Signs of a Golden Age: Interpreting archaeological evidence of China's role in the ancient Silk Road trade network in the first millennium C.E.

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Preface

There are many without whom this thesis could not have been written, or at the very least would have been a mere shadow of the finished product in front of you. Primary in this is Dr. Marike van Aerde, who first ignited my interest in this topic during my BA programme, and whose detailed guidance and patience helped to shape a coherent text out of word-chaos of unforeseen proportions. Prof. Miguel-John Versluys I wish to thank not only for his continued moral support and stellar wine recommendations, but especially for his insight into globalisation theory and the internal coherency of the thesis.

Sincere thanks also goes out to Paul Ruitenbeek, by whose courtesy I was allowed access to his wide collection of Chinese finds, who permitted detailed photography of the objects and provided crucial background information and reference works for the objects covered in this chapter. I also thank Benjamin de Groot as photographer of these objects, having given his time, attention, and expertise to provide photographs of these objects of a quality I would never have dared hope for in an RMA thesis.

I also want to thank my friends and colleagues at the Faculty of Archaeology, as well as my friends from outside the world of archaeology, who provided the much-needed emotional support needed to finish this thesis through the trying times of the COVID-pandemic.

Finally, I want to thank my parents, who have always believed in me far more than I have believed in myself, who had the emotional fortitude not to even blink at my choice of what can only be called a rather unconventional and, at best, uncertain field of study and career, and without whose love, support, and example I would have crumbled at the first hurdle life or this thesis presented.

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Appendices

1. Introduction

1.1 Premise and relevance

The Tang (唐) dynasty (618 – 907 C.E.), and to a lesser extent the Sui (隋) dynasty (589 – 617 C.E.) that directly preceded it, is often considered to be China's premier 'Golden Age', the height of its cultural expression and the peak of its international trade.[1] According to both historical sources and modern studies, the Tang dynasty was famously open to foreign trade and cultural influences, with some popular sources even stating they revived the Silk Road trade network after it fell with the Han (漢) dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.).[2] To this day, Tang dynasty wares, especially the so-called sancai (三彩) ceramics, are among the most well-known and desirable antiques in the world.[3] By contrast, the preceding period of disunity, often called the Six Dynasties period (六朝) (220 – 589 C.E.), stands out as a time of great chaos, uncertainty, and isolation in the minds of many both today and at the time of the Tang (Dien and Knapp, 2019, p. 1-2; Twitchett, 1979, p. 12 & 150). A clear schism thus exists in our image of China in the first millennium C.E.. Yet this image comes to us mainly from written sources both ancient and modern, and is rarely independently analysed based on the archaeological remains of the periods (Dien and Knapp, 2019, p. 7). This is in part due to the abundance of written records from this period in China that have remained accessible to this day (Lewis, 2009b, p. 196), making it a fruitful avenue of research to pursue. The high reputation of the Tang dynasty may also be related to a greater abundance of preserved and displayed archaeological material, and is perhaps made more stark in contrast to the political, social, and economic distress that much of Eurasia was experiencing contemporarily (Fong, 2009, p. vi). Another bias can be found in most scholarship where ancient China's role on the global stage is considered, as emphasis tends to be placed on

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[1] Charles Benn (2004), Dorling Kindersley Limited & Encyclopedia of China Publishing House (2020, p. 133), Peter Frankopan (2015, p. 10), Valerie Hansen (2015a, p. 173), Mark Edward Lewis (2009b), Ezekiel Schloss (1977a, 1977b), and Denis Twitchett (1979, p. 150), to name only a few.
[2] Dorling Kindersley Limited & Encyclopedia of China Publishing House's *Imperial China: The Definitive Visual History* (2020, p. 133), for example.
[3] They regularly sell for thousands of dollars, for example at famous British auction house Christie's (https://www.christies.com/search?entry=sancai&page=1&tab=sold_lots), and are frequently imitated for a wider market (Chen, 2019).

foreign objects, styles, and ideas coming into Chinese society, rather than the influence of Chinese material and culture in the world at large. The aim of this thesis is to place archaeological material from China, which played a role in the ancient Silk Road trade network during the first millennium C.E., on a level with the historical sources, to find where they may coincide with or contradict each other, thus enriching our understanding of China's role in the world of the first millennium C.E..

1.2 Research questions and reading guide

In order to do so, the thesis poses the question whether this schism of China's active participation in international trade between the Six Dynasties and Tang periods can be traced in the archaeological evidence of trade from these periods, by studying a selection of Chinese archaeological material dating to the first millennium C.E. and analysing it through the lens of a world-systems and globalisation theoretical framework.

Several sub-questions have been identified, the answers to which together will form sufficient basis to attempt an answer to the above.

- What is the image of China's place within the Silk Road trade network in the first millennium C.E., based on historical sources and modern studies of Chinese history?
- How did the image of China's place within the Silk Road trade network in the first millennium C.E. take shape?
- What does such a "globalising ancient world system" entail?
- Based on archaeological evidence, how did materials and styles from China become part of the Silk Road trade network of the first millennium C.E.?
- When we consider China from the perspective of globalising ancient world system, can (dis)continuity be identified in the nature and incorporation of these materials and styles between the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods?

The two initial questions are examined in the second chapter on historical context and historiography. The third - an explanation of the necessary theoretical framework of this thesis – as well as the broader methodology applied, are first elaborated upon in the following sections of this introduction. Chapter 3 then

examines how materials and styles from China were received and incorporated within the Silk Road trade network of the first millennium C.E. through several representative case studies, beginning with the analysis of a selection of previously unpublished items from the Paul Ruitenbeek Chinese Art gallery in Amsterdam, before expanding the dataset by incorporating related evidence from collections and museums across the globe, leading to an exploration of several broader themes. The final sub-question makes up the discussion in Chapter 4. Finally, all questions are re-evaluated in Chapter 5, leading to a final conclusion as to the answer to the main research question. The conclusion also outlines insights into directions for further research based on the results of this thesis, as much work remains to be done in order to improve our understanding of the periods of disunity between dynasties in Chinese history (Dien and Knapp, 2019, p. 1; Hansen, 2015a, p. 8).

1.3. Methodology and theoretical framework

1.3.1 Methodology

1.3.1.1 Methods and approaches

In order to provide answers to the research questions outlined above, the applied methods are tailored specifically to our purposes, as well as the available material, and based upon a foundation of earlier research on the topics of Silk Road archaeology, Chinese archaeology, as well as globalisation and world systems theory.

To begin, it is crucial to point out that while, for the sake of structure and clarity, the current chapter - which precedes the chapter presenting the case studies - contains an outline of the theoretical framework used for this thesis, it should be kept in mind that this thesis uses a bottom-up approach to the interpretation of the material, and that the material was not chosen based on its merit for or against these theories. The way the central question of this thesis is framed assumes the existence of globalising world systems at the time of the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods, as it questions the role of Chinese exports in such systems. A working definition must therefore be provided of what is meant by such world systems, and

how and why such a concept can aid in the interpretation of the archaeological material. To this end, relevant sources on the topics of globalisation theory and world-systems theory have been consulted to arrive at the definition provided in the 'Theoretical framework' section of this chapter below. The assumption is not that these theories are inherently true, or indeed that there is one accepted definition of these theories, nor is the aim to prove or disprove them. Rather, they are outlined in as holistic a way as possible within the confines of this thesis, in order to use them as a tool to think with when discussing the interpretations of the archaeological material in relation to the research questions.

Beyond establishing the theoretical framework and methodological approach, a review of both ancient written sources and modern research related to ancient China needs to be undertaken in order to establish what in fact constitutes the prevalent image of China between the Six Dynasties period and the Tang dynasty, and how this image took shape. Sources of Chinese origin are consulted where possible, but it is acknowledged that due to both a language and access barrier limitations will be faced in this. A review of sources related to the historiography of studies of the ancient Chinese past, and how this image formed in both scholarly and popular understanding is also given. Here too the difficulty of obtaining sources of Chinese origin is acknowledged. Despite these limitations, this thesis offers an important step towards interpreting and analysing Chinese archaeological material within the wider scope of ancient globalising world systems - rather than focusing on individual regions, sites, or datasets - against a backdrop of accepted knowledge from historical sources and previous scholarship. As such, it is uniquely positioned to offer western scholars in particular a critical mirror through which to see if prevalent ideas of Chinese history are accurate and adequately substantiated by archaeological evidence.

The decision was made to approach this thesis in a qualitative rather than a quantitative manner, through the use of case studies, as an exhaustive review of all first millennium C.E. Chinese exports and imports is not a possibility both due to a lack of previous work collecting such evidence and restricted access to materials,

especially those located in China or private collections. The trade in ancient Chinese art objects in the West has thrived since the 19th century, and the collecting of them within China and East Asia since even longer (Howald & Hofmann, 2018),[4] which has resulted in a community of knowledge and exchange largely separate from the archaeological field of research. Opportunities to bridge this gap do not present themselves often, making the dataset which forms the basis of this thesis all the more unique. This has also resulted in some cases in a lack of peer-reviewed or up-to-date academic publications on certain topics and material categories in Chinese archaeology, a problem which has also affected the present thesis in certain areas. Where possible, the sources consulted have been wide and scientifically supported, and where this was not possible or limited, the speculative nature of the evidence or its interpretation is clearly stated.

The choice was made also to concentrate on the incorporation of Chinese material and stylistic influence in the wider Silk Road trade network, rather than the incorporation of foreign goods into Chinese culture, for various reasons. Foremost, there already exists a large body of research which focuses on the latter topic, especially concerning the Tang period, whereas the former is a largely unexplored area of research in Chinese and Silk Road archaeology.[5] However, as this thesis examines the role of China within a globalising ancient world system, a concept which typically implies a reciprocal relationship (see 1.3.2 below), ideally both import and export would be examined in equal measure. The length and time constraints placed on this thesis, as well as the highly limited accessibility of published material from China itself made this unfeasible in this instance. Furthermore, as the rest of this thesis will show, the reality of trade and influence along the Silk Road trade network was rarely so simple as to make it possible to

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[4] For an in-depth look at the Chinese art world from the perspective of one of its most well-known dealers, including an illustrated catalogue of over 500 Chinese art objects, consider Eskenazi and Hajni (2012).

[5] See, for example, Chen (2012), Knauer (2006), Lewis (2009b), and Schloss (1977a, 1977b), Sherratt (2006), Watt (2004), Yang (2020), which all consider China's position within the Silk Road trade network at different times leading up to and including the Tang dynasty and from different perspectives, but all do so largely from the perspective of the various elements China adopted, how they were incorporated into Chinese society, and how this affected China's historical trajectory.

identify clear points of origin or routes of dissemination and trace a single direction of the incorporation of foreign materials and styles, so working from a basis of Chinese archaeological material before looking outward unavoidably still results also in a consideration of various outside influences coming into China along the Silk Road trade network and being adopted, adapted, rejected, and further disseminated.

At the basis of the case studies presented in this thesis are seven objects from the Paul Ruitenbeek Chinese Art gallery in Amsterdam, who granted access to their collection for observations and photography of the many pieces on display. The seven selected items – referred to as 'the dataset' from this point on - represent the central themes of the subsequent discussion, and provide both jumping-off point and tether for the exploration of these themes through the use of further relevant case study material in the rest of Chapter 3. The choice of these seven objects to make up the dataset, out of a collection of over 300, was based on a combination of secure dating, which in total covers most of the first millennium C.E., as well as state of preservation and internal cohesion, which will be demonstrated in the Chapter 3 below. The division of the case studies into thematic sections, and the choice of the themes themselves, was based on the connections which could be made between the seven items in the dataset and the particular areas of the Silk Road trade network they shed light on when combined with similar or related material from academic publications, museum catalogues, or other private collections. A broad approach was taken in collecting and reviewing as much further related material as possible and selecting illustrative case studies, using online museum catalogues and literature review as the main sources of material. The selection is based on the suitability of the case studies to represent the available material as a whole, in relation to the dataset, as well as the relevance to the theme of each section.

As the Tang dynasty is widely considered a golden age in Chinese history, material for this period is more abundantly available than for earlier periods. Herein too lies a danger, as a bias toward Tang material as compared to the Six Dynasties period

must be avoided if the conclusions of the thesis are to be valid. Another potential limitation lies in the (assumed) provenance of the material, as often these interpretations are based on the very biases this thesis aims to re-evaluate. As early as 1977, Ezekiel Schloss observed that many items of an earlier origin were often incorrectly interpreted as dating to the Tang dynasty, due to the assumption that production of such items only flourished during this later, more culturally advanced dynasty (Schloss, 1977a, p. 6). A concentrated effort is made to only use those materials of which the date can be determined with some certainty, based on a range of methods in addition to stylistic analysis. However, a lack of direct access to the material makes this difficult. A focus is placed on studies using scientific dating methods and/or concerning dateable grave contexts with known occupants. Special attention is paid not to discriminate case studies based on their geographic destination or eventual resting place. Though studies of the ancient Silk Road trade network typically focus on East-West trade between China, India, the Near East and the Mediterranean, the goal of this study is to situate the movements and incorporation of Chinese materials within ancient world systems, whatever that entails. Finds that made their way outside (continental) Eurasia, therefore, still enhance our understanding and the conclusions made.

Following the presentation of the case studies and their journey and role in the ancient world system of the Silk Road trade network, they are combined with the insights gained from the preceding literature reviews in order to answer the research questions regarding the role of Chinese materials within the rest of the world during the periods in question, and possible changes to this over time. Together, the answers to these questions must lead to a discussion of the central research question, and finally a reflection on how this field of research may move forward with these conclusions, using the archaeological data as a basis for theoretical debate on China's past.

1.3.1.2 Notes on terminology
Some key matters of terminology, dating, and geography must be clarified at the outset. In some cases, these may seem self-evident, yet many of these concepts

and terms are hotly debated or inconsistently used in both popular and academic writing (Szonyi, 2017, p. 6), and various sources used in this thesis may differ or contradict in their usage.

First and foremost, it is important to note that the dates ascribed to most Chinese dynasties are not set in stone, and will differ somewhat between sources. This further illustrates the need for research independent of such organising concepts as the dynastic cycle (see 2.1 below), as it glosses over the many complications faced and the varying levels of power being exerted by dynasties and kingdoms at various points in history. However, it does not eliminate the need to situate proceedings within a timeframe. The dates used to delineate the various dynasties and other periods in this thesis are taken from the books *The open empire: A history of China to 1800* or *The Silk Road: A new history*, both by Valerie Hansen (2015a, 2015b), unless stated otherwise. They broadly align with the popular understanding of the different time periods in Chinese history, but avoid forcing each period to flow directly from the previous into the next. In some cases, the end of one dynasty will not occur in the same year as the start of its successor, as it also often did not in practice. After all, when does one dynasty truly end and another begin? Is it when the last emperor of that dynasty dies, when their capital falls to invading forces, when a new ruler declares themselves emperor, or when they are acknowledged as such by government officials? How much of China's territory – based on either modern or ancient borders – needs to be in the control of a dynasty for it to count as reunification of the empire? There may be many years between the fall of a state's or the empire's capital and the seizure of all its territory, and a new dynasty declaring itself does not mean we see it as a new period in China's history today.[6] Such debates are beyond the scope of this thesis, but illustrate the complexity of China's political history, as opposed to the popular conception of the dynastic canon, and to the clearly defined imperial dynasties contrasting with interceding

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[6] Illustrated, for example, by the Wang Mang (王莽) interregnum, when an official called Wang Mang declared himself the first emperor of the Xin (新) or 'New' dynasty (Hansen 2015, 126), or the Wu Zhou (武周) dynasty started by the emperor Wu Zetian (武則天) in 690 C.E. (Hansen, 2015a, p. 182-184; more on this in Chapter 2).

periods of disunity. A timeline of the most relevant periods referenced in this thesis can be found in Appendix D.

Beyond the dates used for each period in this thesis, their terminology also bears some clarification. While the nomenclature for the more famous Han and Tang dynasties is fairly straightforward, many of the different ruling dynasties during the interceding period went by various names and can become confused with each other. In particular, the use of Chinese characters which, when transcribed to English, appear the same becomes confusing rather quickly.[7] In most such cases, the addition of 'northern', 'southern', 'eastern', or 'western' works to alleviate the problem, and this convention will be adhered to where needed. Where no such terms are conventionally used, or where even with their use the meaning is not completely clear, additional explanation will be given where pertinent. As the historical context chapter below will also show, many long-lived dynasties are divided into two periods, often after a significant change in their power base or organisational structure. This tended to go hand-in-hand with a move to a new capital, and therefore terms like 'northern', 'southern', 'eastern', and 'western' are also often used to indicate such periods. To avoid further confusion, this thesis will instead use 'Former' and 'Later' in such cases, and reserve the cardinal directions for the distinction of separate dynasties using the same or similar names. The Appendices provide both a timeline of the various dynasties and periods referenced in this thesis (Appendix D), as well as maps of the territories occupied by most of them (Appendix A-C), in hopes of providing some additional clarification.

The name for the interceding period itself is also not without its problems, and its definition must therefore also be outlined here. For the purpose of clarity, this thesis will use the term "Six Dynasties period" to refer to the entirety of the period between the Han and Sui dynasties. This is fairly common convention, though in some cases the term is used to refer only to the southern part of China and the dynasties that ruled it during this period (Dien and Knapp, 2019, p. 2), and may

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[7] Or even, when a new dynasty uses the same character as an older one, such as the Wu Zhou (武周) Dynasty mentioned in Footnote 6, which used the same name as the far more ancient Zhou (周) dynasty in order to claim descendance from them (Hansen, 2015a, p. 183).

variously include or exclude the timespan covered by the Sui dynasty, and the Three Kingdoms (三國) period (220 – 280 C.E.) (Dien and Knapp, 2019, p. 1-2). It is also somewhat misleading, since far more than six dynasties were variously in power in the different states that covered the territory of what is now the People's Republic of China. The term refers specifically to the six different dynasties which controlled Jiankang (建康) (modern Nanjing (南京)) (Valenstein, 1975, p. 34), the capital of the southern states which tend to be considered the heartland of traditional Han Chinese culture during this tumultuous period (Dien and Knapp, 2019, p. 2). We return to this historical context in more detail in Chapter 2. For now it suffices to be aware that the term is used in this thesis simply to refer to the time period between the Han and Sui dynasties, or 220 and 589 C.E., for both the northern and southern parts of China.

Further important in our use of terminology are terms such as "Silk Road", "Silk Roads", "Silk Road Network", etc. Over the years, many alternative terms have been proposed for this system of trade routes, both overland and maritime, but none have gained and kept traction quite like "Silk Road" has.[8] In recent years, with the increased understanding that this trade network comprised much more than a single overland road through Central Asia as Ferdinand von Richthoven had initially envisioned when he coined the term in 1877 (Chin, 2013; Hansen, 2017, p. 6), the plural rather than the singular version, or terms like "Silk Road network" or "Silk Road networks", have become more widely used (Lerner & Wide, n.d.). This thesis uses the term "Silk Road trade network" in the singular to encompass the broad geographical orientation of the research objectives at hand, while acknowledging that depending on the scale of analysis various separate and intertwined networks may be identified within it. In the interest of readability the term "ancient" will not be consistently added to differentiate it from China's recent efforts to recreate a

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[8] Glass Road (Lu, 2009), Jade Road (Lerner & Wide, n.b.), Rhubarb Road (Lerner & Wide, n.b.), Paper Road (Bloom, 2005), Fur Road (Frankopan, 2015 ,p. 107), etc. Sometimes these refer only to either the overland or maritime route(s) specifically.

modern "Silk Road", which where needed is referred to as the "Belt and Road Initiative".[9]

Finally, as modern geographical terms such as "China" make frequent appearances throughout this thesis, it is important to clarify the use and definition of them. Broadly speaking, when referring only to "China" this thesis refers more or less to the area within the borders of the modern People's Republic of China. However, as even a brief closer look at the history of this modern nation will show, this definition does not reflect the great changes in territory that the polities which are today considered the antecedents of the modern Chinese state underwent, nor the variety of other states, kingdoms, and peoples which at different times occupied parts of the territory of the modern Chinese state. For the purposes of clarity within this thesis, the use of "China" preceded by a dynasty name refers to the territory that particular dynasty occupied. However, as the following chapter will show in more detail, there was not always a single or central ruling dynasty to speak of, and both the territory of modern China and the world outside of it consisted at varying times of many other states, groups, and societies of varying location, spread, and size. In all cases, whether it concerns names also in modern use or any states, groups, or empires no longer in existence, what is being referred to is the entity as it was at the given time, not today. In any instances where the above is deviated from, or any instances where there may be room for confusion, a clear explanation is always provided.

1.3.2 Theoretical framework

Beyond the matters of definition outlined just above, it is also necessary to lay down the working definitions of a few key theoretical concepts as they are applied in this thesis. To begin, the term "globalising ancient world system" as applied in the research questions, is a concept combining aspects of both globalisation theory and world systems theory. Both are fairly new, and quite dynamic theoretical concepts both within and outside the field of archaeology, and thus are home to

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[9] For those interested in further reading about this initiative and how it relates back to the Silk Road trade network discussed in this thesis, I recommend the *Routledge Handbook of the Belt and Road* (2019), edited by Cai Fang and Peter Nolan as a starting point.

considerable disagreements (Canepa, 2010, p. 9). Therefore, the definitions provided here should not be taken as representative of the entirety of these discourses, nor as the only accepted or applicable ones. However, as engaging in these particular discussions is not the aim of this thesis, the working definitions of these theories as employed here must be made clear.

The definition of globalisation as given by Tamar Hodos in the *Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalisation* (2017) is the most suited to the current aims, as it is not only quite recent, but also takes into account much of the discourse so far, and is provided against a background of several world-wide and temporally diverse case studies. It states that globalisation 'can be defined as *processes of increasing connectivities that unfold and manifest as social awareness of those connectivities'* (Hodos, 2017, p. 4). This definition makes globalisation, unlike terms like complex connectivity, an active rather than a descriptive or passive concept, and thus does not consider the term "global" to necessarily mean connectivity across the entire globe in the literal sense. Rather, it puts the experiential above the geographical in classifying developments as globalising. A sense that the world is becoming smaller, that communication and movement are occurring over greater distances in shorter amounts of time, and that the world, or what one considers to be the world at that time, in general is becoming more accessible, are at the centre (Hodos, 2017, p. 4). While many consider globalisation to imply processes of homogenisation, standardisation, and uniformity, it in fact comes paired with a varying degree of two main aspects, one indeed being increasing shared practices and values as a result of a greater flow of ideas, knowledge, cultural customs, and materials. Conversely, however, globalisation often comes paired with a heightened awareness of cultural differences, and a greater expression of (ownership over) those things that make a particular group perceive themselves as unique from others (Hodos, 2017, p. 3-5). As Hodos states: 'cultural convergence cannot exist without cultural differentialism' (Hodos, 2017, p. 5). The interplay of these aspects results in the emergence of a wide range of new, unforeseen, and hybrid expressions of culture and identity showing varying degrees of local and global attributes at various scales and in all strata of society.

Nick Kardulias and Thomas Hall's updated overview of world systems theory (or world systems analysis) as given in their 2008 paper provides a workable definition of ancient world systems, taking into account both Immanuel Wallerstein's original definition from the 1970s, seen by many archaeologists as too economically focussed and restricted to the modern era, but also the contributions of later theorists and archaeologists aimed to rectify this (Kardulias & Hall, 2008, p. 572). Their definition of world systems entails a focus on over-arching processes which facilitate more worthwhile comparisons not only between contemporary societies, but also between the past and the present (Kardulias & Hall, 2008, p. 578). In their definition, "world" does not imply a system encompassing the entire planet, but rather a self-contained unit of bulk goods networks, political-military networks, luxury or prestige goods networks, and information networks (Kardulias & Hall, 2008, p. 574). It is acknowledged that no such world is ever entirely isolated or self-sufficient, but boundaries or frontiers are defined along gradients. By "systems", they refer to a density of interaction which allows occurrences in one part of the system to have notable and lasting effects in another part (Kardulias & Hall, 2008, p. 574-575). As this occurs, a system can encompass various areas and/or people at different times, and become either more or less synchronised and robust over wider expanses. These processes do not occur only through adoption of practices, but include facets of migration, assimilation, resistance and negotiation. The degrees of coherence, geographical range, and pace of change can vary widely, both within and between systems over time, but often cyclical processes within systems can be identified (Kardulias & Hall, 2008, p. 575). As such, while in the idea of world systems a certain amount of detail can be lost in the analysis and one is in danger of obscuring individual agency by focussing on the bigger picture, this is compensated by the opportunities it provides to connect geographically distant cultural processes and analyse them as part of a larger whole. Instinctively, this may sound like an inherently top-down phenomenon, but in fact if used conscientiously it provides a concrete tool to bring together archaeological material and other sources of evidence in a distinctly bottom-up manner, to arrive at pertinent

conclusions about past connectivity (Kardulias & Hall, 2008, p. 578-579). This thesis aims to provide a concrete example of how this may be achieved.

