

ARTH 386: THE SILK ROAD

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"Silk Road" is a romantic term for the shifting network of trade routes across Eurasia in pre-modern times. It has become a metaphor for many other things as well: cultural connections between China, Central and Western Asia, and the Mediterranean; the resulting spread of ideas and technologies; or premodern world trade in luxury goods. In this course, we will focus on the trading cultures of medieval Central Asia. The first part of the course will provide the necessary historical, geographical and architectural background for the regions involved. In the second part, we will be reading primary sources and studying the production of luxury goods in the great caravan cities. We will study the interactions between settled and nomadic cultures, and the material culture of each. We will also explore the history of trade in luxury goods west to the Mediterranean and east to China in the medieval world, as seen through the eyes of travellers such as Ibn Battutah, Xuanzang, and Marco Polo. The course will conclude with a look at Silk Road studies, sites and museum collections today.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: Students will become familiar with the arts and technologies unique to the region, and local museum holdings of the same. Students will learn the difficult historical geography that underlies the Eurasian trade networks. Students will gain practice reading and analyzing medieval primary sources. Students will consider the ways ideas and material culture spread together across vast distances in premodern times. Students will become more comfortable crossing traditional academic boundaries, and learn to look for connections between peoples and regions usually presented as distinct. Finally, students will study the ethical dimensions of archeology and collecting as they apply to pre-modern Central Asia.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Attendance with active class participation. (10% of the course grade)
- Assigned readings, done before class.
- Two visits to local museums: Sackler and Freer Galleries, and the Textile Museum.
- Two short research papers, based on the museum visits. (20% each)
- Geography quiz. (10%)
- Two exams based on the reading and class lectures. (20% each)

TEXTBOOKS. Required:

- Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters*. Oxford, 1993.
- Peter Golden, *Nomads and Sedentary Societies in Medieval Eurasia*. AHA, 1998.
- Janet Harvey, *Traditional Textiles of Central Asia*. Thames & Hudson, 1997.
- Frances Wood, *The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia*. California, 2002.
- a course reader, available in the bookstore.

Optional but recommended, available in the bookstore:

- Jonathan Tucker, *The Silk Road: Art and History*. Art Media Resources, 2003.
- Weiss and Westermann, *The Bazaar: Markets and Merchants of the Islamic World*. Thames & Hudson, 1998.
- Music CD: *The Silk Road: A Musical Caravan*. Smithsonian Folkways, 2-CD set, 2002.

HOW TO REACH ME:

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PART I: ORIGINS OF THE SILK ROAD

WEEK I: INTRODUCTION: WHERE AND WHAT?

Map and first museum exercise assigned

Reading:

- Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, 1: “Rise and Fall of the Silk Road.”
- Do the readings assigned for next week’s discussion.

On reserve:

- Jonathan Tucker, *Silk Road: History and Art*, use the maps for reference.
- Mallory and Mair, *The Tarim Mummies*.

WEEK II: TRADE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD: ALEXANDER, ROME AND INDIA

Readings to discuss:

- Bentley, Chapters 1 & 2
- Wood, chapters 1-3

Maps due.

Film: Part II, from Michael Wood’s “In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great”

Catalogue on reserve: *Silk Roads, China Ships*.

WEEK III: HAN CHINA AND THE NOMADIC WORLD

Reading:

- Wood, Chapters 4-5
- Thorp and Vinograd, *Chinese Art and Culture*, 4: “The First Empires: Qin and Han,” in course reader.

Catalogues on reserve:

- *Traders and Raiders on China’s Northern Frontiers*
- *Nomads of Eurasia*.

WEEK IV: TANG CHINA, BUDDHISM AND WORLD TRADE

Reading:

- Bentley, Chapter 3
- Wood, chapters 6-7
- Excerpts from Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road* (reader)

Catalogues on reserve:

- *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China*;
- *Silk Road and Shoso-in*.
- *The Caves of the Thousand Buddhas: Chinese Art from the Silk Route*

Film: “China’s Golden Age: The Tang”

First museum assignment due.

