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All other photos by Daniel C. Waugh

THE SILK ROADS AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF KOREA: A VISUAL INTRODUCTION

This is quite simply one of the great museums in the world, worth a visit to Seoul, where there is so much else to see too.... The museum's web site (which I have consulted only in English, at <<https://www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/home>>) has a nice interactive guide to all the galleries with selective highlights of what they contain, part of a larger collections database. The photographs are excellent, the captioning often frustratingly cryptic but obviously a work in progress.

The somewhat intimidating modern building with its open central corridor accommodates one of the first important indications that Korea indeed belongs on any map of the Silk Roads: the ten-storey pagoda erected in the 14th century on whose lower tiers are scenes from the Chinese *Journey to the West*, an account based on the travels of Xuanzang in the 7th century. Of course it would be possible never to make it beyond the first floor, where there is a chronologically arranged sequence of galleries, many of the objects classified as national treasures including rich finds from the 5th-6th century Silla Dynasty tombs in Gyeongju. Dazzled by the gold, one might easily



(right) Pagoda erected at Gyeongcheonsa Temple in 1348. National Treasure No 86. Inv. No Bon 6753.

(left) Gold crown, 5th – 6th century. Treasure No 338. Inv. No Bon 9663.

(below right) Ceramic vessel in shape of horse and rider, 6th century. National treasure No 91. Inv. No Bon 9705. Both excavated from Geumnyeongchong tomb in Gyeongju.





Mural fragment, from Ssangyeongchong Tomb in Nampo (North Korea), 5th century (Three Dynasties Period--Goguryeo).

(right) Phoenix-shaped glass ewer, from Hwangnamdaechong Tomb (South Mound of Tomb № 98), Gyeongju, 5th century. Probably an import from Western Asia. National Treasure № 193. Inv. № Hwangnam 3321.



miss such treasures as a mural fragment of a mounted warrior, who, one might imagine, could have passed along the roads leading west in the 5th century. If you finally make it to the third floor, there are dazzling displays of Buddhist plastic arts such as the inspiring "Pensive Bodhisattva," which merits its own quiet room. One of the stunning displays is the 13 m high hanging scroll from the Bukjangsa Temple which was created in 1688, so large that (as is evident here), it is difficult to photograph decently. The subtleties and elegance of Korean celadons are also difficult to replicate on these pages; so I have settled for another of the national treasures, a remarkable, complex "fish-dragon."

(left to right) The "Pensive Bodhisattva" (Avalokitesvara). Gilt bronze. Three Kingdoms period, early 7th century. National Treasure № 83. Inv. № Deoksu 3312.



Buddha and disciples on Vulture Peak, hanging scroll from Bukjangsa Temple, painted in 1688.

Celadon fish-dragon shaped pitcher, Goryeo period, 12th century. National Treasure № 61. Inv. № gae 2.



On my recent visit in September 2016, just in time to miss the Sinan Shipwreck exhibition described above (!), the gallery that is to house the permanent display was close for remounting of the artifacts. Next to it though is a Central Asia gallery, the focus of our attention here, artifacts from the “Western Regions” along the Silk Roads. Much of this material was collected there by Otani Kozui (1876-1948), with a portion of what he accumulated remaining in Korea after the end of the Japanese occupation. So one can see here a representative sample of material from some of the most famous sites along the silk roads. Additional images are in Color Plates X-XIV at the end of this volume.

– Daniel C. Waugh



Masks and baskets from Loulan. Bronze Age, analogous examples known from the Little River (Xiaohe) cemetery, dated late 3rd–2nd century BCE.



Terracottas from Yotkan, the ancient site on the outskirts of Khotan, ca. 3rd–5th centuries. Such items are very common, with many examples in the British Museum, the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm and in other collections. Figurines of monkeys, playing instruments or in erotic poses are among the most commonly found.



(right) Terracotta of Serapis and Harpocrates, Khotan, 2nd–3rd centuries CE, presumably transmitted from the Hellenistic or Roman East. Inv. No. Bon 3901.

(left) Bronze seal and its impression, Qumtura, 1st–4th century CE





(above, left and center). Vase, Khotan, 3rd–5th century. Inv. № 3899.
(above, right). Bird-headed ewer, Karakhoja, Turfan, 7th–8th century.
Inv. № Bon 4034.

(below, left). A Devata, from Murtuk (Turfan), 6th–7th century.
(below, right). Head of a Buddha, Khotan, 4th–5th century. Inv.
№ Bon 4163.





