

ANTH/EAST 458: Archaeology of the Silk Road

Instructor: Andrew Womack

Fall 2017

Office: TBA

Office Hours: Tuesday 10-noon or by appt

This course will approach the history and archaeology of China and Central Asia through the lens of the Silk Road, a series of trade routes and interacting local economies that spanned across Asia, the Middle East, and into Europe for millennia. Using a mixture of historical documents and material and visual culture, the history of these interconnected regions and the lives of the individuals who inhabited it will be explored, alongside a critical analysis of our sources of this knowledge. Each week we will move chronologically and geographically through the regions connected by the Silk Road, discussing the development of major religions, empires, and trade routes, the spread of new technologies and ideas, the movements of goods and people, and the impact that each of these have on these areas in modern times.

The course will begin with a critical exploration of our sources of knowledge on the Silk Road, with particular attention to the historical and political contexts in which many key documents, artifacts, and sites were first uncovered and the early explorers who were instrumental in their discovery, preservation, and in some cases destruction. Following this the archaeology of the proto-Silk Road will be discussed, which will include our knowledge of the movements of goods, technologies, animals, and peoples between China and Central Asia before the advent of the written record in this region. Transitioning in to the historical period the early empires of China, the steppe regions, and Central Asia and the relationships between them will be discussed. In the following weeks, the development and spread of major religions, including Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam will be covered, along with the trading empires that were key to their expansion. One class will also be devoted to the southern land and sea routes, which connected southern China and southeast Asia to India, the Middle East and the east African coast. The latter portion of the course will delve into the Mongol empires, their formation, fragmentation, and the eventual decline in trans-Asian land routes. Finally, modern revivals of classic Silk Road routes, such as China's "Belt and Road" initiative, and the impact that these are having on modern inhabitants and economies of the region will be discussed.

While course lectures will cover large themes and time periods, students will have a chance to focus on particular subjects of interest through the Blogging the Silk Road project. Discussed in detail in class, the project will involve weekly blog entries recounting your chosen individuals' life and/or journey on the Silk Road, while drawing links to both the weekly course topic and our sources of knowledge on the individual. Each blog entry will be accompanied by a short weekly presentation and a final paper, tying together multiple individuals' journey with larger course themes. You should come away from this course not only with a good understanding of the history of the Silk Road regions, but also of the sources of our knowledge on these topics and the ways in which these inform our understanding of individual lives on the Silk Road.

Requirements

1. (10%) Class attendance and participation. Come to class, ask questions, do the readings (before class), be prepared to say something about them, say it, be critical. If you cannot make it to class for a valid reason (illness, emergency) please email in advance to let me know.

2. (40%) Blogging the Silk Road:

You might not have been there, but we'll be reading about a lot of people who have, now it's up to you to convey their story. In the first weeks of class we'll learn about a number of individuals – traders, monks, soldiers, slaves, diplomats, 20th century explorers – who lived or journeyed along the Silk Road. After selecting an individual or profession, each week you'll write a 1-2 page blog entry about your chosen person's journey along the Silk Road. Using assigned readings, your own research, and a bit of creativity, your job is to convey key points in the life of your individual and relate them to the weekly course topic. You should discuss the importance of specific locations, interactions with other characters or groups, influence of politics, religion, war, etc on their lives. For each entry, a paragraph describing the written sources or material culture that influenced your writing should be provided. Use of images highly encouraged.

3. (20%) In-class presentations. Each week you will provide a short (3-5 min) update on your journey, with a particular focus on tying it in with the topic at hand. This should also include information on the sources, including texts and/or material culture, that informed your knowledge of the journey. If you individual interacted with or is connected to another students' then group presentations describing the interaction are welcome.

4. (30%) Final papers and summery presentation

You have made it to the end of your journey and heard the stories of a number of other travelers along the way, now it's time to tie it all together. Using references to specific documents, material and visual culture, and in-class discussion and reading, write a 10-12-page paper that critically analyzes a topic of your choosing and relates it to at least three of the individuals or professions covered by other students. Topics can potentially include the development of a religion, the impact of a technology, the history of a city, or issues facing a modern region. All topics should be discussed with the instructor by mid-term.

Note on Writing Assignments: All written works should be 12pt, double spaced, Times New Roman, 1-inch margins. Please cite in text (author last name & year) with full bibliographic information at the end.

Readings:

Two required books are available through the library or at Paragraph Books.

Hansen, Valerie. 2015. The Silk Road: A New History

Whitfield, Susan. 2015. Life Along the Silk Road

Other readings will be available either in the library, from the library website, and/or posted to the Mycourses website.

Class Schedule

9/11 Introduction to class

Course structure, requirements, major themes, and discussion of individual projects.

9/18 Origins of Silk Road Knowledge: Archaeologists, Explorers, and a lot of Controversy

Topics to think about: Why is context important in archaeology? Think about both the context in which documents are artifacts are found and the time period and individuals who recovered them? How can these shape our understanding of the past?

Readings: Hansen: Introduction, TBA

In-class: Discussion and selection of project topic

9/25 The Proto-Silk Road: Neolithic and Bronze Age Interactions

Topics to think about: The Indo-European question and early inhabitants of Inner Asia; technologies of transport, status and war: horses, chariots, bronze ornaments and weaponry; mortuary behavior, or, you can take it with you; early cemeteries and mummies of the Taklamakan—the Gumugou, Loulan, and Xiaohe sites

Readings: TBA

10/2 Cultural Divide: Steppe and the Sown in the Iron Age and Beyond

Topics to think about:

Readings: TBA

10/16 Travelers from the East: the Han Dynasty and Silk Road Origins

Topics to think about:

Readings: TBA

10/23 Buddhism: Early development and movement through Central and East Asia

Topics to think about:

Readings: Hansen Ch.1 & 2

10/30 Heyday of the Silk Road: Trading Empires, Expansion of Buddhism, Growth of Religious Art

Topics to think about:

Readings: Hansen Ch 3 & 4

In-class: Selection of Final Paper topics

11/6 The Southern Routes: Land and Sea Contacts from South Asia to East Africa

Topics to think about:

Readings: TBA

11/13 Heyday of the Silk Road II: Trade and Religion in the Tang

Topics to think about:

Readings: Hansen Ch 5 & 6

11/20 The Islamization of the Silk Road; Central Asia before the Mongols

Topics to think about:

Readings: Hansen Ch. 7; TBA

11/27 The Mongol Empire; Marco Polo; Decline of Overland Trade

Topics to think about:

Readings: TBA

12/4 The Silk Road Today; Conflict and Connections in Central Asia

Topics to think about:

Readings:

12/7 Final Presentations

Emailed final paper due on Friday, December 8th by midnight

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