommended.

### Accommodation:

Below are some options you can consider if you have not made housing arrangements.

Colleges:

<https://conference-oxford.com/bb-self-catering>

<https://www.universityrooms.com/>

Bed & breakfasts or guesthouses on [Booking.com : Hotels in Oxford . Book your hotel now!](#) or [Travelodge Oxford Hotels](#)

Airbnb:

<https://www.airbnb.co.uk/united-kingdom/stays>

# Programme

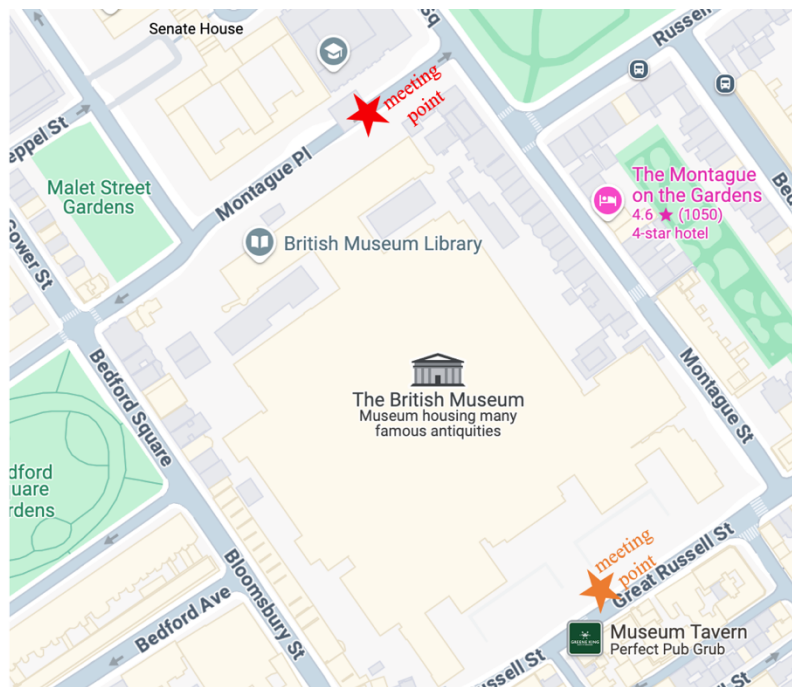
## Pre-workshop museum visit on 7 November

If you have signed up for the special viewing session at **9am**, please meet us at the main entrance of the British Museum on **Great Russell Street** (please see the orange star on the map below). A museum staff will be waiting at the main entrance to guide our group to the gallery.

If you have signed up for the later session at **11am**, please meet us at the back entrance of the British Museum at **Montague Place** (please see the red star on the map below). Siyi will be waiting at the back entrance to hand out tickets for the Silk Roads exhibition. You will need to collect a ticket to enter the special exhibition gallery.

We kindly ask you to arrive on time. If you are delayed or have trouble finding us, you can message or call Siyi at +44 7856183829. You can also find her on WeChat at 13913088678. If you have a change of plan and cannot make it to the British Museum, please kindly let us know.

Please note that the planned strikes on the London Tube have been suspended. You can check for any transportation updates before you travel: <https://tfl.gov.uk/tube-dlr-overground/status/>.



Besides the Silk Roads exhibition at the BM, there is also an exhibition on Ancient Dunhuang at the British Library (<https://silkroad.seetickets.com/timeslots/filter/a-silk-road-oasis-life-in-ancient-dunhuang>). If you are interested in viewing this exhibition as well, please book your ticket in advance via the provided link. We will not organise group viewing for the BL exhibition. You can book the time slot that suits you best.