Combining these two definitions of globalisation and ancient world systems, we arrive at our working definition of ancient globalising world systems, as being self-contained but overlapping and interacting worlds of networks undergoing processes of increased connectivity along with increased awareness of said connectivity. As stated by Tamar Hodos in relation to globalisation, but extended to such terms as globalising processes, systems, and discourses (Hodos, 2017, p. 4), and by Kardulias and Hall specifically in relation to world-systems analysis (Kardulias & Hall, 2008, p. 574), it would be inaccurate to speak of there being only one process of globalisation, or indeed of a single globalised or globalising world system. This would imply a linear and singular development toward a globalised world, when in fact many developments can be defined retroactively as globalising, and many separate and/or overlapping world systems can be defined at a given time, depending on one's definition, classification, focus, and historical realities in the ebbs and flows of connectivity (Hodos, 2017, p. 4). China today, or any past Chinese state, but also the many states it was made up of at various times, may all be defined as their own world systems, as might many other states or societies at that or any given time, and even the increasingly globalising world at large can be argued to be (becoming) its own world system, which various states, peoples, and societies form a part of. As the historical context chapter below will also exemplify, while the focus of this thesis is the incorporation of Chinese material into what could be considered a globalising Afro-Eurasian world system, China could also be considered a world-system in itself, with cultural interaction between different groups within and around it in its own right. The same might be said for the Mediterranean, Europe, the Near East, and many other parts of this larger world system that is the main point of consideration at present. Also in accordance with the observation by Hodos that a great part of the value of globalisation as a tool to think with lies in it being an active process, rather than a state of being or an end goal, this thesis refers to "globalising" rather than "global" or "globalised" ancient world systems (Hodos, 2017, p. 4).

2. Historical context and historiography

This chapter presents an outline of the historical context of the period this thesis concerns. This is a picture of the accepted narrative based on books of Chinese history used in schools, universities, and museums. In other words, sources with education as their aim, and which by their nature must also generalize to a degree in order to keep the narrative understandable and concise. As pointed out above, much of this accepted narrative is based on ancient written sources, and has not been critically substantiated by archaeological research, nor has archaeological research been widely used as an independent source of information. It must also be pointed out that the narrative presented here is based on written sources aimed primarily at English speaking audiences, though many do contain references to or are written by Chinese authors. The aim is to illustrate the generally accepted and widely projected image of Chinese history as it currently exists. This does not mean that all or even most scholars of Chinese history and archaeology agree with this view in its entirety, nor that no other work is being done to substantiate, supplement, or counter this image (Szonyi, 2017, p. 1-7). In fact, the present thesis would not have been possible without many others, both past and present, also working on valuable research projects that enrich our understanding of the past of China and the Silk Road trade network, which will be highlighted in the historiographical section of this chapter below.

2.1 Some nuance: the pitfalls of the dynastic cycle and Mandate of Heaven

However, before we can begin to outline the relevant historical context for the time period at the centre of this thesis, there are two key concepts which must first be understood, as they are central to both past and modern understandings of Chinese history. They are the dynastic cycle and the "Mandate of Heaven (天命)". Handed to us through ancient written sources dating as far back as the Zhou (周) dynasty (1045-256 B.C.E.), when taken at face value they provide a very compartmentalized image of the history of China (Hansen, 2015a, p. 6-8; Lieberman, 2009, p. 94-96). To fully understand why the Six Dynasties period has such a different reputation to other periods of disunity and strife that preceded it,

as an almost forgotten period in China's history during which, unlike those previous periods, no important changes occurred or inventions were made (Lewis, 2009a, p. 1), and why the following period of reunification under the Sui and especially the Tang was considered such golden age of development, culture, and trade by comparison, it is critical to examine the focus of both ancient and modern understandings of Chinese history on these concepts.

To begin with the dynastic cycle, this is a concept that first entered the historical record with the writings of Sima Qian, famous historian of the Han dynasty (Hansen, 2015a, p. 44). The cycle depicts a clear progression throughout each dynasty, beginning with a powerful first emperor who is able to reunite the empire or wrest control of it from a previous ruler through strategic or military prowess. Following him are a series of descendants which inevitably culminate in a weak and unfit emperor who is overthrown by a more fit ruler, natural disaster, or rebel uprising, beginning the cycle anew (Hansen, 2015a, p. 6-7). The key detail is that these last emperors of any dynasty were demonstrably unfit to rule, and therefore deserved to be overthrown. As such, the dynastic cycle model justifies any overthrow of a ruling dynasty, but crucially only does so after the fact. Should a coup or uprising be attempted but put down, or a natural disaster averted or overcome, the ruling dynasty has proven itself deserving of the title (Hansen 2015, p. 44).

This leads us to the other key concept of traditional understandings of Chinese history, which works in tandem with the concept of the dynastic cycle: the Mandate of Heaven, first invoked by the Zhou dynasty, which overthrew the Shang (商) (ca. 1600-1045 B.C.E.) (Hansen, 2015a, p. 42-43). "Heaven" in this case, represents a force somewhat similar to the modern western concept of the cosmos, not a specific deity but rather a divine will which manifested itself in the world in various ways, for example through natural disasters or uprisings (Hansen, 2015a, p. 43-44). This concept of the Mandate of Heaven is later often interpreted as a check on evil rulers, a justification that can be invoked by the people whenever the current ruler was not representing their best interests. What is often neglected is the fact that this concept was only ever applied by a new ruling dynasty after the fact, that if a

dynasty manged to overcome the disaster or squash the revolt, they could claim to have retained the Mandate (Hansen, 2015a, p. 44). In this manner, the Mandate of Heaven could be used to justify both a coup and a continuation of any dynasty.

There are several problems and misunderstandings that these two concepts may lead to, which have made their way into the popularly accepted image of Chinese history. Put simply, the dynastic cycle model, especially combined with the Mandate of Heaven, often falls into the trap of blindly accepting any dynasties' definition of itself, or more commonly its predecessor, rather than practical realities (Hansen, 2015a, p. 6). Valerie Hansen goes so far as to say that a dynasty is 'a convenient fiction' created to allow those not part of the imperial family to rule under the pretence and symbolic power of stability and nobility (Hansen, 2015a, p. 7). These ideas of the dynastic cycle and the Mandate of Heaven are deeply engrained in both popular understanding and scholarship. It is a model introduced by ancient Chinese historians, carried through the ages, and the way it took shape over time reveals much about each subsequent period in time[10] and how they wished to represent their history, yet it cannot be taken as representative of reality.

There is also a danger in these concepts in that they may present a false dichotomy of constant chaos in the absence of a ruling dynasty, and peace and prosperity when there is one. Gradual developments that occur over multiple dynasties and periods of disunity often get lost or are oversimplified when going off official historical documents, which are based on this idea of the dynastic cycle and the Mandate of Heaven (Hansen, 2015a, p. 5-6). What is especially problematic, is that together the dynastic cycle and the Mandate of Heaven imply that during these

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[10] The incorporation of later foreign dynasties, such as the Mongol Yuan (元) dynasty (1276 – 1368 C.E.) and the Manchu Qing (清) dynasty (1644 – 1911 C.E.), for example, is very revealing in this sense. Variously these dynasties were excluded from the dynastic model entirely, as they were not Chinese and therefore should not be considered in this sense. At other times, they were incorporated but simply seen as having become Chinese from the moment they conquered that territory. Yet more often than not, the choice to adopt certain practices was a deliberate one in order to rule their various populations more effectively, and many of these foreign ruling dynasties presented themselves very differently to their Chinese subjects than they did to their own people or in other areas they conquered. Both a leadership tactic and a personal choice, the way foreign influences are adopted, adapted, and incorporated are clearly fluid (Hansen, 2015a, p. 4-5 & 14).

dynastic periods, the political situation was always stable, and one family governed the country in the form of consecutive emperors. In practice, this was far from the case. In fact, eunuchs, high officials, and the families of concubines often held more power and influence at court than did the emperor himself, and the royal family often had to cede power to vassal states or land-owning noble families (Hansen, 2015a, p. 6 & 93). Early works on Chinese archaeology also tend to diminish foreign influence on Chinese history as a result, even emphasising how foreign dynasties that ruled China for various, sometimes significant, periods of time somehow "became" Chinese as they adopted Chinese practices in order to rule (Hansen, 2015a, p. 4). This encourages the image of China as a well-defined, contained, and entirely self-sufficient culture throughout time (Shelach-Lavi, 2017, p. 389).

Related to this, there is the assumption that in the absence of a ruling dynasty, progress and prosperity came to a grinding halt, and nothing but conflict ensued. Certainly, as we shall see below, the Six Dynasties period had no shortage of conflict, both armed and otherwise. Yet, as is so often the case, conflict and uncertainty breed innovation and change (Hansen, 2015a, p. 7), so to limit our view of China's history and its involvement in the Silk Road trade network to clearly delineated dynasties would be nothing short of negligent. After all, one of China's most prominent periods of strife, disunity, and conflict, the Warring States period, was also the time some of its core philosophies were being developed, such as Confucianism and Daoism (Hansen, 2015a, p. 80-81; von Glahn, 2016, p. 44-45), a trend we shall also see return in the Six Dynasties period with the spread of Buddhism in China.[11] There is also an inherent value judgement within the dynastic cycle model, as the dynasties which were chosen to be incorporated into it have changed over time, as has the way they have been represented (Hansen, 2015a, p. 4-5). Far more research is needed in order to untangle those complex

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[11] Buddhism and its spread, adaptation, and influence in China is a complex topic of its own and too large to give due attention in this thesis. For an in-depth and up-to-date overview and initial further reading, the annotated translation by Jülch (2019, 2021) of a key Chinese Buddhist historical text is recommended. For an archaeological perspective, consider Kieschnick (2003).

developments which do not adhere to the dynastic model nearly as well in practice as they do in theory (Hansen, 2015a, p. 7-8).

To attempt to rectify the situation by shifting focus explicitly to the periods between dynasties would have us continue to fall into the trap that this dynastic cycle forms, in letting our vision be ruled from the outset by these organising concepts. Rather than seeking to prove or disprove the correctness of the model,[12] an attempt is made here to let go of the assumptions that have grown out of it and provide an interpretation of the archaeological material from the ground up, seeking first to understand the processes behind and roots of the role and incorporation of Chinese material in the global systems before seeking to understand their potential relationship to periods of political disunity or stability. Naturally it will be impossible to let go of these organising concepts entirely, for the sake of clarity and organisation, especially where it concerns historical context. In this thesis they are, however, only ever used as organising concepts, and in continuing to the historical context outlined below, it remains vital to keep in mind the explanation of this dynastic model, how it formed and is maintained, and the complexities it obscures.

2.2 Historical context

2.2.1 China internally

In 589 C.E., after a period of nearly 370 years without central imperial control, the Sui dynasty managed to conquer both the north and south of China and reunify the empire under a single ruling family (Graff, 2019, p. 275 & 278). Though this dynasty did not last more than 30 years, they are considered to have started a renaissance of Chinese culture, government, and economic interests which the subsequent Tang dynasty was able to build on to rule for the next 300 years (Hansen, 2015a, p. 173). The centuries directly after the official fall of the Han dynasty had been a time of great division and dynastical complication for China, which scholars often struggle to categorize. Some, like *Imperial China: The Definitive Visual History* (Dorling Kindersley Limited, & Encyclopedia of China Publishing House, 2020) and *The*

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[12] As indicated by Hansen (2015a, p. 7), most scholars today do not take this model for granted, nor do they actively use it in their research, yet it maintains its prevalence in popular understanding.

Cambridge History of China (Twitchett, 1979; Dien & Knapp, 2019) follow the dynastic model in classifying the whole period between the Han and Sui dynasties as a period of disunity, typically referred to as the Six Dynasties period, in order to provide a clear and continuous overview. Others like Valerie Hansen in her volume *The Open Empire: A history of China to 1800* (2015) or Richard von Glahn in his *The Economic History of China* (2016) attempt to give a more nuanced or thematic - but often also rather more complicated - overview of Chinese history in the face of the various kingdoms and dynasties that ruled a China largely divided between north and south (Hansen, 2015a, p. 140).

2.2.1.1 Six Dynasties

Much of the groundwork of Chinese society and cultural identity had been laid during the combined 400 years of united rule under the Qin (秦) and Han dynasties between 221 B.C.E. and 220 C.E. (Hansen, 2015a, p. 137). Han dynasty rule had gone through phases of instability before, even briefly losing power entirely to the short-lived Xin dynasty founded by a regent called Wang Mang in 9 C.E. (Beecroft, 2017, p. 161-163), but in 220 C.E. they were unable to restore or cling onto their power. It is somewhat uncertain what caused the final end of the Han dynasty, but it is likely to have been a combination of a growing economic inequality and power struggles within the palace which resulted in an inability to respond adequately to such a crisis (Hansen, 2015a, p. 136). The official fall of the Han dynasty in 220 C.E. was preceded by decades of internal unrest and uprisings (Dien, 2007, p. 2). Most of these were put down, but out of the conflicts arose two powerful generals who amassed more and more power for themselves. In a decisive battle in 200 C.E., the general named Cao Cao (曹操) defeated his rival Yuan Shao (袁紹) and took control of the northern territories (Dien, 2007, p. 2). In his campaign southward that followed, he encountered another powerful general named Sun Quan (孫權), who had formed an alliance with the last Han emperor still clinging to power. Together they defeated Cao Cao and he retreated north, where his son formed the state called (Cao) Wei ((曹)魏) after his father's passing in 220 C.E. (Deng, 2007, p. 63). The last Han emperor, named Lui Bei (劉備), was declared emperor in Chengdu (成都) of a state called Shu Han (蜀漢) the following year. Finally, in 229 C.E. general

Sun Quan became the head of the state called Wu (吳) in the southeast. With this, the former Han territory was decisively divided and a part of the Six Dynasties period called the Three Kingdoms period had truly begun (Deng, 2007, p. 63). However, most put the actual starting date of this period in the year of Cao Cao's death and the establishment of the Cao Wei state, as this spelt the true end of the Han dynasty's political monopoly (Lewis, 2009a, p. 36-38). The Three Kingdoms period is characterized by ceaseless warfare between the three states in order to secure dominance (Deng, 2007, p. 64). However, each state also made important economic, administrative, and political changes in order to stabilize their society and improve agricultural yields and trade (Deng, 2007, p. 64-65).

The end of the Three Kingdoms period is usually placed at 280 C.E., when the Western Jin (西晉) (265-316 C.E.) state, which had replaced the Cao Wei in the north, succeeded in reuniting the three states under one rule (Dien, 2007, p. 3). This only lasted for around 20 years, however, before internal conflicts led to their downfall (Deng, 2007, p. 68). This began a long period of division which largely cut the territory of the fallen Han dynasty in half along the Yangtze River (長江), with internal conflict and struggles for power on both sides (Dien, 2007; Lewis, 2009a). In the north, as many as 16 states occupied various territories, causing this period to be referred to as the Sixteen Kingdoms period (十六國) (Dien, 2007, p. 6). Those vying for power included several families of non-Chinese or mixed cultural and ethnic origins, including the Xiongnu (匈奴), Xianbei (鮮卑), Jie (羯), Di (氐), and Qiang (羌) (Deng, 2007, p. 68; Wu, 2017, p. 489). These peoples from the northern steppes had been in conflict with China for a long time (Dien, 2007, p. 5), and the internal struggles China now faced allowed them to gain a far more permanent foothold (Dien, 2007, p. 4). In 386 C.E., the Xianbei founded the Northern Wei (北魏) dynasty, which united to north in 439 C.E. but fell in 534 C.E. (Holcombe, 2019, p. 119). They built a wall and stationed garrisons along their northern borders to prevent other tribes from entering China, and cooperated closely with the established Chinese elite families (Dien, 2007, p. 7), even marrying into them on several occasions (Hansen, 2015a, p. 161). However, the Northern Wei rulers were also careful to prevent these families from gaining too much power, and took

measures to consolidate their power (Dien, 2007, p. 8). Around 485 C.E., dowager empress Feng (馮), who ruled on behalf of her step-grandson emperor Xiaowen (孝文) for nearly 15 years between 476 and 490 C.E., put a new land distribution system into place called the equal-field system (Hansen, 2015a, p. 160-162), which awarded land for cultivation to individual households based on their size, similar to homesteading (Dien, 2007, p. 8). She also took measures to establish a more Chinese style of bureaucracy, and in 493 C.E. her step-grandson moved the capital from the northern frontier to the old capital of Luoyang (洛阳), which had lain in ruin since its destruction in 311 C.E. (Hansen, 2015a, p. 161-162). The ruling family dropped their Xianbei name and adopted the Chinese surname of Yuan (元)[13] instead (Hansen, 2015a, p. 162), and banned the wearing of traditional Xianbei clothing, the use of Xianbei language, and many Xianbei customs (Dien, 2007, p. 8). While these policies have been interpreted as part of an inevitable process of Sinicization of nomadic tribes, in all likelihood they were in fact part of a strategy to consolidate the power of the ruling family, as the Chinese system of government afforded them more power than the traditional power-sharing method of government of the steppe (Hansen, 2015a, p. 163). However, there were many Xianbei people who resisted these measures, and the equal-field system proved difficult to maintain (Hansen, 2015a, p. 162 & 165). After the death of emperor Xiaowen in 499 C.E., internal power-struggles eventually led to losses against other invading tribes from the steppe and mutinies within the military, culminating in the end of the dynasty in 534 C.E. (Hansen, 2015a, p. 163).

The incursion of the many non-Chinese peoples from the northern steppes, as well as reportedly miserable living conditions as a result of conflicts and droughts (Dien, 2007, p. 6), caused many Han Chinese to relocate south (Dien, 2007, p. 1), including the seat of power of the Western Jin dynasty, which transferred to a prince who had previously been governor in Nanjing in 317 C.E., and is from then on called the Eastern Jin (東晉) dynasty (Dien, 2007, p. 4). This year is usually marked as the beginning of the Northern and Southern Dynasties period within the Six Dynasties

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[13] Not to be confused with the later Mongol Yuan dynasty (see Footnote 10).

period, as it marks a formal beginning of the divide between the areas north and south of the Yangtze river not only politically, but also culturally (Dien, 2007, p. 4; Hansen, 2015a, p. 175). The area south of the Yangtze river had so far been considered an uncivilized, inhospitable swampland ridden with disease by the Han Chinese people, but these areas had already been occupied before they arrived, not only by previous Chinese migrants but also by indigenous populations of Tai (台), Yao (瑶族), and Yue (百越) peoples (Hansen, 2015a, p. 166; Dien, 2007, p. 4). However, little is known about the peoples already living here and how they were affected by these migrations, as they did not leave any writing (Hansen, 2015a, p. 166). After the arrival of the large groups of Han migrants, large areas of land were cleared and made into productive rice paddies, but this took many years and great effort (Hansen, 2015a, p. 166). The area south of the Yangtze river, like the north, underwent a succession of various conflicting states and dynasties, six of which secured control over the capital of Nanjing (Dien, 2007, p. 1). Many of the Xiongnu, the most prominent of the steppe peoples to antagonize China during the Han dynasty, were also forced southward by the rise of the Xianbei in the north (Dien, 2007, p. 5). They settled around the northern borders as a buffer against the other newcomers from the north, and were also recruited into the military of the various Chinese dynasties in the south internally (Dien, 2007, p. 6). Control of the military, which defended the south against incursions from the north, was crucial in securing political power, and in 420 C.E. a junior officer named Liu Yu (劉裕) managed to take control of the large northern garrison army and declared himself emperor of the (Liu) Song ((劉)宋) dynasty (Dien, 2007, p. 4-5). This was not the end of political conflict in the south, in fact four more dynasties would gain control of Nanjing before the reunification under the Sui dynasty and most of these successions occurred through violence (Dien, 2007, p. 5). However, the power structure established by Liu Yu largely remained in place until 589 C.E., largely due to his decree that all military garrisons be placed under direct control of the court and no personal armies by elite families were to be maintained (Dien, 2007, p. 5).

2.2.1.2 The Sui

The ultimate reunification of the Chinese states both north and south of the Yangtze river began with the founding of the Sui dynasty in 581 C.E. (Chittick, 2019, p. 270-271). They replaced Northern Zhou (北周) dynasty which had succeeded in reuniting much of the territories of the Northern Wei after their fall in 534 C.E., which had led to a return of internal struggles for dominance in the north (Deng, 2007, p. 69; Hansen, 2015a, p. 174-175). Only a few years later, in 589 C.E., they succeeding in reuniting the north and south, ending the Six Dynasties period (Deng, 2007, p. 69; Hansen, 2015a, p. 175). The Sui made strong attempts to bridge cultural gaps, including a decree by the first Sui emperor that all citizens, regardless of background, be treated equally before the law, as well as an active patronization of Buddhism (Hansen, 2015a, p. 175). They also built a new capital city near the previous Han capital of Chang'an (長安), modern Xi'an (西安) (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006, p. 78), constructed the Grand Canal (京杭大運河) from Hangzhou (杭州) all the way to Luoyang which greatly improved the transport of commodities, and instated the equal-field system which had been introduced by the Northern Wei predecessors (Fairbank and Goldman, 2006, p. 77). Ultimately, however, the Sui dynasty fell as a result of ambitious but unsuccessful expansion campaigns by the second Sui emperor, to a rebel general of mixed Turkic and Chinese origin who had belonged to the previous northern aristocracy (Hansen, 2015a, p. 178). This general, named Li Yuan (李淵), declared himself the first emperor of the Tang dynasty in 618 C.E. (Hansen, 2015a, p. 178).

2.2.1.3 The Tang

The Tang relied significantly on the new foundations laid by the Sui dynasty (Twitchett, 1979, p. 48), but were far more successful in expanding their territory, conquering parts of Korea, Vietnam, and far into Central Asia (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006, p. 78). The imperial government had far more power over its inhabitants than had been the case for at least the past 400 years, issued a new law code and land distribution system, and declared Daoism the new state religion (Hansen, 2015a, p. 173-174 & 178). However, like the founders of the Sui dynasty, the imperial family of the Tang was of mixed Chinese and non-Chinese heritage (Fairbank & Goldman,

2006, p. 76), and even during the early Tang period, foreign ideas and religions found their place in Chinese society, for example in the form of mosques, synagogues and Christian churches, as well as established communities of Sogdians, Uighurs, Turks and Tibetans in the new capital of Chang'an, as well as official envoys from over 300 countries (Park, 2002, p. 23). Buddhism was also still popular and actively patronized by some emperors (Hansen, 2015a, p. 179). During the Tang dynasty China also became more urbanized and the economy much more regulated, with the Tang rulers exercising tight control over market trade and personal property (Hansen, 2015a, p. 173). In the early eighth century C.E., a more formal money economy is said to have largely replaced the previous system of bartering for goods, and new ports and canals were built to improve shipping and logistics (Schloss, 1977a, p. 70). This presents a significant change in the infrastructure of trade and economy, and resulting social changes in the form of a rising merchant class, increasingly significant presence of foreign traders, and a large civilian bureaucracy.

