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## THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE “ARCHAEOLOGY AND CONSERVATION ALONG THE SILK ROAD”

In November 2018, the International Conference “Archaeology and Conservation along the Silk Road” was held for the third time at the city of Tabriz (East Azerbaijan, Iran). More than 80 scholars from Iran, China, Austria, Germany, and Russia brought to the conference 52 oral and poster presentations which cover a broad array of topics, including Islamic bridge-caravanserai in Iran, the collection of blue-white porcelain at the Ardebil Shrine, Sino-Iranian cultural contact in medieval period, early nomadic cultures in the Altai region, and the burial behaviors at Ephesos. Abstracts of the reports were published and distributed in print and electronic forms, along with other materials prepared by the organizers of the conference. This article highlights the contents of some presentations, and some results of the first two conferences held in 2014 and 2016 in China. The main purpose of these activities is to unite the efforts of archaeologists and conservators to preserve and promote cultural heritage, which has been found and is being studied and restored in the territory of the Great Silk Road in different countries of Eurasia. It is hoped that this multinational and multidisciplinary conference will be carried on in the future.

*Key words:* international conference, Great Silk Road, Archaeology, conservation, cultural heritage.

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### *Introduction*

The third international conference “Archaeology and Restoration along the Silk Road” was held on 14–15 November, 2018, at the city of Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province, Iran (fig. 1). Tabriz was once a capital city of the Ikhanid Empire, and an important transit station of the Silk Road. Although repeatedly wrecked by earthquakes, it retains a number of historical monuments, among which the Grand Bazaar has been enlisted as a World Cultural Heritage. The organizers purposefully selected an ancient caravanserai Yaam (fig. 2), which was restored and turned into a hotel, 40 km away from Tabriz, as the venue. Over 80 archaeologists and conservators from Iran, China, Austria, Germany, and Russia participated in this conference (fig. 3).

The international conference “Archaeology and Conservation along the Silk Road” is a series of events that is held every other year in the Silk Road countries. It was first held in 2014 at Northwest University at Xi’an, China under the auspice of the former chairperson Brigitte Winklehner of the Eurasia-Pacific Uninet, a network of universities of Europe and Asia founded and funded by the Austrian Ministry of Science and Education for the purpose of fostering cooperation among them. Over sixty archaeologists and conservators from China, Austria, Germany, Russia, and India were invited to participate in the conference for the purpose of breaking the political and disciplinary barriers and promoting international collaboration. In 2016, the second conference was held at Nanjing University at Nanjing, China, in the same manner, attracting over 70 scholars and students from China, Austria, Russia, Iran, Germany, United Kingdoms, Italy, Switzerland, United States, and Australia. The proceedings of the conference were published in Austria. At the end of the event, Dr. Hamideh Choubak, director of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research (ICAR), ex-



Fig. 1. The Opening Ceremony of the Third International Conference “Archaeology and Conservation along the Silk Road” (2018)  
Рис. 1. Открытие Третьей Международной научной конференции «Археология и консервация на Шелковом пути» (2018 г.)



Fig. 2. The venue of the conference (restored Yaam caravanserai)  
Рис. 2. Место проведения конференции (отреставрированный караван-сарай Яам)



Fig. 3. Conference participants in the plenary session  
Рис. 3. Участники конференции на пленарном заседании

pressed the intention of holding the third conference in Iran. The founders of the conference Prof. Liangren Zhang and Prof. Gabriela Krist accepted her request so as to increase the academic contact with Iranian institutions.

#### ***The Results of the Conference***

The conference opened with a grand ceremony, when Mr. Morteza Abdar, General Director of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism of East Azerbaijan Province, and Mr. Majid Khodabakhsh, Governor of the province, presented an overview of the achievements in the fields of tourism, cultural heritage, and archaeology of the province. Prof. Liangren Zhang called for attention of the world academic community to the importance of Iran, which is located between East Asia and the Mediterranean World, the Eurasian steppe and the Indian Subcontinent, and played a crucial role in ancient Silk Road. Unfortunately, up to date the archaeology and conservation of this country has not been well represented in international conferences.