## **Workshop on 8 November**

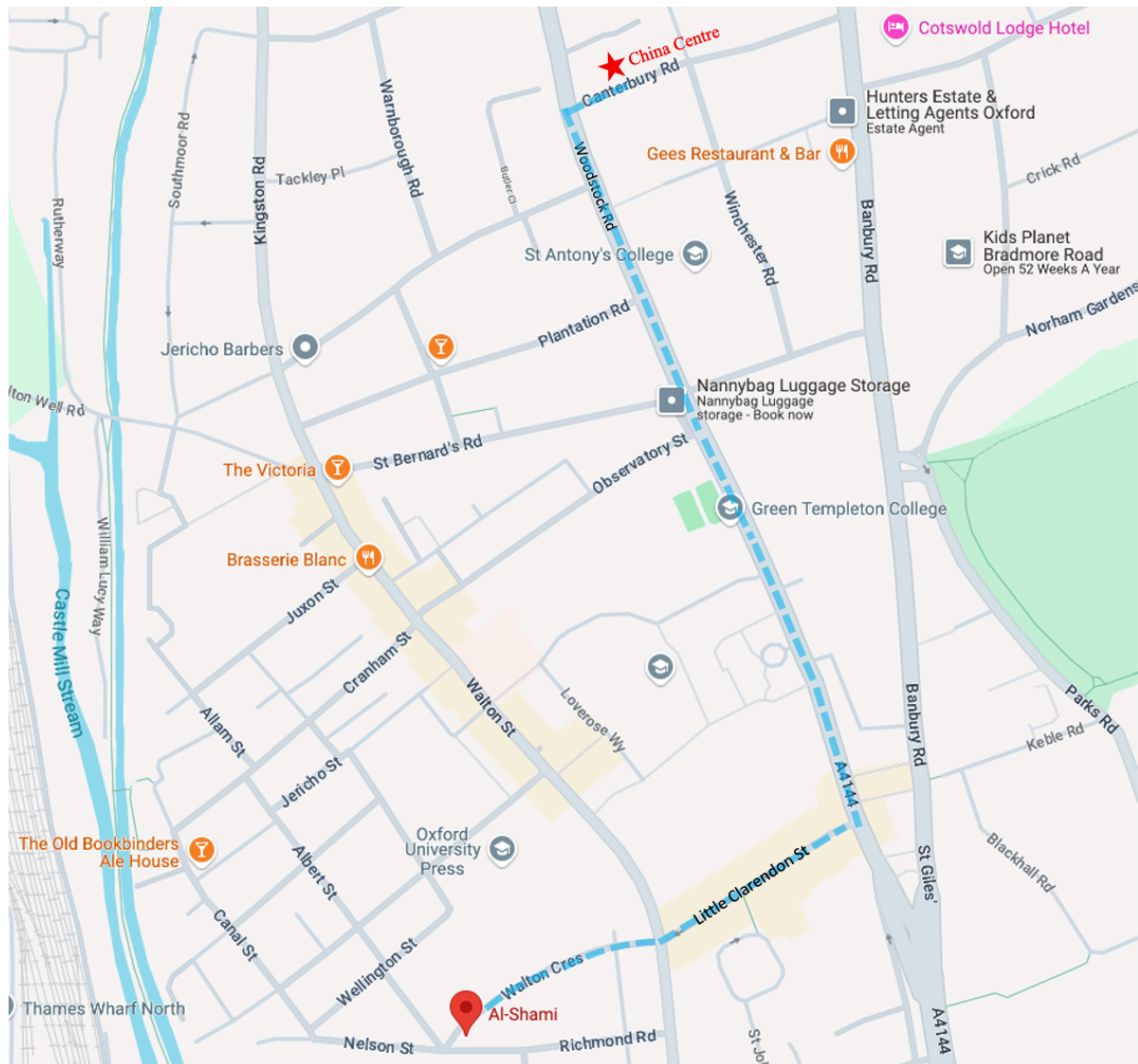
There will be 13 presentations in total. Each presenter has 15 minutes, followed by a 5-minute Q & A.