The period of Tang rule was not without its own political struggles, however. Issues of succession formed a problem from its beginning, as two sons of the dynasty's founder began contending for power in the 620s, eventually resulting in the murder of one and the forced abdication of their father by the other (Hansen, 2015a, p. 178). This son ruled as emperor Taizong (太宗) for over 20 years, but the son who succeeded him ceded most of his power to his wife, who for a time after his death even ruled as emperor in her own right as emperor Wu Zetian (武則天) (Hansen, 2015a, p. 181). She was effectively in power between 660 and 705 C.E., and during that time even declared her own new dynasty called (Wu) Zhou ((武)周) (Hansen, 2015a, p. 182-184). She was deposed in 705 C.E., and Tang rule definitively restored, though it took until 712 C.E. with the ascension of emperor Xuanzong (玄宗) for the political situation to regain a true sense of stability (Hansen, 2015a, p. 184). Xuanzong ruled until 756 C.E., and is still considered one of China's most talented emperors, yet he was also nearly responsible for the downfall of the Tang dynasty near the end of his reign (Hansen, 2015a, p. 184). In 755 C.E., a general named An Lushan (安禄山), rebelled against the emperor, and with his personal

army managed to take control of the secondary capital of Luoyang and force the emperor to flee to Sichuan (四川) (Hansen, 2015a, p. 204). The blame was put on one of the emperor's consorts named Yang Guifei (楊貴妃),[14] whose popularity had previously been so great she even caused a significant shift in female beauty ideals from the slim and elongated frames to her own more voluptuous figure, and who had greatly favoured An, even adopting him as a son 747 C.E. (Hansen, 2015a, p. 188 & 202-204). However, after his initial success, internal power struggles amongst the rebels led to An's murder in 757 C.E. and the eventual suppression of the rebellion by the new Tang ruler with the help of Uyghur troops (Hansen, 2015a, p. 207). Following the An Lushan rebellion, the imperial family, though restored to power in name, had to cede much control to local rulers (Hansen, 2015a, p. 178), the tax base was in tatters, and China was plagued by incursions from Central Asian troops and raiders (Hansen, 2015a, p. 207). Attempts were made by subsequent Tang rulers to regain their former influence, but these were unsuccessful, and finally in 907 C.E., after a series of rebellions which began in 874 C.E., the last child emperor of the Tang was killed and the line permanently ended (Hansen, 2015a, p. 221).

2.2.1.4 To conclude

This is, broadly, the image of this time in China's history as it exists today, but also how it lived throughout time: a period of great chaos with no imperial authority and hardly any commercial contact with the outside world to speak of, followed by a greatly prosperous, urbanized, and internationally involved period of reunification under the new imperial order. Yet there had been other periods of great chaos, violence, and disunity in China, as well as others of flourishing trade, international contact, and cultural expression. The Han dynasty, too, is often idealized as a golden age of unity and culture in China's history, yet without the emphasis on trade and international relations, and the openness to the incorporation of foreign elements into Chinese society that the Tang enjoys. Looking at the historical record,

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[14] 'Guifei' in fact means 'consort', the term for the highest rank of imperial consort at the time. Her own first name was Yuhuan (玉環), but she is most popularly known by the combination of her title and family name (Li, 2020, p. 148).

this Six Dynasties period was the first time in at least 1800 years that no single ruler, symbolic or otherwise, was at the head of all the states or territory that made up what was considered to be China at the time. The territory that made up China had changed vastly over time, however, and the emperors of these earliest dynasties of the Shang and the Zhou ruled over a much smaller area than what was being fought over during this Six Dynasties period of division. Back then, much of what is today considered China was inhabited by non-Chinese speaking peoples, who were slowly assimilated into, or expelled from, Chinese territory (Hansen, 2015a, p. 37-41). They had no written language, and therefore hardly a voice in today's understanding of the historical period (Hansen, 2015a, p. 39). This was different during the Six Dynasties period, as during the preceding Han dynasty much of what today makes up China had been united under a single ruling dynasty, of Han Chinese descent, for the first time. As shown above, the Six Dynasties period then presents as a period of political disunity, which had been faced before during the so-called Spring and Autumn (春秋時代) and Warring States (戰國時代) periods, but now in the face of a previous period of unity on a grand scale in the minds of people both past and present. It was also a period of substantial foreign cultural incursions at different strata of society all the way up to the ruling class. This long period of conflict also coincides with a marked rise and spread of Buddhism and many other philosophies through China, as people searched for an alternative to the Confucian teachings that seemed unable to prevent this unrest (Deng, 2007, p. 69). A testament to the spread and influence of Buddhism and the cultural interaction during this period are the three main Buddhist grottoes in China at Mogao (莫高窟), Dunhuang (敦煌窟), and Yungang (雲崗石窟) (Deng, 2007, p. 77-78). They contain many carved statues of the Buddha and other Buddhist figures and themes, as well as stone replicas of wooden architecture and carved reliefs, and their unique artistic style had a large impact on later Sui and Tang arts (Deng, 2007, p. 78-79). The northern territories in particular embraced Buddhism, as several rulers were avid devotees (Deng, 2007, p. 80). At no previous time in China's history had such systemic foreign cultural influences been encountered. In reuniting the territory in 589 C.E., the Sui dynasty may have set in motion this prevailing image of

Tang openness to foreign cultural influence and international trade, because such openness had been necessary in order to unite the different territories and their culturally divergent communities (Hansen, 2015a, p. 174-178). The reunification under the Sui and Tang after centuries of cultural and political divide between the north and south may have forced more openness to foreign cultural influences, and therefore trade and migration, as this had been a necessity in eliminating the cultural divides between the north and south (Hansen, 2015a, p. 173-4).

As the frequent mention of various peoples from the northern steppes and their important role in Chinese history in the above has already hinted at, these developments did not occur in isolation. Finds suggests that trade routes spanning vast areas of modern China may have begun to form as early as the Shang dynasty (Hansen, 2015a, p. 41),[15] while during the reign of Han emperor Wudi (漢武帝) (141 – 87 B.C.E.), China first joined the ancient Silk Road trade network, bringing Chinese goods all the way to Egypt, the Roman Empire, and even as far as England for the first time (An, 1984, p. 4). The next section provides a brief overview of this trade network and its operations during the first millennium C.E., in order to contextualize the case studies that follow in the next chapter.

2.2.2 The Silk Road

As much as Chinese society presents its own unique historical trajectory, from the beginning it formed part of various networks of interaction both great and small in scale. From the first introduction of bronze metallurgy from southern Siberia through the Tarim Basin around the third millennium B.C.E., which would become such a defining material of early Chinese society (Mei et al., 2017), to the introduction of glass manufacture most likely from Iran or Iraq during the fifth century B.C.E. (An, 2002, p. 79), to the conquest of surrounding territories and the ongoing conflicts with the steppe nomads to the north (Pines, 2005), the history of

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[15] Such potentially far reaching early contact is further confirmed by the discovery of corpses of unknown origin but with several Caucasoid features in the region of Xinjiang (新疆), dating to between 1800 and 200 B.C.E.. They had, for example, round eyes and large noses, as well as light hair and fair skin, and some were over 180 cm tall. Moreover, the techniques used to make some of the textiles found alongside them appear distinctly similar to those found in Europe at the time (Hansen, 2015a, p. 42).

China has always been connected to the history of those around them. China's formal connection to the Silk Road trade network began in 121 B.C.E., when emperor Han Wudi decreed that the Jade Gate (玉門關) in be opened (Kuzmina, 2008, p. 2), letting foreign traders exchange their goods with Chinese merchants in this one location (Juliano & Lerner, 2002, p. 2). At this stage, most of what we would today consider the Silk Road trade network had already taken shape along their own trajectories, and continued to change and evolve after China formally connected itself to them via this initial opening of a single node of access to the Han empire.[16] With China opening itself and its established trade contacts with the peoples of the steppe to the north and the indigenous peoples to the south up to it, the network reached its largest extent and took the shape most still associate with it today (Liu, 2010, p. 1-19). To explain the nature and functioning of all the peoples involved in these various networks, how they took shape over the several centuries before China connected to them, and how they continued to evolve after this moment would be far too complex and beyond the scope of this thesis to outline here, but an attempt is made to give the most pertinent information for the sake of contextualising what follows. For the sake of clarity, the common strategy of splitting the network into its overland and maritime components is adhered to, though it must be stressed that these were far from self-contained components within the network, and frequently overlapped or crossed (Beckwith, 2009, p. XX).

2.2.2.1 Overland
As the previous section already indicated, China and the wider region surrounding it were not unfamiliar with intercultural contacts over both long and short distances even prior to their official joining of the Silk Road trade network, and these contacts could range from friendly, to profitable, to contentious and anything in between, and where it concerned China's involvement in the Silk Road trade network these initially took place largely over land (Casson, 1989, p. 27). The nomads of the steppe to the north had been a continuous thorn in the side of the Han empire from its

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[16] For an up-to-date and more in-depth understanding of the formation of the Silk Road trade network and its underlying processes, consider Beckwith (2011), Benjamin (2018), Liu (2010), and Whitfield (2015, 2018) . For further reading related specifically to the maritime aspects of the network, consider Mathew (2017).

beginning, but also served as valuable trading partners and occasional allies, forming a link to the western regions (Deng, 2007, p. 52-55). They continued to play a crucial role in China's subsequent involvement in the wider network and, as the above has demonstrated, in Chinese society and politics after the fall of the Han dynasty. As also stated above, rather than creating the Silk Road trade network as some sources suggest, China was in fact the last to join an already well-established and complex network of various trade routes across most of Afro-Eurasia which had formed over the course of several centuries.[17] From developments such as the spread of horseback riding and pastoral nomadic confederations like the Scythians and Xiongnu across the Eurasian steppe (Benjamin, 2018, p. 25; Beckwith, 2009, p. 59), the expansions of Etruscan city-states, Greek colonies, the Roman Republic, and the Persian Empire in the first millennium B.C.E. (Liu, 2010, p. 1; Beckwith, 2009, p. 59-60), to the further expansions of the Roman and Kushan empires and the continued movements of various steppe peoples like the Sarmatians, Alans, and Xiongnu in the first centuries of the first millennium C.E. (Benjamin, 2018, p. 146 & 202; Beckwith, 2009, p. 78), just to name a few key developments, slowly various networks began to overlap, connect, and merge. China, though distant, took up a prominent role in this network upon joining it through its production of silk. In fact, during the first century C.E., Pliny the Elder lamented in his *Natural History* that the copious amounts of silk being imported into the Roman Empire were draining the state's resources (Liu, 2010, p. 20). Until about the fifth or sixth century C.E., China maintained its monopoly on their way of processing silk from domesticated silkworms (Good, 1995, p. 960), but the secret somehow made its way along the network until it was being produced in various places along the Silk Road trade network including Byzantium and India (Muthesius, 1993, p. 40; Hansen, 2015a, p. 155).[18] Silk was not the only commodity being traded along the network, however, as the established networks had traded in spices, fragrances, gemstones, and

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[17] See Footnote 16.
[18] One story goes that a Chinese princess smuggled a single silkworm out hidden in her hair when she was married off to a Central Asian prince (Hansen, 2015a, p. 155). Roman author Procopius on the other hand, asserts that the first silkworm eggs were smuggled to Byzantium by order of emperor Justinian to avoid expensive imports (Hildebrandt & Gillis 2017, …).

decorative fabrics, among other things, since long before China opened itself up to this trade (Liu, 2010, p. 10 & 20-21), and China itself also contributed more than just their elusive fabric, such as other types of fabrics (Hill, 2009, p. 25), furs (Casson, 1989, p. 26), and certain spices such as cinnamon and cassia (Casson, 1989, p. 123), though silk appears to have been the most profitable (Hansen, 2015a, p. 123), and receives by far the most scholarly attention.[19]

In many cases, such developments came hand-in-hand with both violence and diplomacy in various degrees. At the time of the Six Dynasties period, China was not the only place along the network experiencing conflict and disorder. The Roman Empire was also going through a steady decline, and was in constant conflict with the Sasanians along its eastern frontiers (Cunliffe, 2015, p. 295), who were themselves also undertaking military campaigns toward the northeast in places including Sakastan and Merv (Potts, 2018, p. 287). From its beginning as a single node of contact at the Jade Gate to the various existing overland routes during the Han dynasty, China's trade activity grew into its own complex web of connections with the various peoples trading overland and, as we shall find below, by sea. Written records tell us that despite the tumultuous times, the overland routes of the Silk Road trade network were quite heavily travelled during the years of the Six Dynasties period and trade still flourished (Cunliffe, 2015, p. 295), with pilgrims travelling from China to India recorded as early as 260 C.E. (Hansen, 2015a, p. 152). Central Asian peoples such as the Hephthalites, Avars, Western Turks, the Alans and the Huns all formed links in the network which transported goods throughout Eurasia (Cunliffe, 2015, p. 320-339). Through such kingdoms as Kucha and Kroraina, and passing through the hands of several peoples of different backgrounds and cultures along the way, goods made their way across the overland network over either long or, more commonly, short distances (Hansen, 2015,a p. 153). Of particular note when it comes to China's connections within the Silk Road network are a people called the Sogdians (Hansen, 2003). Aside from being active traders,

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[19] Elusive because several authors speculated or misunderstood how the fabric was produced and its properties. For example, Pliny the Elder thought it was produced by brushing down off leaves of a certain plant after soaking them in water (Liu, 2010, p. 20).

the Sogdians also were and remain particularly known as musicians and entertainers across the Silk Road trade network, and this is reflected in items such as mingqi (冥器) tomb sculpture (see 3.2.1), contemporary documents, and pictorial art (Furniss, 2009, p. 38-39; Lingley, 2010, p. 68; Mahler, 1950; Rothschild, 2015). Though their homeland of Sogdiana, with its major city of Samarkand in modern-day Uzbekistan (Hansen, 2017, p. 193), was conquered various times by different empires between the second and seventh centuries CE, the Sogdians were able to maintain several largely independent city-states and a distinct material (Xu, 2021, p. 156). They also settled in many major Chinese cities during the Six Dynasties period, and were some of the most active traders along the Silk Road to and from China throughout the first millennium CE (Hansen, 2015a, p. 157).

During the Six Dynasties period, in particular the Xianbei of the Northern Wei dynasty, maintained extensive contacts across Eurasia (Rawson, 2012, p. 30). Though the area would not come under direct Chinese control until the Tang dynasty, troops and garrisons were stationed far into Central Asia by the Chinese states throughout the Six Dynasties period (Hansen, 2017, p. 7). During the Tang dynasty, China's expansion grew to directly include areas of Xinjiang (新疆) and Mongolia, as well as the coastal areas of Goguryeo (高句麗) and Baekje (百濟) (modern Manchuria and Korea) (Schloss, 1977a, p. 70). These various conquests brought other opportunities for trade and interaction between Chinese soldiers and local populations (Hansen, 2017, p. 7), and expanded direct trade opportunities for Chinese merchants. Officials and ladies of foreign origin could also apparently serve in high positions in both the Tang court and the Silk Road garrison cities, and intermarriage was not uncommon during both the Six Dynasties and Tang periods, both between foreigners and Chinese in China and in the form of Chinese royal women being given in marriage to foreign royalty and aristocrats (Bray, 2019, p. 367; Hansen 2015, p. 173).

2.2.2.2 Maritime
As China's involvement with the Silk Road trade network grew over the course of the Han, Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods, so in particular did its connection to

the maritime parts of it. From both written records and archaeological research, we know that quite some merchants traded by ship rather than overland caravans, in particular during the Tang dynasty (Mathew, 2017; Liu, 2010, 40-41). These maritime networks, like the overland routes, had already begun to take shape long before China's involvement in the Silk Road trade network. A first century C.E. source called the *Periplus Maris Erythraei (Periplus of the Erythraean Sea)*, believed to have been written by a Greek merchant living in Roman Egypt, provides a detailed description of the various maritime trade routes he knew of and the goods traded along them, covering routes all the way from Italy and Greece, the eastern coast of Africa, to the western coast of India, and even makes brief mention of lands further east (Casson 1989). Most important for the maritime routes were Indian ports and Arab trading vessels. Like the Sogdians on the overland routes, Arab and Indian seafaring merchants were key traders along the network, and sold the goods they acquired on their sea voyages on to local merchants, through whom they made their way to Persia, the Roman Empire, and even further afield to the kingdom of Aksum in modern Ethiopia (Cunliffe, 2015, p. 312). Most goods which made their way from one end of the network to the other by sea did so by passing through Indian ports such as Barbarikon, Barygaza and Arikamedu, as well as Sri Lanka (Mathew, 2017). The overland and maritime routes were closely connected, as many goods arrived overland at these maritime ports and were traded further inland and across the various empires and lands connected to them after their arrival (Beckwith, 2009, p. XX). Many goods arrived at the Indian ports by the overland routes from China via the Tarim Basin, but ships also regularly travelled between the ports of eastern China, the Malay peninsula, Indonesia, India, and Arabia.

Though China's maritime connection to the Silk Road trade network appears to have taken off mostly during the Tang dynasty, going by the increased amount of Chinese goods such as pottery and bronze items on Arab and Byzantine trading vessels,[20] these maritime contacts can be traced to at least as early as the Six

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[20] The most famous example being the Belitung shipwreck (Krahl, 2010).

Dynasties period, and Chinese maritime trade with Indonesia even to the second century C.E. (Casson, 1989, p. 27). The monk Faxian (法顯), who travelled far along the Silk Road trade network between 399 and 417 C.E. and recorded his journey, departed from China overland but returned by ship, chartering several ships which took him from Sri Lanka via Indonesia back to China (Hansen, 2015a, p. 152). Though in some cases he had to wait months for a ship which could take him, from his records we know that these ships sometimes carried as many as 200 passengers (Hansen, 2015a, p. 152), showing that such journeys were not out of the ordinary during this time. Faxian's and other such travelogues also indicate that the distance covered and amount of cargo carried by these maritime merchant ships were likely significantly greater than was usually the case on the overland routes. While the overland caravans tended to be smaller and carry lighter goods, and in most cases only travelled short distances of the road over and over again, the maritime voyages were able to ship heavier items such as pottery and made slightly longer journeys (Hansen, 2015a, p. 157), though still there is no indication that any one ship would have regularly travelled all the way from China to Rome in either the Six Dynasties, Sui, or Tang periods.

2.2.2.3 To conclude

The above has painted a picture of various complex networks of trade and exchange across Africa, Europa, and Asia expanding and becoming connected to each other in various ways over the course of several centuries. Over this course of time, China's involvement changed from conscious the opening of a single node of connection in the Tarim Basin, to a complex network of contacts of its own, both overland and maritime, through which many Chinese goods made their way across Afro-Eurasia, and China received many foreign goods in return. Of these various peoples, kingdoms, and connections throughout the first millennium C.E. along the Silk Road trade network, written sources reveal an interplay of often strict governmental control in urban centres on the one hand, and a great freedom and variability on the other, for the larger parts of the routes not directly governed or easily accessible (Hansen, 2017, 1-22). On a network as extensive as the Silk Road, local or regional occurrences could have far-reaching consequences. Ultimately, as

Arab historian Al Masudi notes, direct trade with China and much of the Silk Road trade network fell away in the ninth century C.E., after a massacre of Arab and Persian traders in Guangzhou (廣州) (Zuchowska and Zukowski, 2012, p. 205). Soon after this, in the 10th century C.E. a series of conquests cut off most of the routes between India and China, effectively putting an end to China's connection to the Silk Road trade network as described above (Hansen, 2015a, p. 157).

2.3 Historiography

As previously pointed out, the above historical context sections present a brief overview of the generally accepted, up-to-date image of Chinese history during the first millennium C.E., both where it concerns its internal developments and its role within the world of trading systems and interactions it participated in. Now, we must examine how this view took shape, in order to demonstrate the importance of evaluating it against the available archaeological material presented in Chapter 3. In addition, it is important to put into perspective the academic context from which many of the sources used below also stem. This section can be divided into three parts, which together will provide an overview of the scholarship on this topic as a whole. Firstly, as mentioned above, scholars of Chinese history find themselves in the luxurious position of having an abundance of written records to consult, both official records and other works intentionally written to be passed down and survive, but also many which survived quite by accident and show an entirely different side of history (discarded court records re-used as funeral clothing, for example) (Hansen, 2017, p. 5). As such, much of the above historical context is based on primary sources of the period itself, or documents written a few decades or centuries after. These, as well as some similarly ancient sources from other regions of the Silk Road trade network, will be the subject of the first section of this chapter.

This is not to say that the fields of Chinese history, archaeology, and art history have been in any way stagnant since.[21] Therefore, what follows the section on ancient historical sources are two sections on the modern scholarship of the subject, how this developed and how it has contributed to the image presented above. The first

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[21] For a more in-depth overview, see Szonyi (2017).

examines the field in China itself, as the fields of ancient history and archaeology have their own unique trajectory of development there. The second brings a wider overview of the scholarship of Chinese archaeology and history in the West. However, in reality it is impossible to cleanly separate Chinese scholarship on the one hand, and western scholarship on the other, as recent developments especially have brought these two increasingly closer together (Szonyi, 2017, p. 2). The purpose of these two sections together is to give an overview of the development of the current state of scholarship on the subject and to highlight the important role of Chinese scholarly developments in this, as well as the important differences between popular and scholarly understandings of the Chinese past.

2.3.1 Ancient sources

Beginning as early as the Shang dynasty, China has a deep tradition of keeping royal records and archives (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 11). The majority of these earliest records, however, have been lost to us (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 11). From the Qin dynasty onward, bureaucracy became increasingly specialised and professionalised, and the royal court chronicles increasingly elaborate (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 11). In particular during the period directly after the fall of the Han dynasty, the practice of both official and unofficial history writing surged, and it became increasingly routinised under the Tang dynasty (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 15). A larger of number these records remain accessible to us today, and the official canon of the court chronicles was established in the 18th century (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 11). It is made up of what has been called the 'Twenty-Four Histories', a collection of 24 official dynastic histories compiled typically by the ruling dynasty about its predecessor (Wilkinson, 2000, p. 501-519). Of these 24, 14 directly concern the period covered by this thesis.[22] These are by no means the only historical records available to us for

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[22] They are: *Records of the Three Kingdoms (三國志)* concerning the Cao Wei (曹魏) (220-265 C.E.), Shu Han (蜀漢) (221-263 C.E.), and Wu (吳) (222-280 C.E.) dynasties, compiled by Chen Shou (陳壽) of the Jin (晉) dynasty (265-420 C.E.) in 289 C.E.; *Book of Song (宋書)* concerning the Liu Song (劉宋) dynasty (420-479 C.E.), compiled by Shen Yue (沈約) of the Southern Qi (南齊) dynasty (479–502 C.E.) in 493 C.E.; *Book of Southern Qi (南齊書)* concerning the Southern Qi dynasty, compiled by Xiao Zixian (蕭子顯) of the Southern Liang (南梁) dynasty (502-557 C.E.) in

this period, but they are the accepted canon of dynastic history (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 11). Many have only been partially translated at best. The dynastic histories tell us much about the political history of China, but beyond the Twenty-Four Histories, there are several other ancient sources to consult, some related to them and some entirely independent. Legal records and administrative documents shed light on the nature of trade and the organisation of life in China at this time, while fiction and poetry represent another valuable source of information in their depictions of Chinese society, cultural norms, and daily life at the time (Szonyi, 2017, p. 5).[23] Authors would likely have wanted their stories to be relatable, and therefore the general settings of, and messages behind, these stories may reveal much about life during this period. Not only this, they can offer a look into the lives of sections of the population which the official records slight, such as women, children, artists, merchants and foreigners (Sanders, 2017, p. 221). Another important subgenre is

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537 C.E.; *Book of Wei (魏書)* concerning the Northern Wei (386-534 C.E.) and Eastern Wei (東魏) (534-550 C.E.) dynasties, compiled by Wei Shou (魏收) of the Northern Qi (北齊) dynasty (550-577 C.E.) in 554 C.E.; *Book of Liang (梁書)* concerning the Southern Liang dynasty, compiled by Yao Silian (姚思廉) of the Tang (唐) dynasty (618-907 C.E.) in 635 C.E.; *Book of Chen (陳書)* concerning the Southern Chen (南陳) dynasty (557-589 C.E.), also compiled by Yao Silian in 636 C.E.; *Book of Northern Qi (北齊書)* concerning the Northern Qi dynasty, compiled by Li Baiyao (李百藥) of the Tang dynasty in 636 C.E.; *Book of Zhou (周書)* concerning the Western Wei (西魏) (535-557 C.E.) and Northern Zhou (北周) (557-581 C.E.) dynasties, compiled by Linghu Defen (令狐德棻) of the Tang dynasty in 636 C.E.; *Book of Sui (隋書)* concerning the Sui (隋) dynasty (581-618 C.E.), compiled by Wei Zheng (魏徵) of the Tang dynasty in 636 C.E.; *Book of Jin (晉書)* concerning the Jin dynasty, compiled by Fang Xuanling (房玄齡) of the Tang dynasty in 648 C.E.; *History of the Southern Dynasties (南史)* concerning the Liu Song, Southern Qi, Southern Liang, and Southern Chen dynasties, compiled by Li Yanshou (李延壽) of the Tang dynasty in 659 C.E.; *History of the Northern Dynasties (北史)* concerning the Northern Wei, Eastern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Qi, Northern Zhou, and Sui dynasties, also compiled by Li Yanshou of the Tang dynasty in 659 C.E.; *Old Book of Tang (舊唐書)* concerning the Tang dynasty, compiled by Liu Xu (劉昫) of the Later Jin (後晉) dynasty (936–947 C.E.) in 945 C.E.; and *New Book of Tang (新唐書)* concerning the Tang dynasty, compiled by Ouyang Xiu (歐陽脩) of the Song (宋) dynasty (960–1279 C.E.) in 1060 C.E.. For more detail on official Chinese historical canon, see Rusk et al. (2020) and Wilkinson (2000). Note that the dates used in this footnote for each dynasty are from their founding until their fall, and may differ from in-text dates which concern the period of time they were in power.