Heads of Buddhist deities, 6th–7th century, Turfan. Analogous examples were collected at Tumshuq by the Pelliot expedition at the beginning of the 20th century; now in the Musée Guimet, Paris.



Terracotta appliques from Buddhist sites, the elephants, presumably representing the Indian deity Ganesha, from Qumtura, 8th century; the others somewhat earlier from Khotan. Some of these probably were attached to mandorlas behind sculptures.





Mural fragments: (left) from Turfan (Bezeklik?), 10th century (Inv. № Bon 4096) and (right) from Bezeklik Cave 18, 6th–7th century (Bon 4054).



(below) Moulded plaques of meditating monks from Dunhuang, 10th century (Bon 4037), analogous examples in, e.g., National Museum, New Delhi.

(bottom and right) Thousand Buddha mural fragments, Qumtura, Cave 16, 8th–9th century (Bon 4069).





(top left) Mural fragment, hand of Buddhist devotee holding flower, from a Pravidhi scene, Bezeklik, Cave 15, 10th-12th century.



(right) Mural fragments with Uighur inscriptions, Bezeklik, 10th century (Bon 4071-80).



(left) Silk banners depicting Bodhisattoas, from Dunhuang, Tang Dynasty (Inv. No. Bon 4020, 4022).

(bottom right) Decorative curtains, mural fragment, Bezeklik Cave 15, 10th-12th century.





Artifacts from the Astana cemetery and Karakhoja, Turfan, 7th–8th century: (top left) Head of a guardian figure; (top right) guardian beast; (bottom left) figurine of a eunuch; (right) figurines of women. These mingqi are abundant, exhibited in various collections [e.g., a very large array in the Uighur Autonomous Region Museum (Urumqi); others in the Musée Guimet (Paris), the British Museum (London), and the National Museum, (New Delhi)].



(below) Silk pouch, Karakhoja, 13th-14th century (Inv. № Bon 4013).



(top left and right) More tomb figurines (on right, Inv. № Bon 4142).

(right) Painted pots from Astana.



(right) Bronze mirror, Turfan, 7th-8th century (Inv № Bon 3890), illustrating the story of Xu You, a man of virtue who declined the throne.