Time	Schedule
09:15-09:20	Workshop opening and introductory words by Anke and Siyi
09:20-09:40	Jessica Rawson (University of Oxford), <i>The Silk Roads in a Geographical and Environmental Perspective</i>
09:40-10:00	Maxim Korolkov (Heidelberg University), <i>Destruction and Reconstruction of the Silk Roads Economy in the Hexi Corridor, Second Century BCE to Fourth Century CE</i>
10:00-10:20	Alexander Campos Aran (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich), <i>Between Center and Periphery: Han-Dynasty Cemeteries in the Hexi Corridor and the Movement of People, Objects and Ideas</i>
10:20-10:40	Coffee/tea break
10:40-11:00	Catherine Klesner (University of Cambridge), <i>Early Islamic glazed ceramic along the Silk Roads: Reconstructing technological traditions from Samanid and Karakhanid period Bukhara and Tashkent</i>
11:00-11:20	Ashleigh Haruda (University of Oxford), <i>Sustaining the northern Silk Road: Preliminary Faunal Finds from the mediaeval site of Dzhankent, Kazakhstan</i>
11:20-11:40	Shiyu Yang (University College of London), <i>Interregional Exchange on the Eastern Silk Roads: A Case Study from Dengzhou Port, China</i>
11:40-12:00	Megan Allbrooks (University of Oxford), <i>At World's End: An Analysis of Silk's Use and Consumption at the Viking-Age Site of Birka, Sweden</i>
12:00-13:00	Lunch break
13:00-13:20	Chris Gosden (University of Oxford), <i>Exploring the Interaction between China and the Steppe through the Horsepower project</i>
13:20-13:40	Kai Feng (Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum), <i>Appearance of Camel-themed Artistic Works in China and the Early Silk Road</i>

13:40-14:00	Delphine Decruyenaere (Museum national d'Histoire naturelle de Paris), <i>Use of Hard Animal Tissues in Object Manufacturing: Deliberate Choice or Local Availability? Archaeozoological and Proteomic Analysis of Artifacts Discovered in Sogdiana during the Antique and Medieval Periods</i>
14:00-14:20	Coffee/tea break
14:20-14:40	Huhongyan Tian (University of Oxford), <i>How Many Ancient Goods Can Be Detected Archaeologically--A Case Study of the Silk Road in the Tang Dynasty</i>
14:40-15:00	Xiaoyan Ji (University College London), <i>A Study of Dunhuang Hebrew Manuscript H1412</i>
15:00-15:20	Yuxin Fu (University of Oxford), <i>The Wangchuan Ceremony: A Living Testament to Maritime Silk Roads' Cultural Exchange and Continuity</i>
15:20-15:40	Coffee/tea break
15:40-16:40	Keynote speech by Yu-Ping Luk (British Museum), <i>Journey of the British Museum Silk Roads exhibition</i>
16:40-16:45	Closing remarks by Anke
From 16:45	Heading to dinner

## **Post-workshop dinner on 8 November**

If you have signed up for the post-workshop dinner, we have arranged a group reservation at 5:30 pm at Al-Shami, a Lebanese restaurant offering a variety of options, including halal and vegetarian dishes. You can find more information on their website: <https://www.alshami.uk/>. The restaurant is located at 25 Walton Crescent, Oxford OX1 2JG. You can consult the map below for directions from the China Centre.



## **The Silk Roads in a Geographical and Environmental Perspective**

Jessica Rawson (University of Oxford)

### **Abstract:**

The Silk Road or Roads is the name given since the nineteenth century to routes across the deserts and oases from China, through present-day Xinjiang and the so-called Stans. This or these routes are by no means the only, or perhaps even the major routes of communication between China and Western Asia, today's Russia and Europe. The paper will look at the wider geography. Three major geographical features determined how this contact was channelled. First of all, the region we think of as China's core is bounded on the east by the sea and on the west by the eastern escarpment of Tibet, but is more open in the north. Secondly, while people certainly could climb up into Tibet, it was not at all easy or indeed possible to cross the high plateau, without being acclimatised to heights. There is no known city to city contact across the plateau to Western Asia until probably the nineteenth or twentieth century. Thirdly, for this reason all communication across Eurasia was pushed northwards by the large height and width of this major plateau. Leaving China to the northwest was possible, but by no means straightforward, as we can discuss. The paper will review, the several different routes taken, the mountain routes, the steppe, the desert and oases. All of these were very challenging environments, an issue that is usually overlooked. In addition, the drivers for this contact were often people whose seasonal movement was useful to others. Horses as much as silk were some of the primary drivers for the exchanges across Eurasia.