WEEK V: Review and quiz, Monday, February 21.

PART II: ARTS AND TRADE IN MEDIEVAL CENTRAL ASIA

WEEK VI: ISLAMIC ASIA

Reading:

- Stokstad, *Art History*, rev. ed. 8: “Islamic Art.”
- Lawrence Butler, “Mosques and Muslim Identity along China’s Trade Routes” (reader)

On reserve:

- Bloom and Blair, *Art of the Islamic World*
- Frishman & Khan, *The Mosque: History, Architectural Development & Regional Diversity*.

Second museum project assigned.

WEEK VII: TEXTILES OF CENTRAL ASIA

Reading:

- Janet Harvey, *Traditional Textiles from Central Asia*.
- Lawrence Butler, “Putting the Silk into Silk Route Studies” (reader)

On reserve:

- Jan Thompson, *Silk, Carpets and the Silk Road*.
- Andy Hale and Kate FitzGibbon, *Ikats: Woven Silks from Central Asia*.

WEEK VIII: TRAVEL IN THE MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC WORLD

Reading:

- Ross Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta*, excerpts (course reader)
- Eleanor Sims, “Trade and Travel: Markets and Caravanserais” from Michell, *Architecture of the Islamic World*. (course reader)

On reserve:

- Royal Ontario Museum, *Silk Roads, China Ships* exhibition catalogue.
- Weiss & Westerman, *The Bazaar: Markets and Merchants of the Islamic World*.

WEEK IX: THE MONGOL EMPIRE

Reading:

- Bentley, Chapter 4
- Peter Golden, *Nomads and Sedentary Societies in Medieval Eurasia*.
- Barbara Brend, *Islamic Art*, 5: “The Last Invaders: Mongol and Timurid Empires.”

Catalogues on reserve:

- *Empires Beyond the Great Wall*
Modern Mongolia.

WEEK X: MARCO POLO AND THE ITALIAN TRADE

Reading:

- Wood, 8: “Tangut, Mongols, Nestorians and Marco Polo.”
- Marco Polo, *The Travels*, excerpts. (reader)
- John Larner, *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World*, 7: “Marco, Merchants and Missionaries.” (reader)
- Butler, “Marco among the Idolators: Images and Iconoclasm along the Silk Roads.”

On reserve:

- Rosamond Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600*

WEEK XI: TIMUR SAMARKAND and BUKHARA

Reading:

- Wood, 9: “A Parterre of Roses: Travelers to Samarkand and Ming China.”
- Blair & Bloom, *Art & Architecture of Islam, 1250-1800*, 4 & 5, on Timurid art and architecture.

On reserve:

- Lentz & Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Image* (exhibition catalogue on reserve)
- Blair & Bloom, *Art & Architecture of Islam, 1250-1800*
- Weiss & Westerman, *The Bazaar: Markets and Merchants of the Islamic World*.

WEEK XII: Review and test on medieval Central Asia.

PART III: LATTER DAYS

WEEK XIII: END OF THE SILK ROAD

Second museum project due.

Reading:

- Wood, Chapter 10: “The Great Game and the Silk Road.”
- Bentley, chapter 5: “Toward a New World Order.”
- Morris Rossabi, “The ‘Decline’ of the Central Asian Caravan Trade” (reader)

On reserve:

- Royal Ontario Museum, *Silk Roads, China Ships* exhibition catalogue.

WEEK XIV: REDISCOVERY AND PRESERVATION

Reading:

- Wood, Chapters 11-14.
- Finnbar Barry Flood, “Between Cult and Culture: Bamiyan, Islamic Iconoclasm, and the Museum,” *Art Bulletin* 84, no. 4 (December 2002), pp. 641-659.
- Butler, “Buddhist Cave Art in American Collections: Recovering the Context” (reader)

On reserve:

- *Along the Ancient Silk Routes: Central Asian Art from the West Berlin State Museums*
- *Dunhuang: A Centennial Commemoration of the Discovery of the Cave Library*.

The **final exam** will be open-book, open-notes, and will be comprehensive.