Among the 52 papers that the organizers had received, 26 were presented (fig. 4). In general, the presentations increased our knowledge of the Silk Road. Foreign cultural elements found in southern China have been conventionally regarded as transported through the maritime Silk Road. Prof. Meitian Li from People's University of China collected medieval images of whirling dance on bricks from the Xiangyang region in Hubei Province and on porcelains of the Tongguan Kiln in Hunan Province, which unveils the previously unknown movement of the Sogdians into the middle Yangtze River along the Han River. Regarding the Sino-Iranian cultural interaction during the Western Han Dynasty, little was known in the past. Dr. Jie Yin from Nanjing University garnered petal-shaped silver and copper boxes from the Shizhaishan cemetery in Yunnan Province, the Royal Tomb of the Southern Yue



Fig. 4. Presentations by some speakers  
Рис. 4. Выступления некоторых докладчиков

state in Guangzhou City, and the Princely Tomb of the Jiangdu Princedom in Jiangsu Province. Although they are formally analogous to those of the Achaemenid period in Iran, they may have entered China in the Parthian period. Jade industry was prominent in the Shang and Zhou periods, and a major source of jadeite materials was thought to be Khotan. However, in the recent decade, Dr. Guoke Chen has been investigating a number of jadeite mines in the Hexi Corridor. At this conference he presented materials of the Hanxia Site, and suggested that the ancient miners may have been the Indo-Scythians and the raw materials they produced may have been transmitted to the urban centers of the Shang and Zhou Dynasties.

European scholars have long been active in the archaeology and conservation in the domain of the Silk Road. Prof. Tishkin and Prof. Seregin from Altai State University (Russia) have been working in the Altai area, a part of the steppe Silk Road. In much of the history, the Altai area was a periphery of nomadic empires. Prof. Tishkin reported imported goods of various periods. In tombs of the Pazyryk Culture there have been discovered mirrors, silk, and lacquer wares from China and carpets from Persia; in the subsequent periods, the Xiongnu and Rouran empires extended their power to this area, bringing leather belts, gold plaques, and garments. Prof. Seregin presented imported goods of the Turkish and Mongolian periods, among which there are mirrors and coins from China, and other goods from the West. Dr. Martin Steskal, who has been working at Ephesus in southwestern Turkey, a harbor city

of the Hellenic and Roman times linking up the Mediterranean world and Asia, discussed the two types of interment, inhumation and cremation, in this city, and against the common assumption, they were personal choices rather than religious or political mandates. Ms. Birgit A. Schmidt has been working on the restoration and display of the frescos cut from Buddhist caves in Xinjiang in the early twentieth century, of which a major part was devastated during World War II and the remaining part is now in the Museum for Asian Arts (Berlin). She reported the virtual reconstruction of the caves and the frescoes.

In the international conferences under the umbrella of the “Silk Road”, archaeology and conservation of Iran have been under-represented. The purpose of holding the conference at Tabriz, an ancient city on the Silk Road, is partly to change the status quo. And the presentations served that purpose well, providing much fresh knowledge to the international audience. Prof. Zhang and his Iranian partner Ali Vahdati, who have been excavating Tepe Naderi in Northern Khorasan Province, reported their discovery of Bronze Age painted pottery of the Central Asian style and blue-white porcelain of the Chinese style, which speak eloquently out the cultural outreach of Northern Khorasan Province. Prof. Haede Laleh from University of Tehran described a Nishapur-centered craft production and trade network, which extended to as far as Herat in Afghanistan, Kopet Dag Mountains, and the salt desert in the Central Plateau. Grains and crafts turned out to be circulated within and without the region. Behruz Omrani from the Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism (RICHT) spoke about the Royal Road, which was built by Darius I to connect Susa and Sardis 300 years before the opening of the Silk Road. The road was later extended to link up Mesopotamia, Indus River, and North Africa, and Alexander the Great trekked it to conquer the Achaemenid Empire.

Other Iranian scholars brought Silk Road architectures to the conference. Mr. Amin Moradi from the RICHT examined tall buildings (Tower-shaped mosques and tombs) of the Seljuk period (1037–1194), which he thought to be inherited by Ilkhanid-period structures with some adjustments. Ms. Mahnaz Ashrafi from the same institute studied the Anbooh and Manjil bridges of the Safavid and Ghajar periods on the Qazvin-Gilan Freeway, a section of the Silk Road. The topography along the way is so rugged that bridges are indispensable. What is interesting here is that some bridges assumed the function of caravanserai over time: storage facilities and horse stables were affixed to them so that merchants could stay overnight. Meysam Labbaf-Khaniki presented the archaeological discoveries of the castle of the Sarakhs Plain, which is located along the Silk Road between Iran and Turkmenistan. In history it was the entry into Khorasan not only for merchants and monks, but also for nomadic invaders. For security’s sake, wall and castle were built upon the ridge in the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the Sasanian period (224–651), chahartaq was a type of architecture typical for fire temples, but it sometimes concurred with castles at mountain passes along the Silk Road. Alireza Shahmohammadpour offered an example of Baze Hur, where a castle and a chahartaq were built on the two ridges of a pass.

