

# The Silk Road

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"The Bridge between Eastern and Western Cultures"

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## In This Issue

- The International Dunhuang Project
- Economic and Social Roots of Buddhism
- Byzantine Solidi in China
- Silk Road or Paper Road?
- East Meets West under the Mongols
- Two Travelers in Yazd
- Kyrgyz Healing Practices

## Next Issue

A special focus on Mongolia, including:

- Nicola di Cosmo on early nomads
- Esther Jacobson on petroglyphs
- Guolong Lai on Han mirrors in Xiongnu graves
- articles on the summer 2005 Arkhangai excavation

plus

Ulf Jaeger on the Francke-Körber Collection of Khotan antiquities in Munich, and more....

## About

*The Silk Road* is a semi-annual publication of the Silkroad Foundation. *The Silk Road* can also be viewed online at <<http://www.silkroadfoundation.org>>.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions or contributions. Guidelines for contributors may be found in Vol. 2, No. 1 (June 2004) on the website.

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## From the Editor

As my e-mail inbox keeps reminding me, technology has dramatically altered the possibilities for meaningful interaction with those who share an interest in the Silk Road. My correspondents range from middle school students doing History Day projects and filmmakers and editors needing information for documentaries or articles to scholars whose expertise on the languages and history of the Silk Road far exceeds anything I would dare to claim for myself. The mere fact that their inquiries come my way and from all over the world is a tribute to the Internet, which has become for many the first choice for information. Is there anyone today with a computer and Internet connection who does not use Google as a reference tool? A name on a web page may identify an "authority" whose brain can be picked with a few keystrokes. Of course as a teacher, I have to keep reminding my students to be critical in their assessment of online sources and about the fact information produced with old-fashioned technology (e.g., ink on paper) is far from obsolete.

In previous issues of *The Silk Road*, articles have on occasion highlighted how technology is transforming the study of evidence regarding the early history of interactions across Eurasia. In particular we have seen how new techniques of analyzing archaeological material have advanced our understanding of material evidence and how innovative mapping of sites can help us to understand their context and relationship to sites in other regions. That said, as I learned from my experience in Mongolia this summer both on the Xiongnu

excavation co-sponsored by the Silkroad Foundation and the Mongolian National University and in independent study of petroglyph sites in the Mongolian Altai, the application of advanced technologies is uneven. Even where they are available, the techniques many not be able to answer some of the basic questions we pose about such key issues as chronology. And in too many cases still, the lack of access to advanced techniques for analysis or preservation of material may be a real constraint on the amount of information which can be learned from an excavation.

In any event, the promise of technology is great, although I hesitate to say unlimited, since I am somewhat pessimistic about humans being able to devise technological solutions to all the problems they create. It is also undoubtedly the case that for many aspects of the historical record, we will never figure out how to fill the gaps, however much the application of new technology may provide us with information and understanding we previously lacked.

Certainly one of the most promising benefits of the technological revolution is that described in our lead article by Susan Whitfield, the Director of the International Dunhuang Project (IDP) at the British Library. Most of our readers are undoubtedly aware of the project and may have visited its web site. Her article highlights the huge accomplishments to date as well as the ambitious plans for its future. Here already is a superb research tool for serious scholars around the world as well as a source of

information for the generally curious. An example of the use of the material may be found in this issue in Connie Chin's article on patronage of Buddhism along the Silk Road: the IDP website provided the images of the documents from which she did some of her translations.

The fact that the IDP is making available resources scattered in the museums and libraries of several countries and doing so in a number of languages is extremely important. To develop the basis for such cooperation and find the funding is in itself little short of miraculous. Those of us who are engaged in more modest Internet projects generally do not have the resources to provide such access to audiences whose languages are different from our own; what we can accomplish is generally constricted by our individual schedules and knowledge. The IDP is an undertaking which also is beginning to contribute in a major way to the ability of educators to transform their curricula by incorporating meaningful material on the history and culture of Eurasia. I am particularly struck by its undertaking to provide curriculum materials for Chinese schools in Gansu. If the historic Silk Road is all about cultural sharing across human and geographic boundaries, then the IDP is in itself a kind of modern Silk Road which transcends boundaries and in fact reaches much farther than the historic Silk Road ever did. As Dr. Whitfield's article reminds readers, the continuing success of IDP is contingent on its funding. I would recommend to all our readers that they consider "sponsoring a sutra" to help support the processing of the material.

Among the other contributions to this issue, Jonathan Bloom's reminds us of the importance of the early technology transfer along what, as he argues, might better be called the "Paper Road," given the significance of the use of paper for human communication down

through the centuries. Prof. Bloom's article and the complementary one by Prof. Sheila Blair on cultural exchange under the Mongols were originally delivered as lectures in the lecture series co-sponsored by the Center for East Asian Studies at Stanford and the Silkroad Foundation. Professors Bloom and Blair are distinguished experts on Islamic art whose books I highly recommend. The Foundation has broadened its sponsorship of public lectures by such distinguished scholars to include several universities; we plan to publish many of the lectures in future issues of our journal.

The other contributions to this issue are quite varied. Professor Lin Ying summarizes her earlier published work on the very interesting phenomenon of Byzantine coins and their imitations in China and suggests new ideas as to how the coins may have been understood there. Jipar Duyshembiyeva's account of some of her field work on Kyrgyz healing

practices offers new evidence about the intersection between traditional practices and Islam. And Frank Harold's article on Yazd evokes the culture of one of the important cities on the historic Silk Roads in Western Asia. Readers will recall Frank and Ruth Harold's photographs from Palmyra, which illustrated our article on that famous caravan city. The Harolds have also contributed generously from their photo archive to Silk Road Seattle.

Looking ahead, we anticipate that the June 2006 issue will be devoted primarily to the archaeology and culture of early eurasian nomads, especially in Mongolia. Included will be information on the excavations at the Tamir River site last summer. In anticipation of our spring issue, readers may wish to visit the excavation website.

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## Arkhangai Excavations

<http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/excavation/arkhangai/index.htm>

A four-week excavation and study program near the Tamir River in Arkhangai Province, Mongolia, was co-sponsored by the Silkroad Foundation and the Mongolian National University in July and August 2005. The large team included professional archaeologists from Mongolia, China and the United States, Mongolian graduate students and undergraduates specializing in archaeology, and volunteers primarily from the U.S., some of whom were acquiring their first experience in archaeology. The institute was highly successful as a learning experience for all involved and for its concrete accomplishments in archaeological survey and the excavation of a Xiongnu settlement site and graveyard. A web site, elegantly designed by Fredrich Kahrl and Wendy Tao, participants in the excavation, introduces the results of the Arkhangai Province excavation. The web site includes descriptive essays, maps, photographs, annotated bibliography and much more. Material will be added to the web site over the coming months as analysis of the results of the excavation become available.