## **Destruction and Reconstruction of the Silk Roads Economy in the Hexi Corridor, Second Century BCE to Fourth Century CE**

Maxim Korolkov (Heidelberg University)

### **Abstract:**

In the centuries before the Han conquest in the late second century BCE, Hexi Corridor was part of the growing Inner Eurasian network that spanned the Tarim Basin, northern grasslands, and fringes of the Tibetan Plateau. Its participants formed relatively small communities with multi-resource economies combining agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, and fishing. The Inner Eurasian pattern of connectivity in the Hexi Corridor as well as in the Tarim Basin and Sogdiana to the west was characterized by cohabitation of groups with sedentary and mobile lifestyles, absence of a centralized territorial state, multi-directional transregional exchanges, and prominent role of the local elites as capital providers in the long-distance trade.

The Han conquest of the Hexi replaced this Inner Eurasian pattern of sociopolitical organization and economic network with a Sinitic-style sedentary society that relied on intensive irrigated agriculture, resided in towns, was organized in a bureaucratic state, and relied on monetized, impersonal forms of exchange (markets) as well as state-managed redistribution for many crucial staple goods and manufactures. The state and the middling producer-consumer groups replaced aristocratic elites as the principal drivers of trans-local exchanges. The Han conquest fundamentally disrupted the long-standing Inner Eurasian pattern of long-distance connections.

However, in the longer run, the Han frontier society in the Hexi Corridor importantly contributed to the growth of cross-Eurasian exchanges. This was partly due to the introduction of new production systems, trade goods, and tools of exchange, but perhaps more importantly, through institutional consolidation stimulated by the Han conquest: the more robust states that maintained travel infrastructures and provided security and trade-enabling services; and urban-based trade diasporas and religious associations that became crucial agents of commercial expansion in Late Antiquity.

## **Between Center and Periphery: Han-Dynasty Cemeteries in the Hexi Corridor and the Movement of People, Objects and Ideas**

Alexander Campos Aran (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)

### **Abstract:**

Archaeological excavations in the Hexi Corridor made since the 1950s have revealed a plethora of tombs that date back to the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE). They have yielded a wealth of material culture such as manuscripts, silk textiles and lacquerwares that offers unique insights into the societies of this erstwhile borderland region. They point to a wide range of social dynamics on location and various kinds of interactions within the Han Empire and beyond. Scholarship, so far, largely has neglected the tremendous value of the available archaeological data and instead has favored isolated passages from early Chinese histories. Consequently, the Hexi Corridor has been portrayed as a mere transit route on the fringes of the empire that people, animals, objects, and ideas needed to traverse in order to access the “markets” of the so-called Silk Roads. Thus, highly complex movement processes have been reduced to unidirectional flows of luxury goods. Based on comprehensive analyses of tomb assemblages, I will show that the geographic location of the Hexi Corridor at the periphery of the early Chinese empires, in fact, turned it into a socio-political center in a matter of less than two hundred years. Its very nature as a borderland between diverse political, cultural and ecological spaces facilitated multifaceted exchanges of people, objects and ideas in numerous directions and for a variety of reasons. I will highlight the intricate dynamics of human mobility in border regions and argue that significant insights can be gleaned when peripheries are reevaluated as centers.

**Early Islamic glazed ceramic along the Silk Roads: Reconstructing technological traditions from Samanid and Karakhanid period Bukhara and Tashkent**

Catherine Klesner (University of Cambridge)

**Abstract:**

This paper presents the results of the archaeometric analysis of early Islamic style glazed ceramics from the major cities of Bukhara and Tashkent in Transoxiana. Glazed ceramics, introduced to the region in the 9th c. CE, served as important cultural markers and demonstrated the intentional affiliation that the residents in Transoxiana developed with the wider Islamic World. Through ceramic compositional analysis by Neutron Activation Analysis (NAA), we have identified local production of glazed wares in Bukhara, Tashkent, and Samarkand, including the iconic Samanid period slipwares as well as slipwares from the subsequent Karakhanid period. Using electron microscopy (SEM-EDS), we have characterised the technological traditions of these glazed wares. This research provides key insights into the extant of ‘Samanid’ and ‘Karakhanid’ style slipware ceramics in the eastern Islamic World, and addresses questions about the degree of technological similarity between these major production centers in the Early Islamic period. We also consider how these locally produced glazed wares relate to a number of imported glazed wares from western Asia, and how the pattern of imported trade goods informs us about Silk Road trade.