[23] For an in-depth and up-to-date collection of this variety of written records, see Rusk et al. (2020).

travelogues and accounts of envoys and diplomats, which elucidate the way China interacted with its neighbours and societies further afield (Deeg, 2021; Meng, 2020). These are frequently written by Buddhist monks such as Faxian (Hansen, 2015a, p. 152-154), Yijing (義淨) (Meng, 2020, p. 45), and Xuanzang (玄奘) (Meng, 2020, p. 44). These provide valuable insights into the daily practicalities of the Silk Road trade network and how it operated, as well as the various peoples who operated along it, but of course do frequently suffer from issues of translation and cultural misunderstandings.[24] This abundance of written records at our disposal has become something of a double edged sword, in causing an imbalance in the valuation of archaeological materials vis-à-vis written sources. We must remember that the written record is inherently biased, and represents only a part of our history. Much of the written record from ancient China consists of official court histories, compiled by order of the emperor and subject to strict regulations (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 15). They reveal much of the concerns of state, the emperor, and high officials, but little of the daily lives of the common people (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 15). The written record also often slights women and non-Chinese minorities living within and outside Chinese territory (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 15). While they are sometimes mentioned, allowing us at least some idea of the wealth of different people living in and around China at any point, the written records reveal little about their concerns or their agency. Even those written records not compiled upon official imperial edict still favour the literate, those with the time and resources to learn to write and enough material and incentive to do so. This also excludes many of the merchants and traders who are so crucial to the functioning of the Silk Road trade network. The prevalence of official court histories potentially leads to a rather top-down approach to Chinese history, focussing on major concerns of state and the lives of emperors, nobles, and high officials, but revealing little about the realities of daily life for the majority of the people living in, or interacting with, China. Additionally, it promotes the assumption that not much, other than perhaps fighting and general

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[24] Especially when it comes to complicated cultural or religious concepts, as even lamented by Xuanzang himself in a letter to the king of Gaochang (高昌) in relation to the complexities of Buddhism (Li & Yan, 2000, p. 22).

crisis, happened during periods between dynasties (Hansen, 2015a, p. 7). The other type of written records, as mentioned, those written with the assumption that they would not survive, but which did so quite by accident due to favourable environmental conditions, provide a balance to this by showing an unedited version of history, and by shedding light on events not usually covered in court records (think of minor legal disputes, trade transactions, everyday correspondence, etc.) (Hansen, 2017, p. 3-4). Yet these too were written for a reason, which can be difficult to retrace and therefore must still be handled carefully, and not taken as objective truth. The outcome of a court case, for example, favours one party over another; a transaction document may be fibbed with in order to benefit a greedy merchant; and just because a law or ruling was written down, does not mean they were adhered to in practice. So, even those written records which survived by accident, rather than having been written down for posterity, must be evaluated critically. Human intention is difficult to trace both historically and archaeologically, but holding these types of sources up to each other's light may provide some indication. So far, this endeavour has been relatively one-sided, with the written record often being used to verify or fill in blanks of the archaeological material, but not vice versa.

2.3.2 Modern scholarship: Chinese scholarship

China has a long history of historical and archaeological research and documentation, as evidenced for the former by the previous paragraphs. As early as the Song (宋) dynasty (960-1276 C.E.), several elites began to collect archaeological artefacts and displayed an interest in their origins, though this practice was closer to what we might call antiquarianism than true archaeology (Fraser et al., 1986, p. 227). The practice waned after the Song dynasty, but beginning in the Qing (清) dynasty (1644 – 1911 C.E.) interest was revived, and the practice began to gain a more scientific character, including rigorous testing methods and research protocols, during the time of the People's Republic of China. At this time, several prominent Chinese archaeologists such as Li Ji (李濟) (1896-1979 C.E.), Liang Siyo (梁思永) (1904-1954 C.E.), and Xia Nai (夏鼐) (1910-1985 C.E.) were educated at western universities and brought the insights they gained there back to their research of

Chinese history (Zhong, 2013). During the years of the Great Leap Forward (大跃进) and the Chinese Cultural Revolution (文化大革命), painted such foreign influences as encroachments on Chinese development and culture, causing a rather drastic rejection of outside influences within archaeological research as well Wilkinson, 2017, p. 15 & 25). Naturally, this also resulted in a particular attitude towards research regarding something such as the Silk Road trade network. Interest in historical research on the topic of China and the Silk Road trade network in China itself has long fallen into somewhat of a gap in terms of interest, as scholars tend to focus either on pre-Qin or modern Chinese history (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 12), but during these years in particular archaeological research was intensely focussed on the origins and development of Chinese civilization as a self-contained and clearly delineated unit (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 15). This also meant a particular geographical focus. Until the 1980s, institutional archaeological efforts were concentrated in the Yellow River (黄河) region, as this was seen as the cradle of Chinese civilisation (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 13). Accidental discoveries tended to provide the only insights into areas outside of this region, a trend that can be observed to this day (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 14). However, recent years have seen something of a boom in Chinese historical and archaeological research (Ching, 2017, p. 28), leading also to new topics of interest, including the regions outside the Yellow River basin, as well as the lives of women and non-elite people (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 25). Falkenhausen in 1993 critiqued that in China more than anywhere else in the world, archaeology has been overwhelmingly focussed on the lives of the elites, the very group already amply covered by the written records (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 13). Most importantly for the topic of this thesis, studies have begun to focus on China's economic history and its role as an influence in the wider region, and its interactions with outside forces are being viewed in less essentialist terms (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 25). Even more recently, new techniques in the areas of ancient DNA and ecology have caused an increased interest in environmental reconstruction and ancient migration research (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 25-26). Still, research on the topic of China's involvement in the Silk Road trade network tend to emphasise China's importance while simultaneously placing focus on the incorporation of outside influences on Chinese society, placing

an emphasis on China's strength and prowess of being able to maintain its own culture and society while selecting which foreign elements to incorporate and adapt in its own particular brand of cosmopolitanism (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 25).

2.3.3 Modern scholarship: western scholarship

Interest from the west in the history and archaeology of China and the Silk Road had been in its beginning closely tied to colonial occupation in these areas, and overall remains fairly separate from China's own efforts to this day, with barriers of language, access, and methodological and theoretical approaches forming a large part of the reason (Hein, 2016). British generals such as Hamilton Bower took an interest in the regions they travelled through in Central Asia, and discovered that their dry desert climate preserved a host of archaeological remains and well-preserved ancient written documents (Hansen, 2017, p. 9). Alerted to the importance of these regions for the historical record, explorers such as Sven Hedin and Aurel Stein launched scientific campaigns to Central Asian areas such as Xinjiang (Hansen, 2017, p. 11). Though by today's standards their methods might not be considered properly scientific, Stein in particular published so extensively and recorded his finds with such a level of detail that these reports remain of key importance in archaeological research to this day (Hansen, 2017, p. 11). Not only that, in many cases these earliest explorers travelled along the very same routes, and have left us accounts of their experiences on them, which provide another insight into the practicalities of travelling in such inhospitable areas (Hansen, 2017, p. 12). These colonial origins seem to have resulted in a heavier focus on the Central Asian areas of the Silk Road and their relation to China rather than vice versa. Between the 1950s and 1980s, developments in global scholarship mirrored those in China at the time in directing its focus more toward internally generated change, rather than the 19th century idea of cultural diffusion and the effects of cultural interactions and migrations when it came to generating societal change (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 15). In recent decades, with the advent of post-processualism and the emergence of globalisation and network theories in archaeology, there has been a renewed interest in the archaeology of the Silk Road trade network and its value within the context of global history (Kuzmina, 2008, p. 11). Szonyi (2017, p. 3) and

co-authors observe a lag between recent developments in scholarship on Chinese history, and the image still generally dominant in popular understanding and presented to students, especially where it comes to the difference between normative concepts (such as the dynastic cycle and many other brought to us through the written record) and empirical reality. Several key discoveries have contributed to new insights into the workings of the network and the peoples that occupied it, and the prevalence of books and collected volumes on the topic of the Silk Road trade network speaks to the desire to understand the complexity of its far-reaching connections in their entirety,[25] though it unfortunately has also led to a rather top-down approach to this topic in research, as well as a difficulty in retracing certain findings and sources. Authors such as Irene Good and Jiayao An (安家瑶), who tend to focus on material categories, provide a balance to this but are the exception rather than the rule. A lack of archaeological finds from China and Central Asia published in English exacerbates this problem, while earlier finds already in museums are not currently being critically re-evaluated with modern techniques and theoretical frameworks. Outside of academic scholarship, when it comes to publications on the topic of Chinese archaeological materials one must also mention the fairly abundant catalogues published by auction houses and art galleries which deal in Chinese art objects. Though not peer-reviewed and in some cases based on outdated or unsubstantiated interpretations, they tend to provide detailed descriptions and photographs of the items in question, and in many cases provide the only substantial publications on the relevant archaeological material, a problem also faced in the writing of this thesis on more than one occasion. The written records of China have, however, seen a rise in attention by western scholars, with sources other than the accepted canon being brought in and new interpretations of earlier material being put forward. A crucial recent work focussing on the documentary evidence of Silk Road trade is Valerie Hansen's *The Silk Road: A New History with Documents* (2017), which also makes reference to archaeological finds on many occasions. Michael Szonyi's *A Companion to Chinese*

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[25] Beckwith (2011), Benjamin (2018), Cunliffe (2015), Di Cosmo and Maas (2018), Hansen (2017), Liu (2010), Mathew (2017), Whitfield (2015), Whitfield (2018), just to name a few.

History (2017) provides a thorough and varied chronological and thematic overview of scholarship on the topic of Chinese history and archaeology, both in China and abroad. Both, sadly, do relegate the importance of archaeological evidence largely to periods for which no written records are (abundantly) available, a recognizable trend among many historians. Wilkinson in Szonyi, however, does briefly acknowledge this tendency (2017, p. 15). *The Economic History of China* (von Glahn, 2016) is an important work that shows that even based on historical sources, the dynastic model is not an inevitability, but rather an accepted trope. By casting a purely economic lens, periods are divided rather differently. Finally, recent years have seen a trend towards including China and the Silk Road in larger discussions of archaeological theory, with young scholars expressing a desire to move away from theories developed from a western historical framework, and generating archaeological theory based on a wider contextual background (Szonyi, 2017, p. 2). The present thesis fits within this framework of recent developments in scholarship on Chinese history.

3. Case studies

As stated in the methodology section above, the chosen dataset for this thesis consists of seven objects selected from an independent art dealer and gallery in Amsterdam. They were chosen to represent a wide scale of items, people, and ideas which travelled along the Silk Road trade network, and illustrate important changes and continuities in Silk Road trade and interaction during the first millennium C.E. and beyond. All seven objects are in a remarkable state of preservation, in most cases largely unbroken and in some even preserving remnants of paint. These previously unpublished objects, from a source not often accessible to archaeologists, provide a lens through which to see more clearly the socio-economic, political, and cultural influences at play along the Silk Road trade network in the first millennium C.E.. They form a basis from which to bring in similar or related archaeological material from various collections and publications, and to discuss several of these connections and influences in the subsequent sections of this chapter, divided into the thematic topics of 'Trade and travel represented', 'Exported items: luxury and practicality', 'Currency on the Silk Roads', and 'Influential style and beauty'. Through these themes, the chosen dataset can be connected to similar objects and studies on the topic of this thesis, thereby placing them in a wider context, and revealing their connections to each other as well. In the current chapter, each object in the dataset will be described and placed within its wider thematic context, leading to a discussion of the importance of this information for the purposes of this thesis in the following chapter. For the sake of readability, only one photo will be displayed in-text for each object, the full collection of photographs can be found in Appendix E.

The first five objects in the dataset are of a category of finds known as mingqi figurines meant not only to represent, but to function as all things used, needed, and interacted with in life for the deceased in the afterlife (Baker, 1993, p. 4). They were not meant for display,[26] but rather were buried carefully with the deceased.

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[26] At least not primarily, though it has been suggested that they played a role in funeral processions and ceremonies prior to burial (Rawson, 2002, p. 124).

Nevertheless, today they provide insight into the lives and appearances of not only the elite class they were buried with, but also of the lower classes and foreign peoples they often represented. The two bronze objects, unlike the mingqi, appear to have been objects meant for use, display, and trade, based on their similarity to other finds from more securely provenanced contexts, including cargo retrieved from shipwrecks and nodes along both the maritime and continental Silk Road trade networks. Considering the objects in our dataset are of such varying style, nature, and dating, each thematic section will not touch directly on all of them, as some are more relevant to the exploration of each theme than others. However, together, these objects and the themes they allow us to explore provide new insight into the nature of China's interactions with the outside world throughout the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods.

3.1 Objects in the dataset

3.1.1 Camel and rider

Figure 1 Camel and rider. Mingqi figurine dating to the Tang dynasty, likely of a Central Asian merchant. (Benjamin de Groot, courtesy of Paul Ruitenbeek).

This ceramic figure of a camel, with a detachable saddle and rider and carrying various items (Figure 1), likely originates from a grave context dating to the early or middle Tang dynasty, as similar pieces can be found in grave contexts throughout China dating to this period (see 3.2. for more detail). The camel itself is around 50.5 cm high from the base to the top of the head, 44.2 cm long from snout to tail, and around 17.5 cm wide. The height from base to the top of the rider's head is approximately 52.5 cm, while from the lowest part of the saddle to the top of the rider's head is approximately 23 cm. The space between the two humps which fits the saddle and rider is approximately 13.5 cm, and the saddle and rider are around 23.5 cm wide.

Small traces of its original painted decoration can be observed on the saddle. Several of the saddle components, including the figure of the rider, appear to have been made separately first, before being applied and fired together. This includes also the various cargo items on the saddle, consisting of a sack, a jar, and a dead rabbit on each side and what appears to be a fur at the rider's back. The clothing of the rider is decorated with incised lines to indicate folds and layers, as are the mane, top of the head, front of the neck, and tops of the front paws of the camel to indicate longer hair. The hair or headpiece of the rider also appears to have been made separately first, suggesting this may have been intended as a cap or helmet rather than a hairstyle. However, mingqi with similarly rendered hairstyles featuring clearly defined curls keep open the possibility of this too being meant to represent the hair itself (Schloss, 1977a, p. 108 & 225, 1977b, p. 109). Both sides of the saddle appear to feature the exact same items, indicating moulds may have been used for each individual item before applying them to the saddle. Their locations on each side of the saddle are similar but not identical, due to the slightly twisted position of the rider toward the left side of the camel, leaving less room for all three items on this side.

3.1.2 Woman in red on horseback

Figure 2 Woman in red on horseback. Mingqi figurine, likely dating to the Tang dynasty, of a woman riding a horse. She may represent a servant or a dancer. (Benjamin de Groot, courtesy of Paul Ruitenbeek).

The first of three figures on horseback in the dataset, this female rider (Figure 2) likely dates to the early eighth century C.E.. The rendering of the horse and the hairstyle and overall features of the lady are especially telling, which will be expanded on in sections 3.2 and 3.5 of this chapter. The figurine is approximately 35.5 cm high from ground to the top of the rider's head, 27 cm long from nose to tail of the horse, and 11.5 cm wide. Remnants of painted decoration are visible, especially on the saddle, though unfortunately no clear traces of any other horse-gear remain visible. The pattern on the saddle appears similar to other examples of both saddle-cloths and garments in tomb figurines of the Sui and early Tang dynasties (Watt, 2004, p. 291-293). It is possible she once held a rein made of perishable material in her right hand (Schloss, 1977a, p. 74). On the saddle, what appears to be a floral or swirling cloud motif is still visible in remnants of red and green paint. One can also see the saddle includes a low back-rest for the rider, allowing her to lean slightly backward. Her dress appears red in colour, and features

a very characteristic single long sleeve extending far past the hand on her left side. The toes of her shoes are pointed and curl slightly upwards. Incised lines represent folds, layers, and seams, as well as the mane and tail of the horse. The tail of the horse is cropped short, with an added protrusion from the base falling to either side of the tail, perhaps a ribbon. The lady's hairstyle features a topknot high on the forehead.

3.1.3 Musician on horseback

Figure 3 Musician on horseback. Mingqi figurine, likely dating to the Tang dynasty, of a female musician riding a horse. She may be playing a lute or a pipa. (Benjamin de Groot, courtesy of Paul Ruitenbeek).

This ceramic figure of a female musician holding what appears to be a lute or pipa (Figure 3) is one of a pair of mounted musicians. This piece was chosen to represent the two due to its remarkable state of preservation and characteristic stylistic features. It likely dates to the early eighth century C.E.. It is around 35 cm in height from ground to the top of the musician's head, 28.5 cm from snout to tail of the horse, and around 12.3 cm wide. It shows remarkable remnants of painted decoration. In particular, a pattern of blue dots and thin black lines can be observed

on both of her lower legs, likely representing a decorated protective shin-guard, or perhaps a pair of culotte-like pants. It is unlikely to be part of a high boot, as the feet themselves are a distinctly red colour instead. The figurine also features horse-gear painted in black, such as the bridle and harness. Like the previous figure, the saddle appears to have a slight elevation at the back, also painted black, though here it is lower than the back-rest of the figure in 3.1.2, and the musician does not lean against it, so it may not have been intended to depict a back-rest but simply a slightly elevated part of the saddle. Her dress is primarily a red colour, though she wears a white shawl around her neck. Incised lines represent folds, layers, and seams, as well as the mane and tail of the horse. This horse, like the one in 3.1.2., has a cropped tail, here with what appears to be a band around the base. Her hairstyle also features a topknot high on the forehead. Remnants of her painted make-up, with a white face, rosy cheeks, and bright red lip, can still be clearly seen.

The instrument she carries is a flat plaque in the shape of a teardrop, and was made separately and then placed in her hands, clear from the position against the body and the fact that the dress decoration continues and is visible underneath the lute. There is a square or rectangular platform in the middle of its widest part, presumably this is where the strings (either painted or made or real string, now gone) would have been attached. The other attachment site at the end of the neck has broken off.

3.1.4 White-glazed woman on horseback

Figure 4 White-glazed woman on horseback. Mingqi figurine, likely dating to the Sui dynasty, of a woman riding a horse. The figurine is covered in a white glaze, with some black paint traces remaining. She may represent a dancer. (Benjamin de Groot, courtesy of Paul Ruitenbeek).

This white-glazed figurine of a woman sitting on horseback (Figure 4) dates to an earlier period than the figurines shown so far, being quite characteristic in style of the Sui dynasty. It is approximately 28.5 cm high from the ground to the top of the female figure's hair, 20.5 cm from the front of the horse's head to its rear, and 9 cm wide. The horse itself is somewhat more stylized than the camel and two horses shown previously, lacking any incised lines to indicate hair texture. The tail of the horse is long, while the mane appears cropped and somewhat square and stylized. The posture is more straight and static than the previous two horses, the face looking down and the mouth closed. Slight remnants of mostly black paint, representing parts of the harness, saddle, and bridle, remain visible. The vertical stripes that can be seen on the saddle-cloth are a characteristic feature of such saddled horse figurines of the Sui period (Zhou, 2009).

The female figure carries nothing in either her hands nor on her saddle, giving no immediate indication of her role. Her hairstyle, facial features, and dress are very similar to other figurines of the Sui and Tang periods, typically found in groups of musicians and/or dancers (see for example Valenstein, 1975, p. 52; Baker, 1993, p. 16-20 & 26). Like the figurine of 3.1.2. her dress features a slim long sleeve typical of certain Chinese dance styles (Zuchowska, 2014, p. 68). An almost identical figurine from the Schloss collection, now to be found at the Hofstra University Museum of Art, with similar long sleeves also on horseback, strengthens the dating of this figure as being of the Sui or early Tang dynasty period (http://hofstrauniversitymuseum.pastperfectonline.com). The cream glaze is especially typical of the Sui period (Schloss, 1977a, p. 68). Her hair is worn in a large twisted bun on top of her head, and may feature a headpiece. She wears a long gown of at least two layers, and a shawl around her shoulders. A tied ribbon is also visible high on her chest, and folds and bunching of fabric are indicated by bumps in the ceramic, as well as some incised lines, though these are less sharp than in the previous figurines due to the figure being glazed. Unlike the previous three figures she looks straight ahead, and her posture faces forward.

3.1.5 Packhorse or mule

Figure 5 Packhorse or mule. Mingqi figurine, likely dating to the Six Dynasties period, of a packhorse or mule. It wears a saddle-cloth and cargo sack. (Benjamin de Groot, courtesy of Paul Ruitenbeek).

The last of the ceramic figurines from the dataset, and the oldest, this packhorse or mule (Figure 5) can be dated to the Northern Wei dynasty. It is around 15.3 cm high from ground to the highest point of the mane, 21.7 cm long from the top of the ears to the end of the tail, and around 10.5 cm wide including the sack it carries. It appears more stylized than even the Sui horse of the previous section, once again facing forward and looking down, its mouth closed. Its head and legs appear disproportionately small compared to its trunk and especially its neck, a feature characteristic of earlier horse figurines of the first millennium C.E. (Schloss, 1977a, p. 67 & 195-196). Incised lines indicate its harness and bridle, but no incisions appear to indicate longer hairs for its mane or tail. Like the horse of the Sui figurine above, and unlike those of the Tang lady in red and musician, its tail is long and hangs down. It wears a saddle-cloth and carries a sack or duffel on its back. The incised line decoration on the sack appears quite similar to those of the camel rider of the first figurine in this chapter (3.1.1), though it is relatively much larger on this

packhorse. Some red paint traces remain on the saddle-cloth, in the incised lines on the sack or duffel, on the straps of the harness and around the bridle. Its stance is static and its legs are spaced quite far apart, creating a rounded arch-like shape. Very similar packhorses are to be found in publications by Ezekiel Schloss (1975, 1977b, p. 44) and Anette Juliano (1975, p. 36), further supporting the early dating of this figurine.

3.1.6 Bronze mirror

Figure 6 Bronze mirror. Mirror likely dating to the Tang dynasty, made of bronze, featuring a dragon and cloud decoration. (Benjamin de Groot, courtesy of Paul Ruitenbeek).

This bronze mirror (Figure 6), measuring around 14.7 cm in diameter and 0.7 cm in thickness, likely dates from the Tang period, based on the outer shape with eightindentations, somewhat resembling an eight-petaled flower, which became common around the eighth century C.E. (Nakano, 1994, p. 19-20). It may originate from a grave context, though similar mirrors have also been found as trade goods along the Silk Road trade network, most notably a collection of them on the famous Belitung shipwreck (Louis, 2010). It has an attached knob with a hole in the centre of

its decorated face, which would have been used to attach a ribbon meant for holding the mirror up to one's face. The decoration on this side shows a dragon twisting around the central knob, as well as several clouds. Though some rusting is visible on both sides, both the decoration and smoothness of the other side are still clearly visible. Another very similar piece can be found in the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art (https://asia.si.edu).