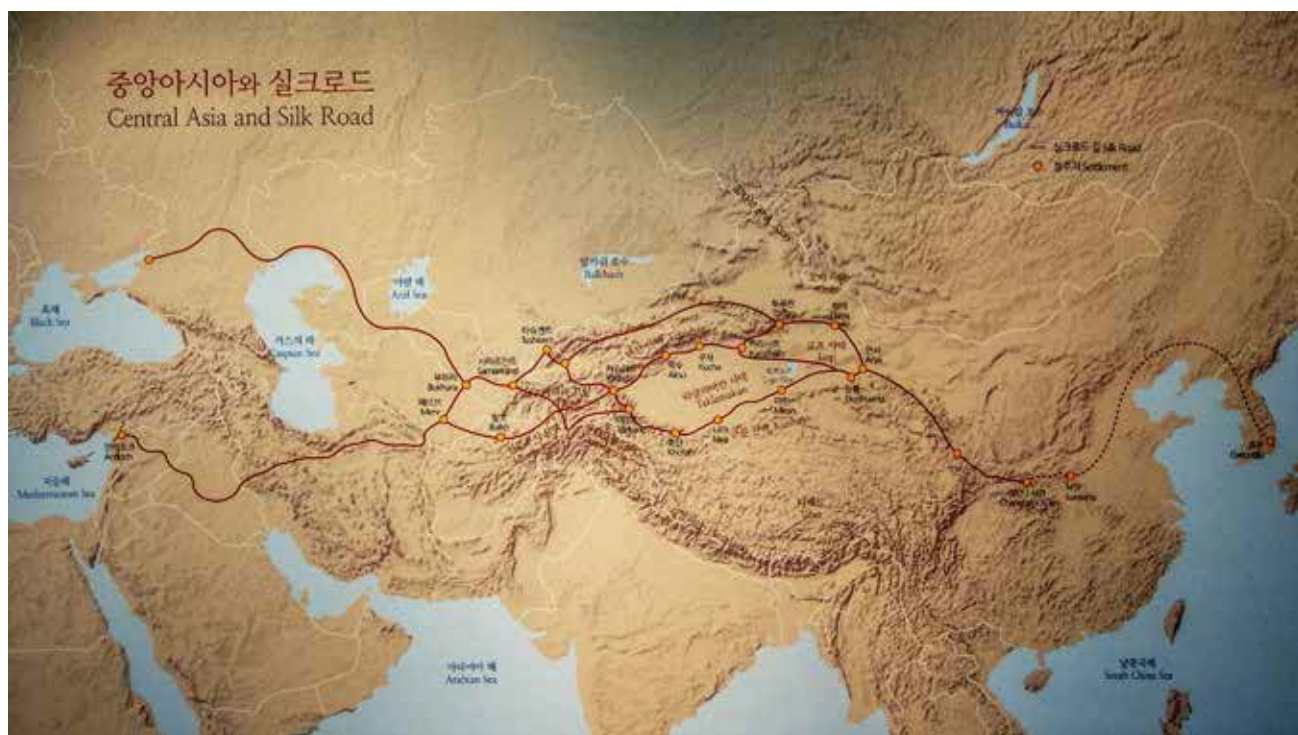




Lamp, Khotan.



Wooden shoes, Turfan, 6th-7th century (Inv. No Bon 4122).



As the map at the entrance to the Central Asia gallery reminds visitors, in the east, the Silk Roads did not stop in Chang'an but reached as far as Gyeongju. In another context, it would be reasonable to extend the route beyond to Japan, as the Sinan shipwreck itself suggests.

Plate X

National Museum of Korea, pp. 226-35.



All photos by Daniel C. Waugh.



Gold crown with jade ornaments, Silla period, 5th century, from Hwangnamdaechong, Gyeongju. National Treasure no. 191.



(top left) Gold crown, 5th – 6th century. Treasure № 338. Inv. № Bon 9663.

(bottom left) Gilt-bronze cap. Three Kingdoms period (Baekje), 5th century. Gongju, Chungcheongnam-do

(bottom right) The queen's gold diadem ornaments. 3 Kingdoms period (Baekje), 6th century. Gongju, Songsan-ri complex, Tomb of King Muryeong (r. 501-523), Chungcheong-do. National Treasure No. 155.



Note: The captioning is drawn from that in the museum itself.

Plate XI

National Museum of Korea, pp.
226-35.

*Gilt silver cup and stand, Goryeo dynasty,
12th century (Inv. duk 130). Of type used to
serve drinks to foreign envoys.*



*(below) Gold Belt buckle. Seogam-ri tomb No.
9, Pyeongyang. Excavated in 1916. National
Treasure No 89.*



Gilt bronze belt, Goryeo dynasty (Inv. duk 2982).



Plate XII

National Museum of Korea, pp. 226-35.

(top) Sarira reliquary (outer and inner compartments). North and South Kingdoms period (Unified Silla, ca. 682), from Gameunsa temple site. Treasure No. 1359. Inv. ssu 16424-16426.

(photo bottom left) Buddha statues: (left): Goryeo Dynasty, 10th century, from monastic site in Hasachang-dong, Hanam, Gyeonggi-do. Iron, with traces of varnish. Treasure No. 332. Inv. duk 2748; (right) Bhaishajyaguru Buddha. Unified Silla period, 9th century. From Samneunggok, Mt. Namsan, Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do. Inv. Bon 1957.



The "Pensive Bodhisattva" (Avalokiteśvara). Gilt bronze. Three Kingdoms period, early 7th century. National Treasure No. 83. Inv. No. Deoksu 3312.



Plate XIII

National Museum of Korea, pp. 226-35.



(Clockwise from upper left) Moulded plaque of meditating monk from Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, 10th century (Inv. Bon 4037);

Avalokiteśvara, Nepal, 14th century (Inv. koo 5261);

Bodhisattva. Song dynasty. Color on wood (Inv. Bon 8239);

Buddha and disciples on Vulture Peak, hanging scroll from Bukjangsa Temple, painted in 1688.





Plate XIV

National Museum of Korea, pp. 226-35.

"Magic camel," Oudh, ca. 1750 (Inv. koo 5743).

Celadon Maebyeong (= meiping) vase with incised lotus scroll design. Goryeo dynasty, 12th century. National Treasure No. 97.



"Horned" horse, tomb sculpture, Northern and Southern Dynasties (Inv. koo 4258).



Celadon ewer in dish, Goryeo dynasty, 12th century (Inv. duk 990). Inspired by Wudai period (Five Dynasties) or late Tang dynasty metal wares.