

Area 1: The Mogao Caves, Dunhuang [western China]

The Mogao Caves are the largest, fullest, and longest used house of Buddhist art in the world.

First constructed in 366 AD (1,656 years ago), there are 492 caves preserved, with about 45,000 square metres of murals and more than 2,000 painted sculptures. The largest cave is 130 feet high, containing a 100-foot-tall Buddha statue. Many caves are so small they can only accommodate a few people at a time. The smallest cave is only a foot high.

Their murals, sculptures, and scrolls also offer an unparalleled glimpse into the multicultural society that thrived for a thousand years along the Silk Road.

Item 1: A virtual tour of Mogao Cave 254

The cave you can select today is number 254, dated between 439-534AD. Pictured below, as sun shines through the window onto the Buddha, a halo is created on his head and upper torso. The design combines Chinese and Central Asian architectural features. The blue Lapis adorning the walls was as valuable as gold at the time and was imported from Afghanistan.



Item 2: A virtual tour of the Library Cave at Mogao, including reading translated available texts

Discovered in 1990, the Library Cave at the Mogao Caves contains tens of thousands of manuscripts and relics. The majority of the manuscripts are in Chinese. Other languages represented are Khotanese (an ancient Eastern Iranian language), Kuchean, Sanskrit, Sogdian (an ancient Iranian language), Tangut, Tibetan, Old Uyghur language, Prakrit and Old Turkic.

Some of the documents discovered here include Buddhist religious texts, business documents, a writer complaining of financial difficulties during his travels, and a letter from a ruler.

Area 2: Bamiyan [Afghanistan]

The Bamiyan Valley, enclosed in the high mountains of the Hindu Kush in central Afghanistan, was a vital link in the Silk Roads. The passage of merchants through Bamiyan brought languages, beliefs and traditions together here, and contributed to its development as a major religious and cultural centre throughout the Middle Ages. It was a centre of Buddhist learning and culture, and was later ruled by Muslims.

Item 3: A Virtual tour of The Buddhas of Bamiyan, before and after destruction

Perhaps most famously, the Bamiyan Buddhas carved into a cliffside, are evidence of the Buddhist heritage of the area. These are thought to date from the 5th century, and standing 55m and 38m high respectively. It is believed that they were once adorned with gems. Despite surviving hundreds of years of Buddhist and Muslim rule, they were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001, leaving two colossal niches.



Item 4: A virtual tour of caves near Bamiyan

Near the Buddhas are dozens of artificial caves, many adorned with frescoes. The designs in these show influences from India, Iran and Europe, reflecting the diversity of influences that shaped the area. In several of the caves and niches, often linked by galleries, there are remains of wall paintings and seated Buddha figures. In nearby valleys, over one hundred other caves have been found, some of which have yet to be explored.

Displaced by war in the area at the start of the 21st century, some of the caves became home to Afghans.



Item 5: The letter written to Simon Tov



You can include the source we looked at earlier. Try to think about what it tells us about the time and area.

Item: A letter



This letter is about who should become the next ruler after the previous ruler, Ahmad ibn Ismail died. Ahmed ibn Ismail would keep two lions outside of his home to ward off murderers, but it is said that on the night he didn't, he was murdered.

Area 3: Khotan [western China]

The kingdom of Khotan, in modern-day western China offers another diverse example in the region. It was an important stop en route to India. Khotan had a thriving paper industry, and also produced wool, rugs and fine silk. However, it was most famous for jade, brought down as river boulders, which was in constant demand by the Chinese for its hardness, beauty, and durability. Trade exposed Khotan to diverse influences and the art, manuscripts, terracottas, artefacts and coins found at its capital Yotkan and the town of Dandan-Uiliq, reveal a rich mix of cultures.

Item : A jade pebble



Ranging from pure white to almost black in hue, Khotan jade — nephrite — was highly prized in China and ensured Khotan's place as a major Silk Road market.

Item 6: A painting of a Khotanese princess

Painting of a Khotanese princess who married the King of Dunhuang, in the tenth century, wearing an elaborate headdress and necklace of Khotanese jade.