3.1.7 Bronze cup

Figure 7 Bronze cup. Stemmed cup made of bronze, likely dating to the Tang dynasty. (Benjamin de Groot, courtesy of Paul Ruitenbeek).

The final piece of the dataset to feature in this thesis is this bronze cup (Figure 7), likely dating to the Sui or early Tang dynasty. It is around 8.3 cm high and 5.8 cm in diameter at the rim, and is largely undecorated aside from a small line along the rim, and another about one centimetre further down. A small disc-like shape sits between the body and foot of the cup. The foot also has a small bulb around halfway down its length. The rim of the foot is somewhat thicker than the rest of it, and protrudes slightly upward. Its shape and lined decoration are reminiscent of

similar items of both ceramic and other metals, most notably silver and gilded silver, some of which have been recovered from the Belitung shipwreck (Chong & Murphy, 2017; Krahl, 2010). It can even be found in a few Chinese glass vessels, though Chinese-made glass is quite rare in the archaeological record (Borell, 2010). A set of two bronze stemmed cups from the British Museum bears a particularly striking similarity to the example from the dataset.[27] While such stem cups from China and along the Silk Road trade network can be found in several museums and galleries today, little information is available about them, as they have not been extensively researched.

3.2 Trade and travel represented

Depictions of people on the move, be they traders, travellers, or troupes of dancers and musicians, typically on horseback or camels, abound in ceramics, paintings, and carved reliefs from China during the first millennium C.E.. These depictions both reflect and have had a profound influence not only on ancient tastes and imaginings of peoples along the Silk Road trade network, but also modern academic understandings of these peoples. From the selected items in the dataset, five objects can in some way be related to the depiction of trade and travel both near and far, and represent these influences when related to further research carried out on similar objects. The objects in question are the first five objects described in the section above, the ceramic mingqi figurines.

3.2.1 A brief introduction to Chinese burial customs and mingqi of the first millennium C.E.

As stated above, mingqi were made specifically for the purpose of funerary burial, and were meant to represent the various goods and resources the deceased would need or want to enjoy in the afterlife (Park, 2002, p. 37). Though beliefs surrounding spirits, death, and the necessary customs and rituals associated with them have varied widely within China and through time, it appears to have been a fairly universally held belief that in life, two souls exist within each person's body, each associated with different aspects of a person's being (Baker, 1993, p. 4). Upon

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[27] https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1936-1118-192-193

death, one of these souls ascends to heaven while the other remains on earth, and it is largely for the benefit of the latter that tombs are furnished with mingqi and other items which would sustain their existence in the tomb in much the same way they had been accustomed to in life (Baker, 1993, p. 4). Considering this, it is important to note that while not use-wear objects in the traditional sense, mingqi figures and other burial goods were intended to be used by the deceased after death, and therefore were made with the intention of being accurate to the person's experience in life, making them an incredibly varied and valued source of information regarding not just elite life, but the world at large and other peoples that played an important role in it as well. They are a remarkable category of finds because while certainly stemming from elite contexts, they represent a range of ages, classes, genders, and roles.

Perhaps the most famous of the mingqi are the Tang-period three-glazed or sancai wares, which began to appear sometime during the seventh century C.E. (Wood, 1999, p. 200), and for which the techniques used began to develop as early as the fifth century C.E. (Park, 2002, p. 50-52). This is a category not represented by the selected figurines from in the dataset, but many Tang-era ceramics in fact remained unglazed (Park, 2002, p. 49). In many mingqi figurines, paint was applied directly onto the fired clay or over a white slip layer, or over a monochrome glaze (Park, 2002, p. 49-50). Though the representation of trade and travel is by no means limited to this material category, the mingqi are a valuable source of information for the present thesis especially because they are a distinctly Chinese phenomenon that nevertheless incorporated a wide variety of cultural influences over time (Schloss, 1977a, p. 2). Due to their function of allowing the deceased to continue their life in much the same way after death, they also reflect those aspects of life that were considered of central importance to the deceased. The mingqi, in both style and subject, are therefore a fruitful point of departure to contextualise other material sources which depict similar subjects but were in various degrees also much more affected by influences from beyond China.

Though writing on the subject has been done largely from art-historical and private collector's perspectives, and therefore usually limited to single private or museum collections and not widely published or accessible, based on the extensive work of collecting and describing the wide variety of mingqi done by Ezekiel Schloss (1977a, 1977b), some broad categories of subjects, as well as developments over time in the style and subject matter can be identified for this thesis. While we must be careful in following the categorisations provided by Schloss, and the increasing variety in forms and depictions they reflect, as they might in part be the result of excavation and interpretation biases, as well as Schloss' professed interest in interpreting these mingqi for their artistic value rather than purely as archaeological objects (Schloss, 1977a, p. 1), the detail and extent of his work provide a valuable resource in our quest to better understand the role of China in the globalising world system of the Silk Road trade network during the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods. While Schloss writes from a collector's point of view, and thus tends to highlight the unique and exquisite examples, and also admits to focusing on periods of calm and prosperity more than the periods of turmoil such as the Six Dynasties period, the general trends he observes help us to contextualise the depictions of people on the move, travellers and traders of the Silk Road trade network during these periods, and have formed the basis for many subsequent interpretations in both academic writing and private collection catalogues. Throughout the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods, figurines of animals, officials, and attendants are popular, with a growing variety of other subjects over time culminating in the Tang dynasty. Inanimate objects such as buildings seem to largely disappear from the mingqi after the Han dynasty (Valenstein, 1975, p. 40). A general increase in proportionality and dynamic poses is also apparent (Park, 2002, p. 51), a development echoed by the relative dates of the figurines in the dataset. Overall there was clearly a great variety and flexibility in attributes and characteristics which could be combined in various ways for these mingqi, despite some recognizable shapes and models, as Schloss also states (1977a, p. 74).

3.2.2 Representing trade and travel

3.2.2.1 Trade

Separate consideration should first be given to the animals that not only transported both people and goods over the Silk Road trade network, but were also a crucial commodity themselves, and the way they are represented in the mingqi. Both horses and camels were a popular subject in mingqi wares throughout the both the Han and Tang dynasties (Park, 2002, p. 43; Rawson, 2002), and remained so during the Six Dynasties period between them, though fewer specimens from this period have been found or studied in detail (Schloss, 1977a, p. 66-67). It does appear, however, that the clay base present in all animal figures of the dataset is a feature introduced by the Northern Wei dynasty which remained in use (Schloss, 1977a, p. 27), showing that to consider this period completely stagnant when it comes to changes in the depictions of trade and travel would be a mistake, which the following will illustrate further as well.

The horse has been key to many historic developments in China, and is closely linked to the Silk Road trade network not only for being a means of transport, but a driving force behind China's involvement in the network to begin with. According to Cooke, the Tang were the first of the Chinese dynasties to have a strong equestrian history of their own, and they made successful attempts to improve domestic breeding programmes (Cooke, 2000, p. 28). For much of Chinese history, however, the Chinese were reliant on imported horses to improve their own herds. Horses were used not only as draught animals, but also as a means of transport and in battle, and even featured in leisure activities for the elite such as polo and dance performances (Park, 2002, p. 8). Sun Ji, one of the foremost experts on the history of the horse in China, observed three significant periods of change when it came to the equine population of China (Park, 2002, p. 5). The first was during the reign of emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty, the emperor who decreed that the Jade Gate be opened, and who also expanded great effort in importing superior horses from the West (Park, 2002, p. 5). The second occurred during the Tang dynasty, with improvements in domestic breeding practices and imports of Arab-type and Turkish horses (Cooke, 2000, p. 27). Finally, during the Yuan dynasty, there was an

overall decline in the quality and amount of horses in China (Park, 2002, p. 5). Cooke links the joining of China with the Silk Road trade network to the Chinese desire for better horses, specifically those from the Ferghana region (Cooke, 2000, p. 28).

It is of no surprise then that such important animals would be abundantly included in the mingqi figurines. Because they are a constant feature, changes in their depiction over time can be observed quite well. Horse figurines from the Six Dynasties period tend to have slightly disproportionately small heads compared to their bodies, as well as slim legs and long tails, the latter feature first appearing in the Northern Wei dynasty (Schloss, 1977a, p. 27). This long tail remained a characteristic feature of Sui dynasty horse figurines, while the tails of horse figurines from the Tang dynasty are almost exclusively cropped short (Schloss, 1977a, p. 33). Among our examples from the dataset, only the white-glazed figure and the pack-horse have a long tail, which aligns with this pattern according to their pre-Tang dating (Schloss, 1977a, p. 33). Pack horses such as the one from the dataset are in fact quite typical of the Northern Wei period (Schloss, 1977a, p. 27). The one from the dataset also features the somewhat disproportionate head, especially when compared to the neck and upper body. Depictions of horses with riders from this period seem to be limited to cavalry warriors (Schloss, 1977a, p. 67), though little research has been done on this subject for the period, and differences between the different states and regions are difficult to pinpoint. Horses with riders of a variety of roles become much more common during the Sui Dynasty. The white or cream glazed figure of a woman on horseback from the dataset shows the typical style of depicting horses in the Sui dynasty, with a stylized cropped mane and slightly more dynamic and realistic features in the posture and face when compared to the packhorse (Schloss, 1977a, p. 33 & 206). This form of depicting the horse's mane would disappear in the early Tang dynasty (Schloss, 1977a, p. 33 & 69). The woman herself looks very similar in style and dress to other examples of the Sui dynasty (Schloss, 1977a, p. 68-69, 1977b, p. IV, 61-62, 71, 118a), and the white glaze itself is a distinguishing feature of Sui mingqi figures as well (Schloss, 1977a, p. 31). As mentioned above, horses of the Sui dynasty are typically depicted with long tails, as

was the case during the earlier Northern Wei dynasty. By far the largest collection of horse figurines from grave contexts in China date to the Tang dynasty (Schloss, 1977a, p. 75). While figurines in standing positions with all four legs on the ground remain common, poses tend to become more dynamic during this period (Schloss, 1977a, p. 75). As mentioned previously, the tails become cropped, in some cases quite elaborately decorated (Schloss, 1977a, p. 75). Overall, the proportions of horse figurines become more realistic as well.

Aside from horses, camels were also a common mode of transportation featured in the mingqi tomb retinues throughout the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods. The camels that are depicted are all of the two-humped Bactrian type originating from Central Asia (Schloss, 1977a, p. 75). Though they are most typically associated with the Tang dynasty, and indeed most known examples date to this period, some examples of them do exist from the Northern Wei period (Schloss, 1977a, p. 67, 1977b, p. 40-43). In fact, unlike the later periods, though fewer mingqi have been recovered overall dating to this period, it seems that only during the Six Dynasties period figurines of camels are more common than those of horses. These early camels are somewhat less detailed than the Tang dynasty versions (see Figure 8), which the camel from the dataset is an exquisite example of. Most camel figurines are heavily loaded with goods, especially those from the earlier Six Dynasties period (Schloss, 1977a, p. 66). There are also a few known examples of camel mingqi from the Sui period, which stylistically follow many of the developments also seen in the horse figurines. Of particular note is the cropped style of the mane in this regard, which appears to be mirrored in the beards of some Sui camel figurines (Baker, 1993, p. 40-41 & 46; Watt, 2004, p. 247). What sets the example from the dataset apart as dating to the Tang period is the detailed rendering of the animal and the large size, as during the Six Dynasties period these camel figurines tended to be no more than 30 centimetres tall. From the Tang dynasty, examples with riders and even entire troupes of musicians are known (Figure 9), but the combination of a rider and cargo as seen on the figurine from the dataset seems quite rare. The outstretched tail is also quite unique, as most camel figurines of this period would

have the tail rendered in relief or in the round, but not quite so outstretched as this (Schloss, 1977a, p. 75).

Figure 8 Mingqi camel. A mingqi figurine of a heavily laden camel, likely dating to the Six Dynasties period. (Juliano, 1975, p. 35).

The typical cargo of the mingqi figurines, the camels especially, includes boards of bamboo, sacks and duffels of various sizes, as well as jars and bottles, and dead rabbits and deer. Several of these can also be seen in our camel from the dataset, showing a remarkable consistency over time. Interestingly, while horses, camels, and traders are common depictions in the mingqi figurines, attesting to their value and to the importance of maintaining this connection to the Silk Road trade in the afterlife for many (elite) people in China, relatively few mingqi represent the goods themselves and any vehicles such as carts that may have been used to transport them. It is assumed that Silk Road trade largely took the form of small retinues of packed animals and a few riders travelling back and forth over limited parts of the network, which appears to be supported by the mingqi depictions and the prevalence of such single riders and the relative absence of carts and large groups

of traders. The camel from the dataset clearly carries some items on the saddle, all fairly small bundles, while more heavily laden camels are more typical of the Northern Wei period. It is notable, however, that the cargo is not often depicted or distinct in its shape. Many of the goods which the Silk Road trade network is so famous for, such as silks and gemstones (Liu, 2010, p. 54) are not easily recognisable.

Figure 9 Camel with musicians. Mingqi figurine of a camel, dating to the Tang dynasty, featuring several musicians wearing kaftans and playing instruments. (https://sogdians.si.edu/camel-with-musicians/).

As indicated above, the mingqi figurines frequently depict what we assume to be peoples of foreign origin, based on their facial features, hairstyles, and dress (Schloss, 1977a, p. 93-110). Interestingly, the majority of them are interpreted as attendants and servants, rather than traders, though the reasoning behind this tends to be unclear, as there seems to be no direct evidence that Chinese households typically employed foreigners as servants. They are perhaps more likely to represent traders bringing horses into China, though a lack of distinguishing features makes this difference difficult to ascertain. A significant amount of mingqi do clearly represent traders hauling cargo along the Silk Road trade network, however, a subject that became especially popular in the mingqi of the Tang dynasty (Schloss, 1977a, p. 70). So common are depictions of foreigners in the mingqi that it caused Ezekiel Schloss to wonder 'where the native Chinese were hiding themselves' (Schloss, 1977a, p. 93). These depictions were based on realities that the Chinese artists and elite households that commissioned them saw around them and heard about. Without a doubt, the amount of immigrants living in China reached its peak during the Tang dynasty, but this process began as early as the Six Dynasties period, when several of the ruling households of the various states were in fact of non-Chinese descent themselves (Lewis, 2009a).

Of the tomb figures from the dataset, the most certain depiction of a foreigner is the figurine of the camel and in particular its rider. While dating to the Tang dynasty, it displays several features already present in mingqi from earlier dates, as the previous section showed in particular concerning the camel and its cargo. Interestingly, while sharing many characteristic features of similarly dated mingqi figures of both attendants and merchants interpreted as depicting those of foreign origin, the camel and rider figurine of the dataset does not fit neatly into any common category of mingqi of the Tang period, due to combining several features not usually present together while missing several which are usually associated with depictions of foreigners, attendants, grooms, or merchants (Schloss, 1977a, 93-110).

There seems to be a general trend toward more individualistic rendering of facial features from the Six Dynasties to the Tang period (Schloss, 1977a, p. 68), which in the past has led to attempts to locate individual features or objects geographically, ethnically, and culturally, including by Ezekiel Schloss himself (1977a and 1977b). While works such as this have immense value in providing detailed catalogues of the mingqi figures and developments over time, such precise pinpointing of certain depictions of features glosses over many complexities and makes certain interpretative leaps based on modern preconceived notions of these peoples (van Aerde, 2018). The implications of this will be further explored in Chapter 4 below. For the camel rider, several features combine to indicate that the figurine is meant to depict someone of non-Chinese origin. The association with the camel is a first clue. As mentioned previously, camels such as this with both a rider and cargo seem to be rare, but from as early as the Northern Wei dynasty several camel and horse figurines are associated with attendants and grooms who share similar facial features and clothing with the rider figurine from the dataset (Schloss, 1977a, p. 66). The open lapels of the overcoat in particular have been associated with depictions of foreigners (Schloss, 1977a, p. 72), though it is also frequently worn by figurines of attendants and grooms not immediately associated with depictions of the Silk Road trade. Aside from the camel, cargo, and dress style, facial features such as a wide nose and prominent brow-ridge have been interpreted as looking decidedly non-Chinese (Schloss, 1977a, p. 72), though such interpretations should be made carefully. In the case of the camel rider from the dataset, these facial features do appear more pronounced when compared to the other two figurines from the Tang period. However, this may also be due at least in part to the other two figurines depicting women. A final prominent component of the camel rider from the dataset indicating that it concerns a person of non-Chinese origin is the unusual hairstyle. This is a rather uncommon look in the mingqi figures, though similarly shaped hairstyles do occur in figurines of stable boys, also interpreted as being of foreign origin and sharing similar facial features to the rider as well (Schloss, 1977a, p. 72, 1977b, p. 109 & 110). The camel figurine from the dataset seems to be a somewhat unusual combination of these various typical elements, as it incorporates features

mentioned by Schloss for both this period and the preceding periods. The type of cargo is very similar to models dating to the Northern Wei dynasty, while the camel itself is rendered in typical Tang style. The clothing, facial features, and hair are features seen in both the Sui and Tang periods that seem to indicate a non-Chinese origin of the rider, but the particular combination of these elements this rider displays is not one that Schloss mentions. Certain features such as a beard and pointed shoes which often accompany other figurines depicting likely foreigners are also absent from this figurine, though this absence by itself would hold little weight. Following Schloss, most camel mingqi did not have riders at all, though those with saddles and cargo are fairly common, and some holding whole troupes of entertainers are also known (Schloss, 1977a, p. 75).

Mingqi are not the only artefacts which offer a window into the lives and depictions of foreigners in China during these periods. Artefacts of the non-Chinese communities which settled in China from various places along the Silk Road trade network provide a different perspective while connecting to both the mingqi and the wider Silk Road trade network. Several tombs of high-ranking officials from these communities have been found to contain elaborate carved rock reliefs, some of which feature elements also represented in the mingqi (Rawson, 2012). A particularly remarkable example in terms of its value in providing information not only about the Silk Road trade network before the Tang dynasty, but also about the reception and depiction of foreigners within China during this period, is the sarcophagus of a Sogdian couple dating to 580 C.E., excavated in the Western Wei and Northern Zhou capital of Chang'an in 2003 (Xu, 2021, p. 145). The decorations on the sarcophagus depict the life of the couple (Figure 10), who had married in Xiping but had both been born to Sogdian families from what today is Uzbekistan. They had relocated to Liangzhou (涼州) (modern Wuwei (武威)) where the husband, named Wirkak or Shi Jun (史君), had become a government official for local immigrant communities, before eventually moving again, to Chang'an, where they both died within a year of each other and were buried in 580 C.E. (Xu, 2021, p. 145).

Figure 10 Shi Jun sarcophagus. Sarcophagus of Shi Jun or Wirkak, featuring several decorative panels. (Xu, 2021, p.146).

It is not the only one of its kind found in China, and beyond clearly showing that immigrants were already a significant presence in the various Chinese states at this time (Xu, 2021, p. 162), several of the carved decorative panels on these sarcophagi depict travel along the Silk Road trade network during the sixth century C.E. (Xu, 2021, p. 146), including camels, horses, and musicians. They form a fascinating node in the complicated web of stylistic depictions of people along the Silk Road trade network, for while clearly meant for and likely commissioned by Sogdian people, they were produced within China itself, and these Sogdians themselves were living and sometimes even born in Chinese states. The bilingual epitaph on the tomb of Wirkak may suggest that its creator had at least some command of both Sogdian and Chinese, but they may only have been proficient in one and had the other dictated to them by a native speaker. As Xu observes, the artists who created the coffin likely received instructions from the family of the deceased, and supplemented this with their own knowledge, experience, and frame of reference

(Xu, 2021, p. 150). The representation of the deceased on their own sarcophagus or tomb is a long-standing Chinese tradition dating back to the Warring States period (Xu, 2021, p. 148), and the choice of depicted scenes in general, especially in the separate depiction of the couple's ascent to heaven, is interpreted by Xu as being distinctly Chinese in tradition (Xu, 2021, p. 164). However, the Wirkak coffin is unique in both Sogdian and Chinese funerary art in its depiction of the entire life-biography of the deceased person (Xu, 2021, p. 155). A wide variety of dress styles is depicted on the different panels, likely based on the culture they are meant to represent (Xu, 2021, p. 149). Panel N4 (Figure 11) shows this remarkable diversity of dress quite well, including a style of dress remarkably similar to those worn by the camel-rider figure, the lady in red on horseback, and the musician on horseback from the dataset. Several panels from the tomb of Anjia (安伽), another Sogdian living in China, also appear to show several people with hairstyles similar to our camel-rider (Figure 12).

Figure 11 Panel N4 from the Shi jun/Wirkak Sarcophagus. Decorative panel showing a feast, with the figures wearing diverse styles of clothing. (Xu, 2021, p. 160).

Figure 12 Decorative panels from the tomb of Anjia. Several decorative panels from the tomb, showing a feast and hunting scene. Several figures are wearing kaftans. (Rawson, 2012, p. 31).

3.2.2.2 Travel

The representation of non-Chinese peoples in Chinese funerary contexts is not limited to attendants and merchants. A significant number of depictions of travellers along the Silk Road trade network feature musicians and dancers, with tomb decorations which depict foreigners tending to emphasise banqueting, dancing, and outdoor activities (Rawson, 2012, p. 31). At least two of our figurines from the dataset fall into this category, those depicted in 3.1.3 and 3.1.4. The interpretation of 3.1.2 as a dancer is somewhat more tentative, as it is based only on the length of the sleeve of her dress, which otherwise looks more like the dress of a regular attendant. While both 3.1.3 and 3.1.4 may also depict courtesans rather than travelling entertainers, an examination of their stylistic features nevertheless leads us to valuable observations about the spread of these Chinese stylistic features along the Silk Road trade network, both those used to depict non-travelling artists and those of other cultures along the Road.

The white-glazed figurine is very recognizable in style as dating to the Sui dynasty, as several similar figurines, both standing, seated, and on horseback have been dated to this period. They are usually part of a group of female musicians or

dancers (Figure 13), a type of mingqi that seems to appear during the Sui dynasty (Schloss, 1977a, p. 68), and share similar dress- and hairstyles. These figurines are often interpreted as being of foreign origin, typically from Kucha, which seems to be based largely on mentions of such foreign troupes of entertainers in the ancient written records. More recent research interprets the style of dress and hair of these figurines as being typical of dancers of the royal court or an elite household, rather than part of a travelling troupe (Park, 2002, p. 79). What sets both this figure and possibly the lady in red apart as dancers is the long sleeve covering the hand, a typical feature representing dancers during this period in China (Schloss, 1977a, p. 74).

Figure 13 Troupe of mingqi musicians. Group of mingqi figurines dating to the Sui dynasty, all of typical style and each playing an instrument. (Schloss, 1977b, p. 118a).

As for the musician on horseback, she appears to be quite a rare example, as most mingqi of single musicians dating to the Tang period are seated, rather than on horseback (Schloss, 1977a, p. 74). Though her style of dress is similar to many other examples from female riders (Schloss, 1977a, p. 74 & 130-135), the preserved painted decoration on her lower legs is unique. The instrument she plays is also of interest, as it may represent either a lute or a pipa, both instruments with somewhat contested origins but which travelled widely across the ancient Silk Road trade network (Lo, 1999; Zhou, 2020).

3.2.3 Developments outside China

Not only the depiction of the animals themselves, but also the way they are dressed is an important source of information regarding trade and interaction along the Silk

Road trade network. A piece of horse-gear of particular note in this case is the stirrup. Invented around 322 C.E. in China, possibly based on earlier Indian mounting aids, the innovation spread throughout Eurasia along the Silk Road trade network in the first millennium C.E. (Cooke, 2000, p. 28). It has recently been argued that the stirrup came to the Roman-Byzantine empire as early as the sixth century C.E. (Penn et al., 2021). This monumental invention therefore made significant movement throughout Eurasia during the Six Dynasties period. While no stirrups are visible on the pieces from the dataset, many similar ceramics from burial contexts and comparable date do feature them. There is an active debate on how and by whom the stirrup was eventually introduced to the Roman-Byzantine empire, though it is generally agreed this occurred sometime during the sixth or seventh centuries C.E. and likely involved a people called the Avars from the Carpathian basin, as well as possibly other peoples of Asia Minor (Penn et al., 2021, p. 129). The stirrup was adapted and took on various different shapes as it spread along the Silk Road trade network, with Avar types being generally quite recognizable (Penn et al., 2021). While the figurines from the dataset do not appear to show any sign of stirrups, it is possible that the people they represent would have used them, and any sign of this may simply not have been preserved or have gone undepicted. Other figurines of female musicians and dancers of very similar style and dating to ours do clearly show stirrups, in particular two figurines very similar to the Sui figurine from the dataset (Schloss, 1977b, p. 61-62). Nothing resembling stirrups is visible on the two Tang figurines from the dataset, though the horizontal positions of their feet might indicate some sort of support underneath which has since been worn away. Another possibility is that any stirrup would have been located under the legs of the riders (Goodrich, 1984, p. 293 & 308), and was therefore not painted or sculpted.