**Sustaining the northern Silk Road: Preliminary Faunal Finds from the mediaeval site of  
Dzhankent, Kazakhstan**

Ashleigh Haruda (University of Oxford)

**Abstract:**

Dzhankent was historically attributed as the capital of the Oghuz Turks and has most recently been described as a nexus of trade on the northern Silk Road as it crossed the Kazakh steppes and deserts. Founded in the 6th century and occupied until its decline in the 11th century CE, the city had long distance connections, as evidenced by Arab graffiti on pottery and Near Eastern glass finds. However, it has remained unclear until now how the city was provisioned and supplied from the surrounding arid steppe. This paper will present the preliminary results of zooarchaeological analysis, to unveil how this cosmopolitan city nourished itself while sustaining trade northwards into the steppe and onto the forests of Russia and south to the markets of the Islamic world.

**Interregional Exchange on the Eastern Silk Roads:  
A Case Study from Dengzhou Port, China**  
Shiyu Yang (University College of London)

**Abstract:**

The Eastern Silk Roads were an interconnected web of land-based and maritime routes between Chang'an/Luoyang area in central China, eastern and northern China, the Korean Peninsula, and the Japanese Archipelago. From the seventh to tenth centuries, Dengzhou Port (present-day Penglai, Yantai City) on the Shandong Peninsula reached its heyday as one of the four largest ports in China, and gateway for international trade, diplomatic and cultural exchanges to Northeast Asia. Cargoes discovered around Dengzhou indicate that trade did not vanish under the threat of tensions and conflicts between Song (960-1279), Liao (907-1125), and Jin (1115-1234) Dynasties. Dengzhou continued to engage in official and nongovernmental interactions during the eleventh to fourteenth centuries rather than being superseded by south and southeast ports.

The paper concentrates on some popular goods exchanged on the Eastern Silk Roads and their circulation networks via Dengzhou between the seventh and fourteenth centuries. Three-colour, Changsha, Yue, Yaozhou, Longquan, Jingdezhen, Korean celadon wares, etc. unearthed in Penglai and other coastal areas of Yantai are examined to discuss how different types of ceramic objects, their techniques and designs were transmitted across East Asia waters, with Dengzhou as an intermediate stop linking local and international markets. Other commodities of daily life, e.g. incense and incense burners, textiles, and exotics from West and Central Asia are also explored to reconstruct the interregional commercial networks in Northeast Asia and propose a multilayer circulation model to understand the nature of exchange on the Eastern Silk Roads.

## **At World's End:**

### **An Analysis of Silk's Use and Consumption at the Viking-Age Site of Birka, Sweden**

Megan Allbrooks (University of Oxford)

#### **Abstract:**

This paper investigates the diverse collection of silk textiles found at the Viking Age Site of Birka in central Sweden, considering their significance not only as material objects but also as conduits of cultural exchange and identity formation. Specifically, the study centres on a dataset of twenty-six tenth-century graves, each containing silk artefacts. In an effort to move beyond the question of silk's provenance, which has been the primary focus of scholarship thus far (i.e., Hägg, 1974; Vedeler, 2014; Hedenstierna-Jonson, 2020), this inquiry has instead been firmly anchored in the concept of object biography, as understood by Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, 1999. As such, this paper examines how the meanings, values, and messages associated with silk evolved over both time and space, as well as how its consumption often transcended functionality due to its unique ability to convey multifaceted narratives of identities, beliefs, and social affiliations to its beholders.

