

the current situation. Additionally, the book's reliance on interviews primarily conducted with representatives from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and it would have been beneficial to include interviews with Uzbekistan representatives as well, given their significant role in the region and their unique experiences in state-building. However, it is important to note that these weaknesses are relatively minor and do not affect the high academic quality of the book. The author's meticulous research, extensive use of primary and secondary sources, and rigorous analytical framework are still noteworthy strengths.

In conclusion, Viktoria Akchurina's book offers a timely and insightful exploration of the challenges and complexities of state-building in the region, making it a groundbreaking and essential contribution to the study of state-building in Central Asia. Through meticulous research, interdisciplinary perspectives, and nuanced analysis, the book provides a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies surrounding governance and state-building processes in the region. The author's ability to connect theory with empirical evidence enhances the book's academic rigor, making it an indispensable resource for scholars, policymakers, and researchers interested in Central Asian politics, state-building, and governance.

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William E. Mierse. *Artifacts from the Ancient Silk Road: Daily Life through Artifacts*. Santa Barbara, CA, USA: Greenwood, 2023. Pp. liv, 403. ISBN: 978-1-4408-5828-4 (print); 978-1-4408-5829-1 (ebook). doi:10.22679/avs.2023.8.2.009

The most important items transported across the Silk Road's complex network of caravan routes were ideas and the cultures from which they emerged and not "things," no matter how precious or desired. Yet, ironically, it is things—hand-crafted artifacts—that most vividly reflect and bring alive this millennia-long transit, adoption, and adaptation of cultural norms, beliefs, and modes of expression.

Through fifty artifacts produced between the eighth century BCE and the early twentieth century, but with a majority dating from the first through fifth century CE, William Mierse sheds light on the dynamics of the Silk Road and its peoples from China to Italy, but with an emphasis on the inhabitants and cultures of Central Asia. Accompanying each artifact is a tripartite essay that places the artifact into its cultural-historical context, describes it in detail, and explains its significance. Appended to each essay is a useful bibliography of significant studies in English.

Preceding the chosen fifty are two lead-ins that should be required reading for every member of Mierse's intended readership—students and the general public—inasmuch as they combine to provide a necessary background for the artifacts that follow.

The first prologue, "What Was the World Of the Ancient Silk Road?," sets forth in forty

pages of clear language the geographic, historical, and cultural aspects of the Silk Road's lands and peoples from earliest times to the rise of Islam in the seventh century. Additionally, the author outlines in broad strokes the types of documentary, archeological, numismatic, and linguistic evidence that scholars use to fashion their understanding of the Silk Road.

The second prologue, "Alphabetical Entries," is a collection of short essays on twenty of the most important elements of Silk Road studies. Ranging from "Amazons" to "Zoroastrianism," they include such topics as "Animal Style," referring to the animal motifs of objects crafted by steppe nomads, "Shamanism, Ancient Central Asian," and "Wool Working and Carpet Making." As these examples suggest, almost all of the twenty touch directly or indirectly on the Central Asian heartland of the Silk Road.

Among the artifacts that Mierse highlights are a few well-known and justly celebrated objects, such as an Ashokan edict-pillar, a gold tetradrachm of Demetrios I from Bactria, and a Gandharan bodhisattva. Were they absent, most would bemoan the oversight. More often than not, however, the author has chosen less familiar but equally important items. Rather than presenting readers with a beautifully executed *sancai* funerary statue of a Bactrian camel and rider from early-to-mid Tang (618-ca. 750)—an image of which appears in every Silk Road book—Mierse opted for a far less sophisticated camel and rider that might have been produced as early as the Northern Wei era (386-534). And it works! In like manner, the reader encounters a reindeer stag horse headdress that sheds light on Iron Age horse culture among the nomads of the steppe and an early twentieth-century yurt, or *ger*, which underscores the millennia-long continuities of steppe culture.

In choosing fifty artifacts, the author had to make hard decisions, and every student of the Silk Road will invariably discover that some favored object was left out. For this reviewer, the absence of the gilt-silver ewer from Bactria depicting Homeric scenes, which was placed in the late sixth-century tomb of the Northern Zhou general Li Xian, is disappointing, but one cannot fault the author. He includes an exquisite Sasanian ewer of similar age depicting graceful female dancers, which serves to illustrate the role of dance along the Silk Road. Then again, one wishes that a bearded, trousered, heavy-booted dancer performing the Sogdian whirl had also been one of the favored fifty. But two artifacts centered on dance? So many choices, so few could be chosen.

Economic realities govern production in the printing industry, a business in which profit margins are narrow. Undoubtedly that cold reality dictated the decision to reproduce the artifacts and the other images that appear in these pages in black and white. That is an unavoidable shame. Despite the high quality of the paper, a number of images suffer from not being in four color. Included among these is the reconstructed costume of the Sakā Golden Warrior, which is striking in its brilliance when viewed *in situ*, and the equally important and colorful pile carpet from Pazyryk. One hopes that readers will be so excited by the author's excellent treatment of these and other artifacts in monochrome that they seek to view them in living color on the internet.

In summary, this not-so-little, quarto-sized book of more than 450 pages brings alive the ancient Silk Road in ways that illuminate and enchant. It belongs in the library of every

university and college and certainly should be in the possession of every serious student of the Silk Road.

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