The mingqi are also not the only group of material where depictions of horses are common during the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods. An important source for their depiction along the Silk Road trade network are the rock carvings in the mountain passes through which overland trade passed (van Aerde, 2020; Kneppers 2019, p. 9). Of these carvings, two figures of horses are quite distinct from the rest,

and appear somewhat similar in style to the Chinese mingqi figurines. Pictured in Figure 14, the square trunk and downward facing head of this horse in particular recall the earlier mingqi horses of the Six Dynasties period, while the horse in Figure 15 shows the more rounded features, dynamic pose and stylisation of the mane more typical of the Tang period. Interestingly, in the rock carvings the genitals of the horses are clearly visible, a feature not seen in the Chinese mingqi figurines. The horses presented here are quite unique among the rock carvings of Thalpan, and difficult to date or interpret who carved them. Yet considering how important horses were for the Silk Road trade network at this time, for China in particular, and the prominent role they played in funeral goods (Park, 2002, p. 2-3), it is perhaps unsurprising that they would also feature among these rock carvings at such an important junction on the Silk Road trade network. Whether carved by traders from China or by traders from elsewhere along the Silk Road trade network, certain Chinese elements of portraying them may have been carried quite a way, and merged with other forms and features of representation not common to their depiction within China itself.
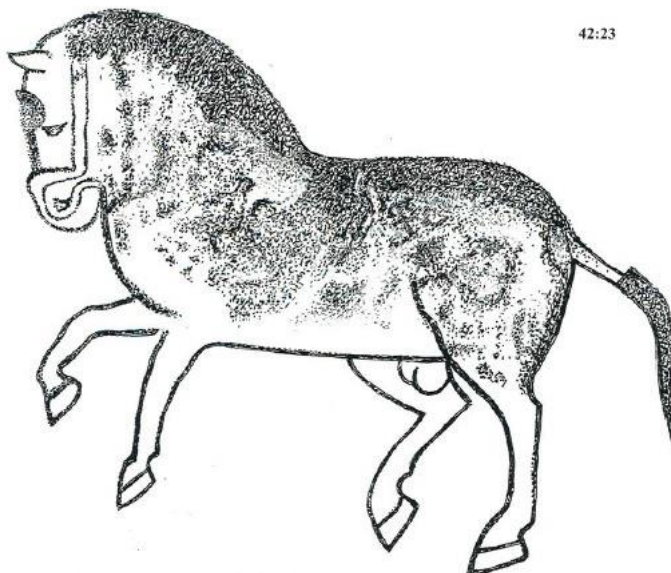
Figure 14 Drawing of rock-carved horse from Thalpan. This rock carving displays certain features reminiscent of Chinese depictions of horses in mingqi, which are unique among the carvings at Thalpan. (Bandini-König, 2003, table 18).
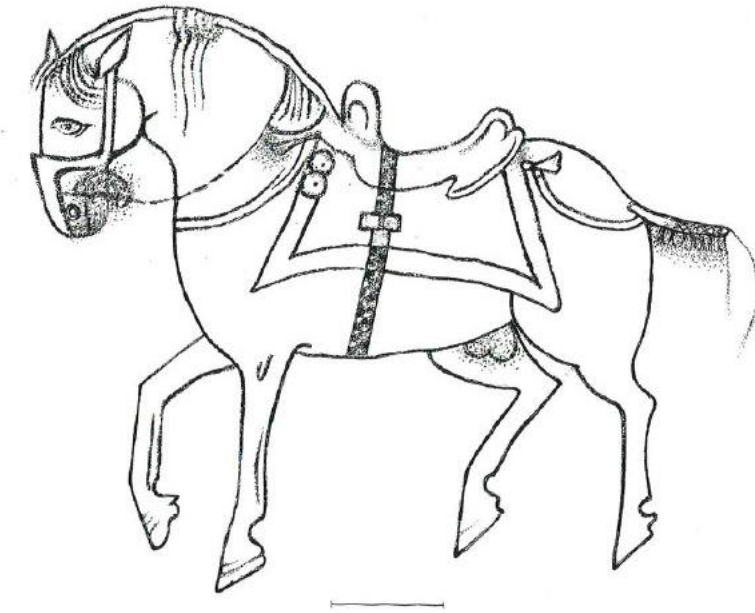
Figure 15 Drawing of rock-carved horse from Thalpan. This rock carving displays certain features reminiscent of Chinese depictions of horses in mingqi, which are unique among the carvings at Thalpan. (Bandini-König, 2003, table 61).

In summary, while the mounted figurines from the dataset, with the exception of the camel and rider, may not initially appear to have much to do with the Silk Road trade network, being in all likelihood courtesans or royal entertainers, as Rawson points out these too connect to the Silk Road trade network in being connected with the capital and other major households that would have been key players in this, largely elite, trade network (Rawson, 2012, p. 39). They illustrate the flexibility in the use of recognizable and common elements, being in some ways quite typical examples from their periods, but in others being quite unique or rare. The implications of this will be further explored in Chapter 4 below.

3.4 Exported items: luxury and practicality

When speaking about the ancient Silk Road trade network and the goods that were traded, one tends to think largely in terms of luxury items. Many well-known and academic works on the topic of the Silk Road trade network place their focus largely on the beautiful silks and other luxury items that were transported over the vast distances of the ancient Silk Road trade network. Indeed, many luxurious goods travelled along this route during the first millennium C.E., illustrated for example by the wealth of goods found on the Belitung Shipwreck, a ninth-century Arab trading

vessel which sank near Indonesia with a wide variety of trade goods on board (Chong & Murphy, 2017; Krahl, 2010). In this section we look at a selection of these different kinds of items traded along the Silk Road trade network from China, where they ended up, and the impact they had through either their appearance, their functionality, or both. The focus lies on the two bronze items from the dataset, the mirror and cup. The possibilities for considering other types of items traded along the Silk Road trade network beyond these categories is almost endless, but will have to be limited to cursory contextualising mentions in the interest of keeping this thesis at a reasonable length.

3.4.1 The most common trade wares

It is of importance to note, at the outset, that while luxury items tend to be given the most attention in both academic research and by the general public, the majority of the goods traded along the Silk Road network were in fact not luxury items, but rather less impressive cargo such as food and simple bolts of cloth (Murphy, 2017, p. 15). This includes the Belitung shipwreck, which in addition to many exquisite vessels and other luxury items, was largely stocked with many quite simple, mass-produced ceramic vessels (Heng, 2019), some of which may have contained grain and rice, as well as other foodstuffs and spices (Murphy, 2017, p. 15). Though such wares are by their nature more difficult to trace archaeologically, they are known extensively from the written records, and the presence of containers such as amphora indicate their presence and abundance. This also relates to the mingqi figurines of the camel and mule or packhorse, both of which are quite heavily laden with sacks of a comparable design. This type of sack makes frequent appearance among the mingqi, and though their contents can of course not be precisely ascertained, their presence and uniformly simple design on figurines meant to reflect the daily life experiences of the deceased person with whom they were buried, attest to both the frequency and importance of these simple trade goods for those living in China and engaging with the Silk Road trade network.

3.4.2 Stemmed cups

Stemmed cups, like the one from the dataset, appear to have been a popular trade item in the first millennium C.E., as several examples have been recovered from deep within China, including Chang'an, as well as the Xinjiang region on the overland routes of the Silk Road trade network, and on the Belitung shipwreck which carried many luxury trade items including several items from China. There is some debate among scholars as to when and by whom the stemmed cup as a vessel form was introduced to China, but it is generally accepted that it was not a Chinese invention, and may have been introduced to China as early as the Warring States period (Lam, 2012, p. 41). Both simple and exquisitely decorated pieces are known (Lally, 2012, p. 14), variously made of bronze, gilt bronze, silver, and gold. Examples can be found in the collections of the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore, the British Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., as well as the private collection of J.J. Lally in New York.[28]

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[28] https://www.roots.gov.sg/Collection-Landing/listing/1310194;
https://www.roots.gov.sg/Collection-Landing/listing/1313263;
https://www.roots.gov.sg/Collection-Landing/listing/1313210;
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1943-0215-11;
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1936-1118-192-193;
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1968-0422-10;
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1936-1118-130;
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/60787?deptids=6&ft=stem+cup&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=1;
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/49564?deptids=6&ft=stem+cup&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=2;
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/42696?deptids=6&ft=stem+cup&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=11;
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/48317?deptids=6&ft=stem+cup&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=12;
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/63535?deptids=6&ft=stem+cup&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=13;
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/73367?deptids=6&ft=stem+cup&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=16;
https://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:fsg_S2012.9.4240?date.slider=200s%2C900s&q=stem+cup&fq=culture%3A%22Chinese%22&record=1&hlterm=stem%2Bcup;
https://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:fsg_F1981.9?date.slider=200s%2C900s&q=stem+cup&fq=culture%3A%22Chinese%22&record=2&hlterm=stem%2Bcup;
https://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:fsg_F1929.16?date.slider=200s%2C900s&q=stem+cup&fq=culture%3A%22Chinese%22&record=3&hlterm=stem%2Bcup;
https://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:fsg_F1911.70?date.slider=200s%2C900s&q=st

Figure 16 Silver stemmed cup. This stemmed cup, dating to the Tang dynasty, is decorated with a hunting scene, showing figures wearing kaftans. (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1968-0422-10).

Though the basic vessel shape was of outside origin, Chinese manufacturers adapted it in many different ways, leading to a wide array of different shapes and decorative features, incorporating a wide variety of cultural influences from around the Silk Road trade network. An example from the British Museum collection which dates to the Tang period, of a very similar shape to the example from the dataset but made of silver, shows how these cups could be intricately decorated with typically Chinese motifs such as this hunting scene (Figure 16). Another, also from the Tang period but made of gold, currently at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, has a very similar shape but is decorated with a combination of Sogdian, Persian, and Iranian motifs, as well as the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac (Figure 17). Gilt bronze and silver stemmed cups of mixed Sasanian and Byzantine designs were also recovered from Datong (大同), the capital of the earlier Northern

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em+cup&fq=culture%3A%22Chinese%22&record=4&hlterm=stem%2Bcup;
https://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:fsg_FSC-P-
178?date.slider=200s%2C900s&q=stem+cup&fq=culture%3A%22Chinese%22&record=5&hlterm
=stem%2Bcup; Lally, 2012, p. 14.

Wei dynasty (Lee, 2009, p. 171), showing that the trade of these cups was not exclusive to the Tang Dynasty, though most known examples do date to this period.

Figure 17 Gold stemmed cup. This stemmed cup, dating to the Tang dynasty, features repoussé decorations showing various cultural influences, including the Chinese zodiac. (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/60787?deptids=6&ft=stem+cup&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=1).

Stemmed cups from China were not limited to those made of metal, but also include examples made of stoneware, earthenware, porcelain, or other types of ceramic. Examples of stemmed cups made of glass and jade are also known (Gan, 2009, p. 86; Lam, 2012).

While some of these examples bear a striking resemblance in shape to the cup from the dataset, though in many cases more richly decorated, others have a distinctly different shape. Though their individual characteristics and origins are too complex to adequately explain in this short chapter, they illustrate the complexity of technological, cultural, and stylistic adoption and innovation that was taking place along the Silk Road trade network during the first millennium C.E. While the vessel

shape itself may have been an outside invention, it was adopted into China with enthusiasm, as the wide variety of known examples from many different places in China shows. The shape was then widely adapted using different decorative styles and media, and in some cases being given different function. To give an example, a collection of green-and-white glazed ceramic stemmed cups from the Belitung Shipwreck presents several fascinating examples of stemmed cups with what appear to be a drinking straws attached, intended for the Near Eastern market (Chong, 2017, p. 10). Such cups with straws are known from later written sources, for example an 11th century Treatise on the Geography and Natural History of the South of China, translated by G. R. Sayer in 1951:

'Southerners practice nose-drinking. They have pottery vessels like cups or bowls with a small tube like the lip of a bottle fixed at the side they apply their nostrils to the tube and snuff up the wine. The cups are used in summer to snuff up water and are called 'nose-drinking cups'. The water enters the throat through the nostrils and provides an indescribably delightful sensation. The people of Yung-chou already do this. It makes one guffaw to record it' (Pu, 1951, p. 90).

Though it is somewhat uncertain if these straws were actually used to drink through the nose, or if this stems from a mistranslation of the Chinese phrase used for this type of straw, the basic shape of the vessel has clearly been adapted into designs and forms of use after it arrived in China. Another example of a ceramic stemmed cup from the British Museum collection is made of porcelain, another example of this vessel shape being adapted to a Chinese medium.[29] An earlier example of a ceramic stemmed cup from China can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, made of white-glazed stoneware and dating to the Sui dynasty, though sadly no find location is recorded (Figure 18). An example of a different material and glaze, though of a later date and sadly only photographed from above, keeping the shape unclear, is held in the Freer Gallery of Art of the Smithsonian Institution and has

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[29] https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1943-0215-11

been attributed to the Qionglai kiln (邛崍窯) site in Sichuan, once again showing the wide distribution of this vessel shape in its various forms.[30]

Figure 18 Glazed stoneware stemmed cup. This cup is highly decorated, featuring pearl roundels. (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/73367?deptids=6&ft=stem+cup&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=16).

The bronze cup from the dataset also bears striking similarities to several examples made of glass, dating to roughly the Sui and Tang periods (Figure 19) (Gan, 2009, p. 86). Glass had been a key trade item along the Silk Road trade network since its very beginning, and in China the manufacture of glass was both influenced by and in turn influenced other production centres along the Silk Road trade network (Gan, 2009). Many have speculated that the origins of glass manufacturing lie in the adaptation of metallurgical techniques (Qian, 2009, p. 244), and while China did not invent glassmaking independently, the similarity in shape of these cups and other vessels of glass and metal from China certainly show that this is not an unreasonable argument.

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[30] https://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:fsg_FSC-P-178?date.slider=200s%2C900s&q=stem+cup&fq=culture%3A%22Chinese%22&record=5&hlterm=stem%2Bcup

Figure 19 Glass stemmed cup. This cup dates to the Sui or Tang dynasty, and has a similarly shaped foot to the cup from the dataset. (Gan, 2009, p. 86).

3.4.3 Bronze mirrors

Bronze mirrors from China have long been traded quite far west (Ravich and Treister, 2017). Sadly, though many bronze mirrors from China are known from museum collections, as well as private collectors, little has so far been written about their stylistic development or their trade along the Silk Road trade network. One important source, based on extensive analysis of a large private collection, edited by Susan Dewar, therefore largely forms the basis of this section. Bronze mirrors from China are known from as early as 2000 B.C.E. (Nakano, 1994, p. 10), and are therefore a very recognizably Chinese item in both form and origin. They were quite popular throughout Chinese history, being thought to bring luck and prosperity to its owner and their household (Nakano, 1994, p. 20). They could be held by hand by looping a rope or cloth through the knob on the decorated face, or placed on a mirror-stand, as shown for example in the painting in Figure 20, dating to the Eastern Jin Period.

Figure 20 Scene from a handscroll. Dating to the Jin period, this portion of the scroll depicts the use of a mirror like the one from our dataset. (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1903-0408-0-1).

They were usually cast in clay moulds, though stone moulds are also known (Nakano, 1994, p. 10). China has a long history of producing exquisitely decorated bronzes (Nakano, 1994, p. 11), though initially the mirrors that were being produced were of a notably lesser quality than the famous bronze vessels of the same period (Nakano, 1994, p. 12). During the late Spring and Autumn period and early Han period, the quality of mirror-production caught up to that of other bronze items, and patterns of dragons and swirling clouds such as those seen on the mirror from the dataset were already quite popular during this time, though in quite a different and distinct style (Nakano, 1994, p. 13). Though these interpretations are tentative due to a lack of surviving mirrors from this period, overall, a decline in quality and size of bronze mirrors made during the Six Dynasties period is observed, and the use of stamps for decorative features that had been so popular during the Shang and Han dynasties seems to have fallen out of use (Nakano, 1994, p. 15). Instead, steel mirrors appear to have been much more popular at this time (Nakano, 1994, p. 35). The manufacture was revived during the Sui dynasty, and the lost-wax technique became especially popular (Nakano, 1994,

p. 15), a development that continued into the Tang dynasty (Nakano, 1994, p. 16-17). Nakano suggests that the bronze mirrors produced during the Sui period attempt to emulate those from the Han period in both design and manufacture (Nakano, 1994, p. 35). The decorative motifs on the mirrors were varied, but included many animals both real and mythical, gods and sages, as well as flower and grapevine designs and cloud motifs. During the Six Dynasties period, depictions of gods and animals appear to have been most popular, while during the Sui dynasty designs from areas to the west of China were introduced, such as grouped flowers, palmettes, lions, and wolfhounds, which in turn formed into the distinctive lion and grape patterns of the Tang period (Nakano, 1994, p. 36). During the eighth century C.E., non-circular mirrors began to appear and become quite popular (Nakano, 1994, p. 19-20). This includes the eight-lobe form of the mirror from the dataset. The Tang period also saw an increased popularity in various bird-designs, while depictions of the divine or mythological which had been popular during the Six Dynasties period appear to decline (Nakano, 1994, p. 20). The Tang dynasty also saw the advent of larger, heavier mirrors (Nakano, 1994, p. 21), and the beginning of mass-production of mirrors, which tended to be quite thick and without any ridges on the decorated surface aside from the rim and the knob (Nakano, 1994, p. 36). Finally, the Tang Dynasty saw the introduction of portable 'inch' mirrors, very small mirrors which could be easily transported and were favoured by the nobility (Nakano, 1994, p. 36).

3.4.4 Trade and connections

The two types of material explored above in relation to the stemmed cup and bronze mirror from the dataset, illustrate the complex connections across the Silk Road trade network during the first millennium C.E., which took place both overland and by sea. Though both the mirror and stemmed cup from the dataset most likely came from grave contexts within China, similar items have been found in relative abundance in various places along the network. Mirrors such as these were certainly an important trade item along the ancient Silk Road trade network, as twenty-nine very similar mirrors, some nearly identical in shape, size, and decoration to the one from the dataset, were found on the Belitung shipwreck (Louis, 2010, p. 213). They

represent a wide range of forms and decorations popular during the Tang dynasty in China, and frequently exported along the Silk Road trade network (Louis, 2010, p. 213). The collection of mirrors is revealing in particular because it reflects the differences in taste and the different reception of the same stylistic elements across the Silk Road trade network. Among the cargo of the Belitung shipwreck were items of Chinese manufacture which were clearly made in styles meant to appeal to the foreign market (Rawson, 2012, p. 41). These styles were in little use in China itself, but had their influence on the development of local styles in the Near East (Rawson, 2012, p. 41-42). A collection of white and green glazed ceramic stemmed cups from the Belitung shipwreck offer another fascinating illustration of these developments (Hsieh, 2010). Most ceramic vessels of this type, usually called "Yue (越)" wares, were made in the kilns of Henan (河南) province and showed design influences from metal vessels in the form and decoration (Valenstein, 1975, p. 35-36). The discovery of this collection on the Belitung Shipwreck show they were part of a trade cargo heading west. Indeed, this Chinese Yue ware appears to have been quite popular in the Islamic Near East, as examples have been found throughout the Abbasid Empire, at Samarra, Siraf, and Nishapur.

This type of Chinese ceramic was even widely imitated in the Near East, though their styles are distinct and often included inscriptions (Macioszek, 2012, p. 31). A stemmed cup dating between the second and fourth century C.E. has even been found in Japan, though it looks markedly different from the other cups considered in this section, and is of an earlier date, making its connection very circumstantial.[31] Nevertheless, the shape may have arrived in Japan via China by sea, and trade in vessels of various materials between China and Japan is certainly known from this and later periods (Gan, 2009, p. 97-101).

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[31]

https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/63535?deptids=6&ft=stem+cup&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=13

Where the Belitung Shipwreck provides the luxury of a snapshot of a collection of trade wares *en route,* the overland connections of these stemmed cups and bronze mirrors are somewhat less secure, but there is no doubt they also travelled by these routes. The gold stemmed cup from recovered from Xinjiang mentioned above, which incorporates mixed Chinese, Persian, Iranian and Sogdian decorative features and a variety of stylistic influences in its decoration and shape, attests that trade of these cups was not limited to the maritime parts of the Silk Road trade network during the first millennium C.E. (see Figure 17). The silver stemmed cup from the same collection, of a very similar shape and depicting a hunting scene, is also interesting in this regard (see Figure 16). Though its find location is not further specified, the hunters depicted wear clothing similar to that of the mingqi camel-rider and lady in red of the figurines from the dataset, a further illustration of the incorporation of various styles and decorative motifs along the Silk Road trade network, crossing not only cultural boundaries but also from one medium to another. Bronze mirrors from China dating to as early as the Warring States period and as late as the third century C.E. have also been found as far west as Sarmatia, a location which suggests they travelled over land (Ravich and Treister, 2021, p. 405).

3.5 Currency on the Silk Roads

Having considered a selection of the goods and items that travelled and were traded along the Silk Road trade network during the first millennium C.E., as well as some which represent the picture of Silk Road trade as it was represented within China and beyond, we now turn our attention to an equally important aspect of this trade: the currency used to pay for these objects. Though in many cases trade along the Silk Road trade network would have taken the form of bartering and direct exchange of one good for another, and certainly no unified system of currency existed along the entirety of the network, the Chinese domestic currency systems certainly did have their own impact along the Silk Road trade network. Though not linked directly to the items from the dataset, this section nevertheless is of great importance in understanding the trade system the materials discussed in the other sections of this chapter were part of. This section focuses on three major types of material often used as a form of currency along the Silk road trade network during

the first millennium C.E.: grain, silk (and other cloth), and coins, with particular attention paid to the latter two, as there are archaeological remains of them in addition to written records.

3.5.1 Silk and other cloth

The previous section of this chapter opened with the observation that luxury items tend to feature prominently in discussions of Silk Road trade. The silks that were produced in and traded from China are usually placed firmly within this category of luxury items. However, as beautiful and renowned as the luxurious silks from China may have been, there is another side to this fabric. Namely, simple silks could be used as a form of currency along the Silk Road trade network throughout much of its existence (Fung et al., 2018, p. 5). The idea of silk as currency on the wider Silk Road trade network is supported by it being demonstrably already in use as such within China itself, as several tax records refer to it being used in lieu of coins to pay the required taxes (Wand & Wang, 2013). The silk used as currency was markedly different from the luxury silks traded as commodities. Not only were they of much plainer style and simpler weave (Wang, 2013, p. 171), they were sometimes inscribed with notes related to their length, width, weight, and value (Fung et al., 2018, p. 5-6). The latter, as seen in an example from Shandong (山東), was usually expressed relative to the silks' coin value (Fung et al., 2018, p. 5-6). The silks and other fabrics that were used as a method of payment were gathered in bolts. In some cases, it was necessary to record all dimensions of the cloth as well as its value in coins, in others only the length was recorded, indicating a more standardised system of currency in the form of bolts of fabric of standard width, weight, and value (Hansen, 2011, p. 84). Two such bolts of fabric recovered from Loulan (樓蘭) by Sir Aurel Stein, and dating to the third or fourth century C.E., now reside in the British Museum (Figure 21), but for much of our knowledge of how this system of payment functioned at various places along the Silk Road trade network and at different points in time, we must rely on written records. In particular, records from oasis cities and trade hubs of the Silk Road trade network in Khotan (于闐), Loulan (also known as Shanshan (鄯善) or Kroraina), Turfan (吐魯番) and Dunhuang, all in the modern region of Xinjiang, as well as records of Chinese garrisons stationed in

these areas are of great importance to understand the way economy and trade along the Silk Road trade network functioned at different levels of society.