Through a detailed analysis of these graves, this contribution further reveals distinctive ways in which men and women elected to incorporate silk into their respective ensembles, namely women's careful adoption of silk into their preexisting costumes and men's full emulation of military styles originating from key portions of the Silk Road, such as the Byzantine Empire, the Islamic Caliphates, and the Eurasian Steppes. Moreover, I argue that the frequent presence of dirhams alongside these silk textiles suggests that this elite subset of Birka's population was deeply familiar with trade networks in and around the Silk Roads. Thus, this study not only highlights the impressive extent of Silk Road trade routes, but also examines their impact from a geographical, historical, and cultural perspective rarely addressed in current Silk Roads archaeology. Finally, I hope for this paper to demonstrate the complex interplay between material culture and the ideas, values, and beliefs that frequently accompany its use and exchange.

**Exploring the Interaction between China and the Steppe  
through the Horsepower project**

Chris Gosden (University of Oxford)

**Abstract:**

This paper will introduce the Horsepower project which is aimed at understanding the links between Mongolia and China in the Xiongnu and China periods. As a multi-disciplinary and multi-national project we will use the ancient genetics of horses, the chemical analyses of metals with excavated evidence in Mongolia and China to build a picture of how the two large-scale states emerged in both places. We will also use broader theory to consider the nature of power in both polities, especially in their cosmological dimensions.

## **Appearance of Camel-themed Artistic Works in China and the Early Silk Road**

Kai Feng (Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum)

### **Abstract:**

On the basis of extensive categories, and temporal and spatial distribution of the camel-themed cultural relics in the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (771-256BC), Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) and Han Dynasty (202 BC-220 AD) of China, it is suggested that their artistic style had obvious chronological and regional characteristics. It is believed that the appearance and development of the camel-themed cultural relics in Central China was deeply influenced by the people in the western and northern part of China, showing a relatively active interaction between agriculture and animal husbandry. The realistic artistic style of the gold and silver camel figures, recently discovered from QLCM1 within the Emperor Qin Shihuang's Mausoleum complex, provide a rare opportunity to investigate the early camel-themed cultural relics in China. The patching technology employed on the silver camel also can be traced to the artworks of Central and West Asia, and beyond. The gold and silver camels were possible imported, or produced locally under the influence of Western art, demonstrating the early Silk Road that had been active before Zhang Qian's trip to the Western Regions in the Han Dynasty.



**Use of Hard Animal Tissues in Object Manufacturing: Deliberate Choice or Local Availability? Archaeozoological and Proteomic Analysis of Artifacts Discovered in Sogdiana during the Antique and Medieval Periods**

Delphine Decruyenaere (Museum national d'Histoire naturelle de Paris)

**Abstract:**

The carving of hard animal tissues was an important aspect of antique and medieval craftsmanship, which involved the production of a wide variety of objects ranging from household utensils to weapons. Research has traditionally focused on the iconography or technological aspects of these artifacts, often neglecting the source of the raw materials. This study emphasizes the identification of the species, providing new insights into the exploitation of animal resources and the relationship between individuals and their ecological environment, while also reflecting the socio-economic and ideological dynamics.

We will try to figure out if there are preferences in the use of some taxa and if these choices simply reflect the local availability of fauna, or do they indicate a deliberate taxonomic selection of materials based on specific criteria.

The 70 artifacts studied here come from Sogdiana and were selected for their diversity in term of function and chronological attribution. They include common everyday items as well as masterpieces, such as the Orlat belt, and can be made from ivory, bone or antler. In the absence of distinguishing morphological criteria, taxonomic identification was achieved through proteomic analysis MALDI FT-ICR realized from bones powder or samples with D-squame stickers.

The results showed that the choice of species is generally based on the function of the object. Domesticated animals are mostly used for household utensils, while wild animals are preferred for weapons and prestige objects. The latests may come from distant regions, suggesting trade networks and cultural exchanges that highlight interactions between different cultures.

The inherent qualities of the material used is also significant: for example, antler is preferred to bone for some objects because of its elasticity. No chronological differences have been observed, but comparisons with other regions reveal variations in species selection, which may depend on the immediate environment of the site or the local habits.