At the conference, the collection of Chinese blue-white porcelains in Iran was a prominent topic. In the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, Chinese porcelain was hot merchandise in the Islamic world. This is what we have known; what we do not know is that rulers of several states built Chini-khana (house of China) to display their collections of Chinese porcelains. According to Yushen Yu, a PhD candidate from Heidelberg University, chini-khana was built in the cities of Samarkand, Herat, and Isfahan, but the one in Ardebil turns out to be the ear-

liest extant one. In the account of Fakhri Daneshpour Parvar, the collection of the Ardebil Shrine was built up in the Ilkhanid, Timurid (1370–1507), and Safavid (1501–1736) periods; altogether 1162 pieces of green celadon, five-color, and blue-white porcelains were stored here. A part of them was damaged in wars and invasions; the remaining ones were displayed in the niches in the walls of the shrine. In an earthquake many of them were crashed. Of the remaining ones, most were moved to the National Museum; only 71 pieces were left behind, and some of them bear the reign marks of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, such as Wanli, Hongzhi, Zhengde, and Kangxi.

On 16 November, the conference was invited to visit Tabriz Islamic Arts University (fig. 5). Rather modest in size, it has only six departments, but it has department of archaeology and conservation and six conservation labs, which deal with frescoes and oil painting. Iran is home to innumerable tepes and cultural objects, which are overwhelming for the limited conservation facilities. After the tour, the department delivered five lectures. Christian H. Fuchs from German Archaeology Institute had been working with the department in excavating and conserving the Ilkhanid city of Rashidiyya. Located to the northeast of the modern city of Tabriz, it was built in 1340 as an academic center. The German-Iranian joint expedition employed multiple techniques to investigate the Tower in the south of the site. At Ojan, the summer capital of the Ilkhanate, Rahim Velayati from the university carried out a systematic survey, discovering a caravanserai, and a section of the Silk Road. During this period, the technique of making glazed bricks was developed, and the new techniques of inlaying and underglaze brick were employed. As artisans traveled, these techniques were disseminated to various corners; and their names were marked on the buildings in Khorasan, Minor Asia, and Central Asia.



Fig. 5. Conference participants on an excursion at the university's art gallery (Tabriz)  
Рис. 5. Участники конференции на экскурсии в художественной галерее университета (г. Тебриз)

### **Conclusion**

As the first two events, the third conference was again a great success, with the scholars in the fields of archaeology, conservation, and art history from multiple countries, who shared a lot of new knowledge among the participants of the ancient Silk Road. It is important to continue the traditions already established by previous conferences and to expand the circle of participants from different countries. The next conference is planned to be held in 2020 in Russia.

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### **ТРЕТЬЯ МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ «АРХЕОЛОГИЯ И КОНСЕРВАЦИЯ НА ШЕЛКОВОМ ПУТИ»**

В ноябре 2018 г. уже в третий раз состоялась Международная конференция «Археология и консервация на Шелковом пути». Она проходила в городе Тебризе (Восточный Азербайджан, Иран) и собрала более 80 ученых из Ирана, Китая, Австрии, Германии и России. Программа конференции включала темы 52 запланированных докладов. Одним из обозначенных направлений являлось представление древних и средневековых импортных изделий, попавших в разные регионы Евразии. Особенно это касалось коллекций китайского сине-белого фарфора в Иране. Тезисы сообщений были изданы и распространялись в печатном и электронном виде вместе с другими материалами, подготовленными организаторами форума. В данной статье отмечено содержание некоторых презентаций, а также кратко представлены результаты аналогичных конференций, состоявшихся в 2014 и 2016 гг. в Китае. Основная цель проведения указанных мероприятий заключается в объединении усилий археологов и реставраторов по сохранению и популяризации культурного наследия, которое выявлено, изучается и восстанавливается на территории Великого Шелкового пути в разных странах Евразии. Стоит надеяться, что сформировавшиеся традиции будут реализовываться и в дальнейшем.

*Ключевые слова:* Международная конференция, Великий Шелковый путь, археология, консервация, культурное наследие.