
DEAR READER,

JOURNEY TO THE WEST

The Silk Road is probably the most famous historical network of commercial roads and it is quite natural that on 22 June 2014, UNESCO designated the Chang'an-Tianshan corridor of the Silk Road as a World Heritage Site. Nowadays we can witness a renewed interest in the history of the Silk Road. Countless exhibitions and conferences are held, academic papers are written about it. Now I would like to draw the attention on two phenomena concerning the Silk Road.

The latest exhibition in the Amsterdam Hermitage Museum is titled '*Expedition Silk Road — Journey to the West. Treasures from the Hermitage.*' It is held between 1 March – 5 September 2014. This time again the State Hermitage Museum provided its satellite museum in Amsterdam with a lavish collection. Having built on the work of Russian archaeologists for more than a century, the Museum in St. Petersburg owns a unique collection of basically everything that is connected to the Silk Road's Central Asian section. The cultural richness of this collection is exhibited in Amsterdam with a unique focus: '*Journey to the West*' — a journey not to the European West but to the West of China, to Central Asia and India. The title — and hence the inspiration for the focus — was borrowed from the 16th century classical Chinese novel written by Wu Cheng'en, recounting the pilgrimage of the Buddhist monk Xuanzang to India that lasted from 629 to 645. The artifacts displayed provide indeed a grandiose 'journey to the West' to all visitors who are privileged to visit this exhibition. My personal favorite was the painted clay and wood figurine of the monkey 'Sun Wukong' (Monkey in Western Garb) unearthed at Khara Koto during the expedition of Pyotr Kozlov (1907-1909) and dated 13th-14th century.

Silk was indeed traded along the Silk Road, but it was by far not the most common traded good. And the commercial aspect of the Silk Road cannot shun its more profound aspect and impact: that of the interchange of cultural, religious, and other spiritual ideas, skills, and crafts. In essence we can even conclude that the Silk Road is the ultimate symbol of globalization put in a right context. This was also the motivating factor for the renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma when he initiated in 1998 the *Silk Road Project, Inc.* in order to promote collaboration among artists and institutions, multicultural artistic exchange, and to study the ebb and flow of ideas among different cultures along the Silk Road. Of the many artists and artistic productions resulting of this initiative is a team of musicians who collaborate under the name '*Ghazal*' and produce a unique and wonderful combination of Persian and Indian improvisative music. The main musicians include Kayhan Kalhor (Iran) playing the kamancheh, Shujaat Husain Khan (India) playing sitar, and Sandeep Das (India) playing the tabla.

Their four CDs up until now under the Ghazal brand include *Ghazal: Lost Songs of the Silk Road*, 1997; *Ghazal 2: As Night Falls on the Silk Road*, 1998; *Ghazal 3: Moon Rise over the Silk Road*, 2000; and *Ghazal: The Rain*, 2003.

We are living in a very fortunate era when we can enjoy such exhibitions like the 'Journey to the West' presenting the enormous cultural richness of the peoples who lived and exchanged high cultures along the Silk Road and also listening to great musicians like Kayhan Kalhor and Shujaat Husain Khan who embody in our time the very essence of the cultural interplay of the Silk Road.

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