# **How Many Ancient Goods Can Be Detected Archaeologically--A Case Study of the Silk Road in the Tang Dynasty**

Huhongyan Tian (University of Oxford)

## **Abstract:**

The Silk Road during the Tang dynasty was a crucial conduit for trade, facilitating extensive material and cultural exchanges between East and West. However, the archaeological study of ancient trade has been constrained by the preservation of durable goods, leaving many perishable commodities documented only in historical records and largely absent from the archaeological record. This paper takes the Tang dynasty's Silk Road as a case study, discussing the textual records and archaeological findings within China. It contrasts the richness of organic goods recorded in historical texts with the limited variety of inorganic goods uncovered archaeologically, exploring how the material properties and burial contexts of these goods influence their preservation and visibility. Furthermore, this study discusses how advancements in archaeological science can be employed to detect and identify these "invisible" commodities, thus addressing key gaps in the understanding of ancient trade systems. Ultimately, this research highlights the need for a more nuanced approach that extends beyond visible artifacts to reconstruct the full spectrum of ancient trade and cultural interactions.

## **A Study of Dunhuang Hebrew Manuscript H1412**

Xiaoyan Ji (University College London)

### **Abstract:**

The Dunhuang Hebrew Manuscript H1412 is a prayer of indulgence and is currently the only Hebrew document unearthed from the eastern section of the Silk Road. This significant manuscript has not yet been translated into English, and previous scholars have primarily focused on philological research. This paper engages with questions of identity, biblical interpretation, and cross-cultural interaction, seeking to answer the question: How did a Hebrew manuscript, written in a seemingly distant language, come to be found in Dunhuang?

To explore this, I conducted extensive research on the allusions to the Hebrew Bible, the substitutions of the Tetragrammaton (the divine name YHWH) in the prayer, and the conversion of the Khazar Khaganate, drawing on both primary sources and secondary literature. The possessor of this prayer manuscript may have belonged to a Jewish community in Central Asia. Notably, the text substitutes the Tetragrammaton with "YYY," a substitution that may have its origins in Babylonian magical incantations. The prayer incorporates biblical allusions and follows a narrative structure that includes sin, diaspora, atonement, return, and reward. This narrative reflects the enduring continuity of Jewish civilization. Additionally, this paper discusses the impact of the Silk Road on Jewish communities in Central Asia.

**The Wangchuan Ceremony:  
A Living Testament to Maritime Silk Roads' Cultural Exchange and Continuity**

Yuxin Fu (University of Oxford)

**Abstract:**

The Wangchuan Ceremony, inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2020, exemplifies how maritime networks facilitated cultural exchange and community cohesion along the Maritime Silk Roads. Originated in the Minnan region of China between the 15th and 17th centuries, this ritual, dedicated to the sea deity Wangye (王爷), has spread to Southeast Asia through the voyages and maritime trade of the Minnan people. Today, it remains an integral part of the cultural landscape in the coastal regions of Xiamen Bay and Quanzhou Bay, China, and in Chinese communities in Melaka, Malaysia.

This paper explores the role of Wangchuan Ceremony in connecting communities along the Maritime Silk Roads, highlighting its significance in fostering transnational communication and intercultural integration. Central to the ceremony are rituals such as the construction of the symbolic ship called 'Wangchuan' (王船), and the performance of a series of disaster-averting and peace-pleading activities. These rituals not only evoke ancestral memories of ocean voyages but also honour the harmonious relationship between humanity and the sea. As a shared heritage between China and Malaysia, the Wangchuan Ceremony demonstrates the enduring impact of the Maritime Silk Roads in enabling a sense of connectedness and continuity for the Minnan communities in both countries, as well as promoting long-term interaction and peaceful coexistence between them.

## **Journey of the British Museum Silk Roads exhibition**

Yu-Ping Luk (British Museum)

### **Abstract:**

The major Silk Roads exhibition at the British Museum (26 September 2024 to 23 February 2025) brings audiences on a journey across networks connecting Asia, Africa and Europe in the period 500 to 1000 CE, revealing interwoven histories through objects. Five years in the making, the exhibition is co-curated by three curators from different collection departments, working with 29 national and international lenders. This talk will reflect on the curatorial journey behind the exhibition and the approaches that were taken, with a focus on the eastern Silk Roads. It will highlight the collaborations that made the exhibition possible as well as some of the reoccurring strands and themes that connect the exhibition narrative.