Figure 21 Bolt of plain silk from Xinjiang. This is one of two bolts of plain silk recovered by Sir Aurel Stein from Xinjiang, now held in the British Museum. (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_MAS-677-b).

Several records show that Chinese military outposts were maintained across Central Asia during the Han, Six Dynasties, and Tang periods, and that these outposts sometimes traded with the locals in bolts of silk when grain supplies ran low (Hansen, 2011, p. 88). One such bolt of silk was recovered from Loulan by Aurel Stein in 1901, a site occupied by Chinese garrisons between 77 B.C.E. and the fifth century C.E. (Hansen 2011, p. 87). The bolt of silk has an indication of its length written on it in Brahmi script. Another recovered from nearby Dunhuang was of a similar width, indicating a standardized width for silks used as currency (Hansen, 2011, p. 88). This same silk bears a Chinese inscription recording its value in coins being 600, which Wang states would be the equivalent of a month's wages of an official with the rank of captain (Wang, 2002, p. 79-80). Documents from Loulan, the earliest ones dating to the third century C.E. and most written in Chinese and some in Kharoshti, the language of the local kingdom of Shanshan or Kroraina during this period, record conversion rates between coins, silks, and grain, indicating the three were all in regular use as a form of currency. They also record that silk was used by

the garrisons to purchase grain and horses, and that the soldiers themselves used silk and grain to buy items such as shoes and clothing (Hansen, 2011, p. 90). There is a close connection between horses and the silks used as currency. As mentioned previously, China's own domestic breeding programmes were rarely successful, they relied heavily on import for their horses, and the central importance of the horse in Chinese society and culture meant they were almost continually in high demand. The legendary Ferghana horses were greatly prized, and records show purchases of horses both by the garrisons stationed around Central Asia and also from nomadic tribes to the north, in both cases usually with large quantities of silk being exchanged in return for the best horses (Park, 2002, p. 22). One fragment from Loulan dating to the fourth century C.E. records the exchange between Sogdian merchants and the local Chinese garrison of 319 animals for 4326 bolts of silk. Although the part of the document that records the type of animal that was traded has not preserved, the measure word used indicates it likely concerned horses being supplied to the garrison (Hansen, 2011, p. 90-91).

The use of silk as a currency was not universal nor stable across the Silk Road trade network, nor over time. Records from the capital city of Khotan show that silk in particular was also used as currency there, but other cloth appears not to have been. At least, they appear to indicate that other cloth was not a standardised form of currency, as documents which record a transaction in carpet had a need to indicate the dimensions explicitly (Hansen, 2011, p. 93). It also seems that here, silk was primarily a form of currency used in the capital, rather than in the surrounding villages, as here the standardized values were often converted to equivalent amounts of grain, carpet, or animals (Hansen, 2011, p. 93). Another record from Khotan, indicating a dispute involving the use of silk as a currency, appears to indicate that the local authorities associated this form of currency mainly with the Chinese and considered them the experts in resolving conflicts concerning its use (Hansen, 2011, p. 94). This also indicates that its use as currency was not very common for the local residents. In Turfan during the early Six Dynasties period, the economy appears to have been quite similarly organised to Niya (尼雅), a village in Khotan, with a predominantly bartering economy used by local residents. This is

shown, for example, by contracts for the sale of land which specify the value of the sale in bolts of silk as well as the amount of grain used to actually pay for it. Were grain a standard unit of currency, it is likely only the weight of the grain would have been recorded, as the relative value would have been known (Hansen, 2011, p. 96).

We also know of the Northern Zhou and Northern Qi states of China paying the Western Turks of Central Asia in bolts of cloth in exchange for being left alone and uninvaded (Hansen, 2011, p. 103). This practice ceased with the coming of the Sui dynasty. The Tang dynasty later, in the year 630 C.E., funded military campaigns against the Western Turks, collecting tax from their citizens in the form of cloth, grain, and corvee labour, and using mainly the collected cloth to pay local soldiers to fight the Turks (Hansen, 2011, p. 103). The Tang conquered Turfan in 640 C.E., and continued to spend increasingly on military campaigns throughout the seventh and eighth centuries C.E., and the accounting for these expenditures was recorded in strings of coins, piculs of grain, and bolts of cloth (Hansen, 2011, p. 104), indicating a sophisticated system of collection, conversion rates, and redistribution (Hansen, 2011, p. 105). Away from the capital where this collection and redistribution took place, garrisons and their soldiers were dependent on local merchants in order to convert their allowances, usually in the form of cloth which was lighter and easier to transport than piles of coins and did not spoil as grain would, into necessary goods such as grain (Hansen, 2011, p. 105). Local residents and merchant also seem to have joined the garrisons in some cases (Hansen, 2011, p. 106). Documents from Dunhuang record that during the ninth and 10th centuries, the economy there shifted from the use of coins to the use of cloth and grain as the exclusive for trade, unlike Turfan (Hansen, 2011, p. 100). This took the shape of a bartering economy, especially when it came to the cloth, with no standardised value system in place.

It seems, therefore, that while silk and other cloth was continually an important trade good in all these places, its use as a standardised form of currency differed from place to place and over time, with local residents, nobles and elites, and the garrisons and their soldiers each navigating the different systems in place at

different levels and adapting accordingly. Standardised value systems were sometimes limited to the realm of officials and elites, and were absorbed into the local system through soldiers and merchants using them to pay for their needs and as trade wares. Unfortunately, not much has been written regarding the use of Chinese currency on the Silk Road trade network, which has meant that the below is based on limited sources.

3.5.2 Coins

Though silk is without a doubt the most famous commodity and currency associated with the ancient Silk Road trade network, it likely operated within a multi-currency system (Fung et al., 2018, p. 5), of which another important aspect was the use of various coins. The use of coins as currency had emerged in several places across Eurasia more or less simultaneously, and by the first millennium C.E. they had been in use for several centuries (Hansen, 2011, p. 84-85). Chinese coins were only one contribution to the host of coins that travelled the Silk Road trade network during the first millennium C.E..[32]

The use of coins and their spread over long distances is often linked to the payment of soldiers (Hansen, 2011, p. 86-87). While this connection sometimes leads to certain complexities of economic systems to be overlooked, it seems to be relevant also to the case of the Silk Road trade network in the first millennium C.E., as during both the Han and Tang dynasties, as well as the Six dynasties period in-between, Chinese military outposts were stationed in various places in Central Asia (Hansen, 2011, p. 87). Garrisons are recorded to have received payment in either silk or coin from units in major cities nearby during the Han and Six Dynasties periods, and one such shipment of 211 coins was recovered by Aurel Stein in 1907 on a route between two garrisons in Loulan (Hansen, 2011, p. 88). They were uniform in size and weight, and occurred together with a find of unused arrowheads, strengthening the interpretation that soldiers were indeed paid in coins. Documents from Loulan also record various transactions, often in grain, silk, and coins. Of particular interest

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[32] Further reading on the topic of coins on the Silk Road trade network can be found in and Tanabe et al. (1997) and Wang (2002).

is a large transaction with Sogdian traders from Samarkand in 330 C.E., who supplied the Loulan garrison with 10,000 piculs of (most likely) grain and 200 coins, though it is not clear what this payment was for or what type of coins were paid (Hansen, 2011, p. 90).

As mentioned above, silks used as currency were inscribed with their relative value in coins. It appears that a standard bolt of silk would have been worth 600 coins (Fung et al., 2018, p. 6). Records from Niya, an important stop on the route between Kroraina and Khotan, indicate that envoys from the two kingdoms travelled back and forth frequently during the third and fourth centuries, and used gold and silver coins when they did so (Hansen, 2011, p. 92). One document in particular seems to indicate that tax was typically collected in the form of Kushan coins called staters, but other forms of payment were often diverted to when gold was not available (Hansen, 2011, p. 92-93). The only mention of silver coins from Niya is found in a record of a Chinese merchant buying a slave from the Supis, a raiding people living south of Khotan (Hansen, 2011, p. 93). Sadly, as these are precious materials, no silver or gold coins have been recovered from the area, but some bronze Kushan drachma and tetradrachm have been found (Hansen, 2011, p. 93). Of particular interest are the locally minted coins of Khotan, which were made of bronze and imitated the Kushan stater, but with a Chinese inscription of one side and one in Kharoshti on the other (Hansen, 2011, p. 93). Overall, the impression from Niya and the capital of Khotan is of a very complex system of both standardised currency in the form of coins and silk and barter exchange, though it appears the standardised forms of currency were largely limited to the local elites and outsiders, while locals tended to favour bartering different goods (Hansen, 2011, p. 93-94). At Niya, Kharoshti predominates the official records (Hansen, 2011, p. 91), as opposed to Loulan where documentation took place largely in Chinese. The wide variety of goods recorded to have been exchanged for each other indicates that at the village of Niya, a barter economy was in place (Hansen, 2011, p. 92). While we must be careful to generalise due to the fragmentary nature of the preserved documents, and the bias they engender as a record primarily used by the bureaucracy, it seems that in much of the Loulan area, as opposed to Niya, an economy existed wherein

Chinese soldiers and outpost officials dealt almost exclusively in grain and silk, as well as coins, though these were reserved for large transactions (Hansen, 2011, p. 91).

In both Niya and Loulan, evidence suggests a fairly stable situation when it comes to the use of currency from the Han to Six Dynasties periods. This is markedly different from Turfan, also in Xinjiang, which initially had an economy mainly organised around barter trade much like at Niya, but where sometime around 580 C.E. the use of coins is introduced, which became the preferred method of payment (Hansen, 2011, p. 96). Initially, these were Sasanian silver coins also in use by the Sogdians, Hephtalites and Western Turks, but around 700 C.E. trade in Turfan became focused on Chinese bronze coins instead (Hansen, 2011, p. 96). In the early Six Dynasties period Turfan operated mainly on a bartering economy, with various goods being exchanged for one another, including bolts of silk, without a standardised value or unit of currency. After about 580 C.E., contracts begin to give prices and values in silver coins, and several hoards of Sasanian and some Hephtalite silver coins have been found in the area of Turfan, and Xinjiang more broadly, from as early as the fourth century C.E. (Hansen, 2011, p. 96-97). Some also made it as far as central China during the fifth century C.E.. The pattern of distribution of these coins has suggested to Hansen that trade routes used by the Sogdians shifted from Turfan to routes through central China during the second half of the fifth century C.E., then back to Turfan during the late sixth to eighth centuries C.E. (Hansen, 2011, p. 98). The Sogdians, it also seems, shifted their use of currency easily from the Sasanian to the Arabo-Sasanian coins in use before and after the fall of the Sasanian Empire to Islamic forces in 651 C.E. (Hansen, 2011, p. 98), showing the flexibility of the economic system in place along the wide stretch of the Silk Road trade network. By comparison, only 48 gold coins have been excavated in China, all of which were solidus coins from the Byzantine Empire, dating between the fifth and eight centuries C.E. (Hansen, 2011, p. 98). Hansen posits that, since Byzantine coins used domestically were typically of bronze, these gold coins were made for the express purpose of diplomatic gifts (Hansen, 2011, p. 98). Both the Sasanian and Byzantine coins reflect conquests by Islamic troops after

651 C.E. in the removal of any Christian decorative elements (Hansen, 2011, p. 98). Another fascinating aspect of the Byzantine gold coins recovered from China is that many of them are in fact copies, some with holes punched in them to indicate they were worn as talismans or sewn unto clothing (Hansen, 2011, p. 99). This is another indication that these gold coins did not circulate widely as a form of currency, either on the routes through Turfan or central China. Luo Feng argues that the presence of Sasanian silver coins and Byzantine gold coins and their imitations, often together and often in burials, in China is not necessarily an indication of direct Chinese trade with Byzantium and the Sassanid Empire, but rather a mark of the Sogdian presence in China and their dominant role in Chinese westward trade along the Silk Road trade network (Luo, 2004, p. 149). Possibly, the Astana graveyard (阿斯塔那古墓) at Turfan is an example of some of the local population adopting the Sogdian practice of being buried with talismans of imitation Byzantine gold coins (Hansen, 2011, p. 99). It seems that the circulation of Sasanian silver coins in Turfan dropped off during the eighth century C.E. (Hansen, 2011, p. 99). They were replaced with the use of Chinese bronze coins around 700 C.E., around 60 years after the Tang conquest of Turfan (Hansen, 2011, p. 100). It is unknown how the political unrest and the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Turfan following the An Lushan rebellion of 755 C.E. affected the use of coins and currency in the area, as no documentation or clearly dated coins have so far been excavated from this later period (Hansen, 2011, p. 100). In Dunhuang, the last mention of coins in the recovered records is somewhat later, at the end of the eighth century C.E. (Hansen, 2011, p. 100). Overall, one gets the impression that coins fell out of use in Dunhuang after this time, being replaced by a bartering economy, though some Chinese coins perhaps continued to circulate as ritual or talismanic objects (Hansen, 2011, p. 100). This did not mean a decline in the amount of trade and marketplaces, however (Hansen, 2011, p. 101). Envoys bearing gifts also continued to travel back and forth to nearby kingdoms such as Khotan and Ganzhou.

On the whole throughout the first millennium C.E., it appears that the use of coins in Central Asia was largely associated with outsiders, be they the Chinese merchants from the east or noble families of Khotan and Kroraina exchanging envoys (Hansen,

2011, p. 106). Local rulers did sometimes mint their own coins, which resulted in various hybrid forms such as the Sino-Kharoshti coins of Khotan. An overall pattern emerges of the use of currency during the first millennium C.E. along the eastern and Central Asian Silk Road trade network of varied and simultaneous use of different forms of currency and exchange of goods in different places. At Loulan, after the fall of the Han dynasty soldiers continued to use silk and grain as the locals did as a means of exchange, while the use of coins was limited to the garrison as a unit. In Khotan, locals and outsiders seem to have differed in their use of currency, with the locals using cloth or grain or bartering for goods, while outsiders such as visiting envoys and merchants used coins and luxurious metal items and silks as means of exchange. A similar patterns appears to have been in place at Turfan until people there began to use Sasanian silver coins for their daily needs during the sixth century C.E.. These changes appear to reflect changing political situations along the Silk Road trade network, in particular war and conquest among the Western Turks, Sasanians, and Hephtalites (Hansen, 2011, p. 102). After the An Lushan rebellion of 755 C.E., Chinese forces withdrew from Central Asia and the area largely reverted back to a barter economy based on cloth and grain (Hansen, 2011, p. 106). Overall, the local economy seems to have been leading in the choices of merchants and soldiers and garrisons to use certain types of currency in each place they found themselves, while trade and exchange interactions among elites and officials made use of currencies not commonly in circulation among the local population (Hansen, 2011, p. 106-107). Merchants and garrisons take up an interesting intermediary or dual role in these exchanges, as they variously become part of both the local and elite/international spheres of interaction.

3.6 Influential style and beauty

To close this chapter, we turn our considerations to the impact of changing standards of beauty and aesthetics in China during the first millennium C.E. on the peoples along the Silk Road trade network. The figurines of people mounted on horseback or camel-back from the dataset are not only valuable in their depiction of trade and travel, but also in their depiction of fashion styles in Chinese ceramic sculpture, and how these styles travelled along the Silk Road trade network. They

will serve as a final illustration of the various ways this network facilitated the spread, incorporation, and adaptation of various forms of cultural expression, and the role the Chinese states played in this. Owing to the relative abundance of funerary figurines – including the ones from our dataset - depicting a wide range of aspects and people related to elite life, and not nearly only the elites themselves (Schloss, 1977a, 1977b; Ando, 1968), as well as a few well-preserved funerary shrouds and other pieces of fabric and a range of wall paintings and rock carvings from China and elsewhere along the Silk Road trade network, quite a bit is understood about the evolution of Chinese and Silk Road fashion and beauty over time (Chen, 2019, p. 11). Through the Silk Road trade network, these standards and aesthetics travelled, though in many cases not retaining their original meanings or being adapted and merged with a variety of elements from elsewhere to appeal on an international stage. This section considers the impact of these matters of taste and aesthetic, looking through the lens of the clothing and overall rendering of the looks of the four human mingqi figures from the dataset, as well as their parallels in various media along the Silk Road trade network. Unfortunately, it is especially in the realm of fashion and beauty that the Six Dynasties period is frequently overlooked, even though quite a lot of decorative silks themselves are from this period, and a lot of decorative elements which travelled along the Silk Road first began to circulate widely at this time (Sim, 2022, p. 173-175). Similarly understudied in this area is the Chinese influence within the Silk Road trade network, as the far more popular subject of the incorporation of exotics into Tang society tends to overshadow them. While not entirely without reason, it means that this final section must draw on limited evidence for its data on these subjects.

3.6.1 Mingqi *fashion and foreign influences*

The dress styles of the four mingqi figures in question, though clearly distinct from each other, share in common that they each feature significant influences from beyond China, while also each showing their distinct Chinese origin and manufacture for a Chinese-specific market. It must be kept in mind that these mingqi figurines themselves were not meant for trade, but rather for burial with the deceased, and in their purpose of continuing the life of the deceased after their

death, offer an illustration of how the Chinese perceived the world around them, rather than how they presented themselves and interacted with the outside world and the Silk Road trade network. However, as the following will show, these two spheres of experience do have significant overlap, and through these mingqi figures, links can be made to other archaeological evidence which connects them to the world of the Silk Road trade network and anchors the lasting impact of developments in Chinese fashion in the Silk Road trade network at large.

To begin with the most significant illustration of foreign influences on the mingqi figurines, the camel rider wears a very recognizable kaftan typically associated with the Sogdian merchants of the Silk Road trade network (Yatsenko, 2019, p. 65). While in the mingqi this kaftan is almost exclusively associated with merchants and attendants, it appears that in Sogdian society itself the garment was in fact more associated with elite merchant classes (Hensellek, 2019). Hensellek argues for the existence of a subtle and unspoken, yet fairly rigid system of rules regulating the ways to wear a kaftan to distinguish status among the Sogdians, but it seems unlikely these carried over directly into Chinese society. Several of the Sogdian tomb reliefs and stemmed cups from China mentioned in previous sections of this chapter depict people, often on horseback, wearing the same style of garment, and it is also well known from Sogdian wall paintings elsewhere in Central Asia (Figure 22) (Hensellek, 2019; Yatsenko, 2004, 2019).
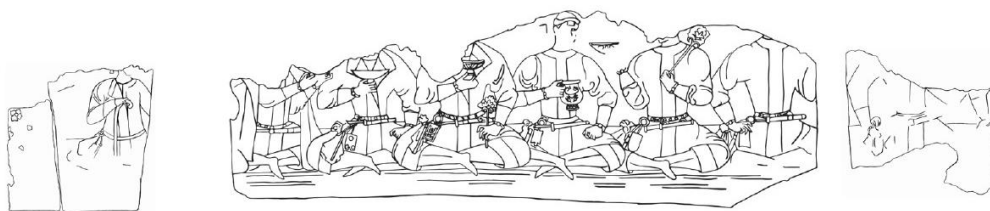
Figure 22 Drawing of a wallpainting from Panjikent. This wallpainting shows a group of people wearing kaftans holding a banquet or other type of gathering. (Hensellek, 2019, p. 186).

It first appeared in China at least as early as the Han dynasty (Park, 2002, p. 72), and is incredibly widespread not only in the mingqi, but also in wall paintings of elite tombs in China (Park, 2002, p. 67). In depictions from China, it is typically interpreted as being worn by foreigners. Though somewhat difficult to make out, a

piece of fabric recovered from the Astana tombs and dating to the Northern Dynasties or early Sui period, depicting camels being led by an attendant who appears to wear a similar kaftan with open lapels, next to the Chinese characters *hu wang* for 'barbarian king' (Watt, 2004, p. 335), indicates that these types of Central Asian garments had already entered China during these earlier periods, and that like the stemmed cups, silks of Chinese manufacture depicting people wearing these garments and clearly indicated as foreigners were being traded along the Silk Road network (Gao, 1986, p. 13, 210 & 251). It would be incorrect however, to interpret any depiction of a person wearing foreign or foreign-appearing garments in Chinese ceramics or other media as being a depiction of a foreigner.

Though at first glance it looks quite different, the figurine of the woman in red might in fact be wearing a similar type of garment, only with the lapels closed (Hensellek, 2019, p. 186). Both styles of wearing this kaftan are represented on a ceramic flask excavated from the Northern Qi tomb of Fan Cui at Anyang, dated to the late 6th century C.E. (Figure 23) (Watt, 2004, p. 250-251).

Figure 23 Flask with dancers and musicians. This flask from Henan, dated to the Six Dynasties period, depicts people wearing kaftans, dancing and playing music. (https://sogdians.si.edu/sogdian-dancer/).

Interestingly, this flask also depicts a musician playing an instrument very similar to the one held by the musician on horseback from the dataset. Where the lady in red and the camel rider differ markedly, however, is in their hairstyles and facial features, with the camel rider sporting an almost helmet-like hairstyle, prominent brow-ridge, and somewhat flattened nose, while the lady in red has a round face, thin curved brows, a small pointed nose and slanted eyes, much like the figurine of the musician on horseback from the dataset. The hairstyles of these figures are also quite alike, both featuring a topknot falling forward towards the forehead and two additional pieces falling over their temples, with the rest of the hair falling in a circle around their necks. These are features associated with a marked change in beauty standards in Chinese society attributed to the popularity of an emperor's consort called Yang Guifei (719 – 756 C.E.), whose voluptuous figure was a significant change from the thin and elongated frames idealised previously in Chinese society (Chen, 2013, p. 96). This change was mirrored in the mingqi figurines, and led to a number of recognizable and well-documented hair and dress styles which set the figurines and other depictions of women in this latter half of the Tang period apart (Chen, 2019, p. 9).[33] The elevated shoulder pads and long sleeve which extends far over the hand on the left arm on the lady in red are also elements not seen in the Sogdian kaftans, pointing to a possible hybrid form of clothing.

The long sleeve is particularly interesting, as it seems to indicate that the lady in red is a dancer (Zuckowska, 2014, p. 68). The other figurine that appears to depict a dancer, the white glazed lady on horseback, likely dates to the earlier Sui period. Despite a distinct and recognizable style, often credited as being from Kucha, few publications have been written about the style of dress like the one displayed in this figurine. Like the lady in red, she too has a distinctly long sleeve extending over her hand to indicate she is likely a dancer, a style associated with a type of dance which is thought to have developed in the Chu (楚) state of southern China during the first millennium B.C.E., and which by this time had been firmly integrated into Chinese fashion (Zuchowska, 2014, p. 68). During the Sui and Six Dynasties periods, far more

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[33] For further reading on the development of Chinese fashion during the Tang dynasty, see Chen (2013, 2016, 2019).

elongated and thin body shapes had been the norm for female figurines, though despite the popularity of the Yang Guifei figure and looks, these older shapes continued to be produced as well (Park, 2002, p. 79). This white-glazed figurine is of a common type, and usually part of a troupe of female musicians and dancers, such as those of the Schloss collection currently housed at the Hofstra University Museum (Baker, 1993, p. 17-18). Though in these groups the figures are usually either standing or seated, the Hofstra University Museum collection also includes an equestrian figurine that bear a striking resemblance to the figure from the dataset (Figure 4) (Baker, 1993, p. 26). Much like the lady in red and musician, the facial features of these figurines are interpreted as distinctly Chinese, while their dress and wrapped topknot hairstyle are interpreted as being of 'Kucha-style' (Baker, 1993, p. 7; Mahler, 1950, p. 127), though such precise interpretation of cultural and ethnic origins based on 19th and 20th century scholarship should be treated very carefully (van Aerde, 2018). Interesting in this regard is to compare these figures to the equestrian musician of the figurines in the dataset, of a later date and markedly different in terms of its manufacturing technique, colouring, and overall style, yet if one looks closely wearing a very similar style of dress featuring a sash tied high on the bust and a shawl around the shoulders. She also plays an instrument seen in multiple figures of the Hofstra collection (Figure 13) (Baker, 1993, p. 16-18). It appears, therefore, that all three display a combination of Chinese and Central Asian features in their rendering and style of dress.