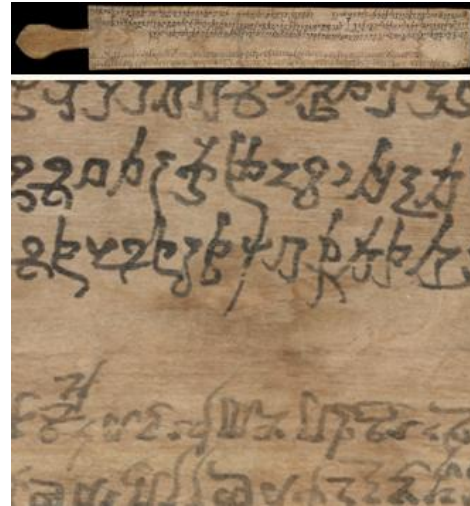
Item 6: Terracotta monkey



Hundreds of tiny terracottas have been found around Yotkan, the ancient capital of Khotan. The function of these Khotanese terracottas have puzzled scholars since their discovery. Animal figurines dominate and particularly typical are the monkeys. Monkeys are not found in Khotan but images of them came from India with Buddhism. They are modelled in miniature with a great deal of attention being

paid to the depiction of their expressions and poses. It is also suggested that they were used as amulets. Similar terracotta monkey figurines have been found at several archaeological sites in north India and Sogdiana.

Item 7: Document about camels



A letter asking for a camel to be sent: 'Let it be such a camel as will cause the Khotanese to admire us. If you do not send a camel as a result of this letter, then I will be annoyed.' Many Khoroṣṭhī letters indicate that it was quite

common to send a present attached to the letter. In this case, an arrow was sent.

Area 4: Mount Mugh [Tajikistan]

Mount Mugh was the site of the 7th-8th-century castle of the rulers of Panjikant in Sogdiana, where important documents written in Sogdian were discovered in the 1930s.

The documents were discovered when a local shepherd on a mountain happened upon a pit containing a basket. The records were originally thought to be pages from an old Qur'an. Afterwards, an expedition was sent to investigate the area. The documents and artefacts from the castle are the main source telling us about the turbulent period of the early 8th century, when Arabs, Turks, Chinese, Persians, Khwarezmians, and Sogdians fought for dominance in the region.

Item 8: Fragment of wall painting

From a wall painted on the throne room of the castle, this fragment depicts part of a siege prior to the storming of a city. Against a vivid, lapis-blue background, five men pull downward on the ropes of a machine known as a traction trebuchet. Of Chinese origin, the

technology of the mangonel made its way via the Silk Roads to Europe, where armies would utilise it in medieval wars. This Sogdian painting is the earliest known depiction of this type of siege machine in action.

Item 9: Seal

This is a seal impression of male head with Sogdian inscription, still attached to the document it secured. It is dated before 722 CE and is made of unbaked clay. A seal with a cord of parchment strip is attached

Area 5: Tabaristan [Iran]

Tabaristan, located in northern Iran, was one of the last parts of Persia to fall to the Muslim conquests in 761. Before the Muslim conquests, the area was ruled by the Sasanians. The tropical climate of the lowlands and the mountain ranges and highlands made invading Tabaristan very difficult. Even after the Muslim conquest, it retained its unique culture with many religions such as Christianity and Zoroastrianism continuing to be practiced.

Item 10: Dish



This dish, from 7th-8th C is made of silver. It is decorated with an image of a ruler reclining on a wheeled couch, surrounded by attendants, musicians and items essential for an outdoor banquet: a vine hung with ripe grapes, a water-bottle made from the skin of a whole animal,

wine jugs in a cooler and a pot suspended over a fire.

Many silver vessels from Tabaristan such as this circulated at the courts of the caliphs of Damascus and Baghdad, where their beauty was celebrated by Arab poets.

Item 11: Coin

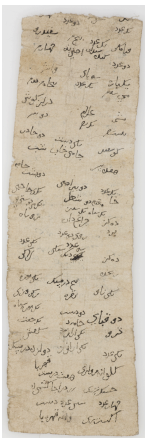
This coin, minted in Tabaristan in 778, is an interesting example of how Tabaristan kept some of its heritage after Muslim conquests. It shows a Sasanian king on the right, wearing a crown with wings, crescent and star. On the right is the name of the governor in Arabic, Sa'id.



Area 6: Istiw (Afghanistan)

Istiw is believed to be in modern day Nimruz Province in Afghanistan.

Item: Dowry receipt



This is a list of items a bride received for her dowry. A dowry is where the bride is given marriage gifts from her future husband. This list includes items such as silver earrings to clothing, fabrics, crockery, bedding, furniture and spindles. The list keeps a written record of everything she received for her wedding so that in the event of a divorce, she can claim it back.

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