3.6.2 An Islamic connection

Previous sections of this chapter have already highlighted briefly the connection between China and the Islamic world, and the impact of Islamic conquest on the Silk Road trade network. To close this chapter, however, we will consider a more long-term connection between China and the Islamic world which, though tentative, sheds some light on the far reach of this large trading network, both geographically and temporally. The overhanging sleeves of the two female figures on horseback from the dataset find a fascinating parallel in certain Persian miniatures of the 14th-16th centuries. These are known as having included and adapted several Chinese influences over time (Kadoi, 2009), which can be seen for example in the depiction

of facial features and in the compositions, which recall some of the tomb reliefs discussed in 3.2.2.1. Some elements of Chinese fashion also appear to have made their way into these miniatures, as the one pictured in Figure 24 below exemplifies.

Figure 24 Portion of Persian miniature of Layla and Majnun. This portion clearly depicts the Chinese facial features and the overhanging sleeve on Layla. (https://asia.si.edu/object/F1946.12.253/).

This miniature depicts a scene from the Arabian story of Layla and Majnun, and depicts Layla as having a clearly overhanging sleeve in the style of the Chinese

dancer figurines. The Chinese influence on the manuscript painting of Islamic Iran is well-documented (Kadoi, 2009; Sugimura, 1981), but rarely considered in this long-term perspective or specifically for the style of dress that is depicted. Yuka Kadoi, however, does consider that the Iranians' first contact with Chinese motifs likely came through decorative silk fabrics exported from China (Kadoi, 2009, p. 15), and links this to the eventual Chinese contributions to manuscript painting in Islamic Iran (Kadoi, 2009, p. 123). In particular, Kadoi notes the popularity in Chinese silks of the grape, camel, and roundel motifs (Kadoi, 2009, p. 16). These pearl and floral roundels also occur frequently in the bronze mirrors discussed above, and in both textiles and mirrors they become popular during the Tang dynasty (Kadoi, 2009, p. 16; Louis, 2010, p. 213-214). It can even be seen in one of the stemmed cups of 3.4.2, which is dated to the slightly earlier sixth-seventh century C.E. (Figure 18). During the Tang dynasty, striped trousers and coloured skirts of Persian origin also became fashionable, and striped patterns in general gain traction (Gao, 1986, p. 14), though a banner recovered from Astana, of Chinese manufacture and depicting a Chinese mythical story, dating to the sixth or seventh centuries C.E. indicates the pattern may already have been popular somewhat earlier.[34] Its find location also indicates that these Chinese fabrics of mixed stylistic influence were traded widely. They are found exclusively on the overland routes, in all likelihood the result of preservation bias due to the dry climate. So, while the connection between these Persian miniatures and Chinese ceramics and silks are somewhat circumstantial and temporally distant, styles, ideas, and inventions spread along the Silk Road trade network could clearly have large and long-lasting impacts.

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[34] https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_1928-1022-0-203

4. Discussion

In this final chapter before the conclusion of the thesis, the data gathered across the different case studies in the previous chapter is considered within the theoretical framework as outlined in 1.3.2, in order to arrive at an answer to the final sub-question, also outlined in the Introduction: 'When we consider China from the perspective of a globalising ancient world system, can (dis)continuity be identified in the nature and incorporation of these materials and styles between the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods?'. This will entail considering what this perspective of a globalising world system means in the context of the Silk Road trade network during the first millennium C.E., before zooming in to evaluate the role of China in this network, bringing in the case study material from the previous chapter to provide new insights into the workings of this network. Chapter 5 will follow with an exploration of how the answer to this question combines with the other sub-questions considered in the preceding chapters of this thesis, in order to arrive at a final answer to the main research question. It will also present thoughts on the future of this particular research topic and the field of research of Silk Road archaeology in which it is situated.

4.1 The ancient Silk Road network as a globalising world system

As stated in section 1.3.1.1, the main research question of this thesis, and by extension the sub-question considered in this chapter, is framed around the concept of globalising world systems, based on a combination of globalisation and world systems theory, which have both been influential in the field of archaeology and anthropology in recent years (Canepa, 2010, p. 9). It is important to reiterate at this stage that these theories, and therefore this combined concept, were used as a tool to help better analyse and contextualize the data provided in the various case studies within this thesis. Though through the evaluations made in this chapter valuable insights may also come to light about the theories themselves, the analysis of them as tools to think with was not the subject of this thesis. To reiterate the definition of the term as given in section 1.3.2, a globalising world system is a self-contained but overlapping and interacting world of networks undergoing processes

of increased connectivity along with increased awareness of said connectivity. Having briefly considered the development and academic context of these theories in section 1.3.2, it now becomes pertinent to consider this definition further in the context of the case studies above, and how the exercise of considering China from this perspective may be undertaken, by first breaking the definition down into its key components and then regarding the Silk Road trade network in this context.

Two crucial points of our definition of globalising world systems are related to this term 'globalising', which as stated in section 1.3.2 is specifically meant to illustrate the ever-developing nature of such processes of connectivity. As stated in the theoretical framework above, processes of globalisation are not simply equal to homogenisation or standardisation of practices across an ever wider geographical area, but also include cultural differentialisation and hybridisation. A globalising world-system, according to the definition above, also includes processes of increased connectivity and an increased awareness of said connectivity. Thought the use of the word 'increase' may be taken to imply a somewhat linear process, in fact processes of increase can occur at multiple levels and at various places in a network in parallel without being directly related or having a particular direction or endpoint in sight (Hodos, 2017, p. 4). The latter, indicating a linear progression toward an ever more connected world on an increasingly large scale, is an image of the processes under consideration in this thesis held by many, and one that this thesis aimed to re-evaluate against the archaeological evidence of the period in question, for which the definition of the theoretical framework as given provides a concrete tool of analysis. Increasing connectivity and an increased awareness of connectivity – increasing or not – are considered here to be two separate things, and though awareness may be difficult to trace archaeologically, the nature of the evidence highlighted by the case studies nevertheless will allow it to be given some consideration, as well as the other aspects of globalisation listed here. Another component of the definition of world systems as provided by Kardulias and Hall (2008), the notion of a *self-contained* world of networks, being more a matter of definition and focus in hindsight than a reality demonstrated through the archaeological remains of the Silk Road network or this thesis specifically, is not up

for further consideration here. While of use to the point of considering the Silk Road trade network itself as a network of commodities, this is done only by our own definition and does not reflect the complexity of the entirety of the Silk Road trade network.

Considering the ancient Silk Road trade network as such a globalising world system, before considering China as a part of it and the role it played, the system in question in this thesis encompasses a wide range of economic and cultural interactions spanning across most of Afro-Eurasia. It did so not through direct long-distance trade, but rather through a multitude of short-distance commercial relationships which in their entirety spanned most of this continent and which persisted throughout the many social, political, and economic upheavals it witnessed throughout the first millennium C.E.. The traders that participated in these exchanges brought their own and other cultures along with them as they adapted to the local and international markets (Hansen, 2017, p. 435). Many Central Asian peoples in particular played a crucial role in this when it came to the overland routes, whereas Arab and Indian trading vessels largely covered the somewhat longer distances over sea. In many cases it is impossible to trace where exactly certain styles, innovations, or ideas originate and how they travelled. This nature of the Silk Road trade network as a complex system of traders each travelling small portions of it, means items or elements that travelled over long distances tended to do so through several hands that did not understand their original meaning or significance, and therefore gave it their own, adapted it, or merged them together. In recent years, academic focus tends to be placed on the Central Asian peoples, in particular the Sogdians and Persians, when it comes to attempts to understand these processes, and for good reason.[35] However, in order to provide a more holistic view of the various key players that made up this trade network and to provide a better understanding of how it functioned, a key nodal point such as China cannot be left out of consideration.

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[35] The importance of these Central Asian peoples to the functioning of the Silk Road trade network and the complexities of their histories have been frequently misunderstood in the past (Lerner & Dischner, n.d.)

<u>4.2 China as part of a globalising world system</u>

The particulars of China's role in the network have often remained understudied and one-sided, and tend to cast China as a key supplier of many of the Silk Road trade network's most sought-after goods, but not its many cultural influences. In this sense, China tends to be considered only in terms of how it received and adopted the many stylistic, cultural, and religious influences which travelled along the Silk Road trade network. This section of the Discussion therefore highlights the active role China played in the functioning and continuation of the Silk Road trade network throughout the first millennium C.E., looking in particular at changes through time in this, and bringing together the various case study materials from the previous chapter in order to do so.

The case studies above have each shown from their own perspective that although Chinese archaeological material is not often given major attention when it comes to discussions of the history and development of the ancient Silk Road trade network, China should certainly be considered an active part of this network throughout the first millennium C.E., though with clear variations in the manner and intensity of participation. The current image of a stagnant and closed society during the Six Dynasties period compared to the open and thriving trade of the Tang period, it seems, is largely incorrect, but cannot be entirely discarded either. The Six Dynasties period saw an influx of non-Chinese peoples into large parts of the Han territory and into all strata of society, and they and the native Han Chinese were integrated under the Sui and Tang dynasties. Seen from this perspective, it stands to reason that the Six Dynasties period would already be characterised by frequent international contacts, which were consolidated into Chinese society when the reunification of the territory under the Tang required these different peoples and cultural influences be brought together into a cohesive whole. This consolidation is likely to appear more clearly in both the written and archaeological records, going some way toward explaining the difference in perception of the periods in this regard. However, while styles may change, participation in this trade network, was important to Chinese elites throughout the first millennium C.E., and when it comes

to long-term impacts of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road trade network, the Tang dynasty cannot be given singular credit.

China's involvement in the Silk Road trade network of the first millennium C.E. was closely linked to trade in horses and facilitated by the use of camels, their importance being illustrated in our case studies by their dominant presence in mingqi figures, both of which came to them through Central Asian traders along the network. As a result, aspects of these Central Asian cultures, such as certain styles of dress like the Sogdian kaftan, were adopted by the Chinese people they came into contact with, and incorporated into Chinese society in various ways and forms. At the same time, these Central Asian traders also facilitated the spread of Chinese cultural elements like the green-and-white glazed ceramics and the use of silk as both currency and luxury fabric, as well as these adapted, amalgamated, and hybrid forms like the stemmed cups and different coins along the Silk Road trade network in turn. When it comes to fashion trends in particular, the relegation in most academic writing of the Chinese role in the Silk Road trade network as limited to being the initial supplier of the material and creator of the fine weaves, is particularly striking. While many credit China as a crucial centre for cloth manufacture - in particular the highest quality silks - for the Silk Road trade network, when it comes to the choice of decoration and design patterns China is given but a cursory glance. The relative lack of the spread of Chinese clothing designs across the Silk Road trade network, especially when compared for example to the Sogdian, Persian and Iranian design elements might be easily explained as a matter of taste, but considering the central role of China's cloth manufacturing industry on the development of the Silk Road trade network, this seems unlikely. Rather, based on the case studies in the chapter above, it should be argued that China's central role in the Silk Road trade network was thanks in particular to a keen talent at playing into prevailing tastes and catering to the international market. This follows arguments made by Rawson (2012) in relation to certain metal ewers displaying what she dubs a cosmopolitan style. These arguments were formed based on the case studies outlined in the previous chapter.

4.2.1 Transcending dynasties

In relation to the impact of changing dynasties and political unity in China throughout the first millennium C.E., the case studies have illustrated both important changes over time as well as several continuities or developments which seem to take place regardless of the presence of a central ruling dynasty. The depiction of certain animals in the mingqi is of particular interest in this matter, as camels are one of the most common animals depicted in them during the Six Dynasties period, with an increasing variety of animals becoming popular during the Sui and Tang dynasties. The camel from our dataset finds several parallels in camel mingqi dating to the Six Dynasties period when it comes to the cargo it carries in particular, and in fact seems rather unique for the Tang period in depicting a camel with a trader rather than a musician, dancer, or other entertainer(s). The Sui dynasty saw the development of its own unique style in mingqi, with the white glaze and troupes of dancers and attendants of very similar style to the figure from our dataset dating to that period. The Tang Dynasty did see significant change as well. The changes in mirror designs appear to be particularly striking, as is the development of the distinctive Yang Guifei style of beauty and dress. Popular decorative patterns on both mirrors and textiles change significantly during the Tang dynasty, the shapes of the mirrors become increasingly diverse, the rendering of horse mingqi figurines becomes more dynamic and proportionate, and the variety of subject matter in mingqi increases. On the other hand, even in the case of the famous sancai wares, the techniques to manufacture them first started to develop prior to the Tang dynasty gaining power, and many of the animals and people chosen as subject matter for the mingqi, though changing in relative abundance, remained in use throughout the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods. Most notably for the present thesis, horses and camels, both key players in the Silk Road trade network and China's involvement in it, are a common subject throughout the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang dynasties. This continuity can even be traced beyond the first millennium C.E., as Yuka Kadoi (2009) links the Chinese style of certain Persian miniatures to the exported decorative fabrics from China, which Gao (1986) illustrates did not cease during the Six Dynasties period, and fabrics

depicting styles of dress also worn by the mingqi figures show the possibility that the influence on the Persian miniatures may have started earlier than the Tang dynasty. In relation to the extended sleeve specifically, this is a feature that had been present in dancing costumes of China for centuries prior to the Six Dynasties period, and which at least did not disappear during the Six Dynasties and Sui periods. While the political situation during the Six Dynasties period resulted in cultural divides between North and South, we must not be too quick to let this characterize the period completely, as regional differences were already present, and in some cases already between North and South, during the Han period at least (Schloss, 1977a, p. 15). Cultural exchange also did not cease completely, as Schloss notes a spread of southern styles in mingqi from South to North, and the southern styles themselves incorporated many other regional influences (Schloss, 1977a, p. 23). Thus, when zooming out to the highest theoretical level, it should be said that while political and commercial developments across the Silk Road trade network often happened in parallel and in relation to each other, they are not inherently connected in any top-down manner, nor are they mutually exclusive processes.

4.2.2. Role of China

The importance of the Silk Road trade network to China during the first millennium C.E., as well as the role China played in this network by playing into prevailing tastes and adapting to gaps in the market, are amply illustrated by the case studies. The frequent occurrence of horses, camels, and foreign types of dress in the mingqi, which serve to allow the tomb occupant to continue their life as they had in death, shows the importance of this trade network in China. The fact that both figures with clearly non-Chinese facial features, as well as more distinctly Chinese figures are shown to wear foreign dress types in both mingqi and other depictions, as well as combinations of influences such as those found in the lady in red on horseback, shows the flexibility and adaptability of these elements in Chinese society. At the same time, the spread of the stirrup throughout Eurasia from China around the sixth or seventh century C.E. is a clear example of Chinese innovations being spread along the Silk Road trade network, and being adapted into distinct styles as it made its way across the Eurasian steppe. The Chinese green-and-white ceramic wares

which became wildly popular in the Near East are a further example of this. Hybrid forms such as the variously shaped and decorated stemmed cups, bronze mirrors featuring a wide range of foreign motifs, as well as hybridized coins such as the Sino-Kharoshti coins of Khotan, had their own lasting impact on the various kingdoms and peoples of the Silk Road network. The Chinese talent and tendency to play into cosmopolitan styles and the taste of the market rather than exporting their own styles is supported by such items as the bronze mirrors and stemmed cups detailed above, as well as the changing uses of forms of currency by Chinese soldiers and garrisons, and may also hold true in regards to the presentation of a variety of foreign and local styles in mingqi figures, presuming they represent how the servants, attendants, and courtesans the elite household relied upon accurately in their styles of dress. However, the difficulty of pinning any cultural influence to a certain point of origin and tracking its route along the network in a linear fashion, due to the complexity of different cultures adopting and adapting elements of another culture, taking them out of their original cultural context and giving them new meaning, is amply illustrated by the case studies above. An example of this might be found in the later example of Persian miniature paintings featuring the long dancer's sleeves also found in many Chinese mingqi and other depictions of courtesans, as well as the seemingly wide adoption by the Chinese peoples of the Sogdian kaftan in a variety of contexts outside of where they would be worn by the Sogdians themselves.

4.3 Linking back

Having zoomed in from the large theoretical framework of globalising world systems to the role of China in such a system through the lens of the case studies detailed above, it is now necessary to link back some final observations from these case studies to the theoretical framework, before moving on to consider the implications of these insights for the field of Silk Road archaeology in the final concluding chapter. In the same way that the items in our dataset share several connections which together could provide insight into certain themes, but never all to the same extent, from the same angle, or even on the same theme at all, so do the various networks that can be defined as making up a part of the complex world

system come together into this greater whole of the ancient Silk Road trade network. While the definition does consider the ever-changing nature of such systems which is also exemplified by the case studies, the evidence diverges from it in that there is no clear overall increase in connectivity, nor a linear progression towards this. Rather, the case studies show a consolidation of the processes already in place since earlier periods in the reunification efforts of the empire, resulting in a more archaeologically visible trace of China's engagement with the world system, but not necessarily an increase in overall connectivity within it. Importantly, the case studies above illustrate that to link these developments too closely to the existence of a central ruling dynasty, in this case the Tang, obscures the many complexities of cultural and trade interactions along a globalising world system such as the Silk Road trade network and creates an inherently top-down view of how these developments came to be. As the above has shown, significant changes in China's involvement in the Silk Road trade network do occur over the course of the first millennium C.E. However, as becomes evident from the case studies and historical and theoretical contexts presented in this thesis, what crucially did not change was the way the Chinese people adapted to the existing market and political climate around them. For a network such as the Silk Road to persist over such a wide geographical area and over such a long period of time, it has to be characterised first and foremost by adaptability. All along a network as far-reaching as the Silk Road trade network, both temporally and geographically, all things are given meaning and change their meaning dependent on a combination of the context in which they are produced, transmitted, and received. While the practicalities of the network and China's involvement in it certainly underwent significant changes throughout the first millennium C.E., some of which must be linked at least partially to the changing political climate in China or any other part of the network, what reaches beyond these differences and even beyond the first millennium C.E. itself is the fact that these circumstances can never be wholly separated from, nor entirely explained by each other. There is no continued progress toward a more connected world, but periods of rapid change and consolidation alternate, and this ebb and flow of change is what ultimately allows the Silk Road trade network as a whole to

persist as the various parts and connected networks that make it up adapt to changes at the local, regional, and network levels.

5. Conclusion

Based on the evidence above, significant differences in both the political situation of China and several other places along the Silk Road trade network, as well as the role and involvement of China within this network and the material remains that they left behind are to be acknowledged. However, to talk of a true schism or to attribute a revival of the network to the Tang dynasty would dismiss significant developments that took place during the Six Dynasties period and which had both local and far-reaching, as well as short-term and long-term impacts on the operation and continuation of the network.

While the prevalent image of internal conflict impeding much or any trade between China and the rest of the world during the Six Dynasties period of political fragmentation which still lives in popular understanding of Chinese history has seen some reconsideration within academia in recent decades, as more nuanced understandings of the workings and complexities of the Silk Road trade network are revealed by a renewed research interest, it remains difficult to find concrete archaeological evidence published which further elucidates China's role in this trade network at this time. The idea that the Tang period should be considered a true "Golden Age" in China's past, during which Chinese society was especially open to foreign cultural influences and took up a central role within the network has seen far less revision and is certainly supported by both primary written sources and modern research, yet has also not seen detailed archaeological evaluation independent of these sources. These issues are especially problematic in light of the notions of the dynastic cycle and the Mandate of Heaven, which together project this image of clearly delineable and coherent dynasties alternating with periods of chaos in the absence of central imperial rule. Yet as had been the case with earlier dynasties and as also clearly evidenced for the Tang dynasty by, for example, the emperor Wu Zetian and her Wu Zhou dynasty and the An Lushan rebellion, within periods of official rule by a single dynasty divisions of power could still vary considerably, and the ruling dynasty could at times be nothing more than symbolic. The image of the dynastic cycle and the Mandate of Heaven causes this period to be seen as a single

unit because these conflicts did not last, but the power of the Tang was never the same. At the same time, the focus on such a top-down, dynastically focussed view obscures how throughout such turbulent times, China's involvement in the ancient Silk Road trade network had its own trajectory, which was affected by but ultimately should be considered separately from this developments, as ultimately the network as a whole functioned separately from these ruling dynasties. The lack of re-evaluation of previous academic work based largely on colonial excavations and analysis of historical documents has also led to a reliance on and perpetuation of potentially outdated interpretations and conclusions about cultural influences along the Silk Road trade network. The ethnic categorisation of facial features in mingqi and other forms of material which depict humans of various origins, as was common practice at the time when such interpretative stylistic reference works as the one by Ezekiel Schloss (1977a, 1977b) were being written, is highly speculative and problematic. Foremost, they are based not only on our modern understanding of ethnic and cultural groups, not any ideas that the artisan who crafted the depiction may have had regarding this. Furthermore, even if the artist's understanding of these ethnic and cultural origins were discernible, their depiction does not reflect reality or the depicted person's own understanding of their ethnic and cultural origin, nor can we say with any degree of certainty to what extent it reflects reality. Finally, it assumes that clearly delineated ethnic and cultural groups, divisible visually by physical features, exist in the first place, when archaeological and anthropological research has shown time and again that concepts of ethnicity, culture, and ancestry are far too complex to be considered in this way. For the purposes of the present thesis, these exact ethnic and cultural interpretations could thankfully be largely discarded, focussing instead on the incorporation, adaptation, and in some cases exaggeration of foreign elements which may have been considered exotic, rather than pinning these elements to any specific geographical, ethnic, or cultural point of origin. By considering the Silk Road trade network of the Six Dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods through the lens of a globalising ancient world system, the archaeological evidence presented through the several case studies could be considered from a more bottom-up perspective for what it could reveal

about the possible increase in connectivity and awareness of global connectivity during these periods, and it has shown that this system, though in many cases evolving parallel to the political developments of large powers such as China and being in many ways profoundly influenced by them, did function on a level separately from them, and continued throughout these various dynasties.

Through the objects in the dataset, which presented a unique opportunity to study objects from a private collection not normally accessible to academic research, several themes could be addressed in connection with the Silk Road trade network. While the representation of trade and travel through mingqi and other visual depictions showed the importance of horses and camels in the Silk Road trade and China's involvement in it in particular, and the spread and development of the stirrup showed the far reach that Chinese inventions could have along this network as early as the Six Dynasties period, the export of luxury items such as stemmed cups and mirrors shed light on the complex nature of adoption and adaptation of various manufacturing techniques, styles, and forms along the network while also putting in clear contrast the bulk of non-luxury items which were traded alongside these items. The various systems of currency and bartering exchange which were in use along the Silk Road trade network, exemplified by evidence gathered from several Chinese garrisons stationed in the Xinjiang area during both the Six Dynasties and Tang periods, showed that it was not nearly always the Chinese or invading forces which determined the modes of exchange, but that often the local communities and markets already in place were leading in how trade took place. At the same time, they showed a rather separate system of envoys and luxury gift-exchange taking place often in the same geographical locations, yet usually taking on completely different forms. Finally, the spread and adoption of the kaftan and other foreign fashion styles in China, as well as the long-term influence of certain Chinese fashion developments illustrate how norms and meanings of the various elements which traversed the network could change significantly depending on the contexts in which they were produced and received.

Based on these observations, China's role in the Silk Road trade network can be defined by a combination of its need to reintegrate a culturally diverse and divergent territory following the reunification of the territory with the Sui and Tang dynasties and a desire to effectively play into an international and cosmopolitan market. From the bottom up, Chinese artisans were aware of what would sell well on this network, while from the top down the ruling dynasties encouraged, managed, and exemplified the adoption of foreign elements. Progress did not come to a halt in the interceding periods, but rather the progress that was made is difficult to link into the linear canon narrative of Chinese history, and thus tends to be either neglected or attributed solely to the dynastic periods instead. As stated by Juliano and Wide on the Freer Art Gallery website dedicated to the Sogdians: 'Our world is shaped by influencers: people whose behaviour and attitudes set the trends for what to wear, what to eat, what to like, what to buy. Such influencers do not rely on political power or authority. Rather, they use their social networks, access to specialist knowledge or goods, and cultural "cool" to shape the ways we behave' (Lerner & Wide, n.d.). Ultimately, it was the adaptability of the various players along the network, and their ability to cope with changes to political structures that allowed the continuation of the network, and this is not a top-down process as the dynastic model would imply. While no clear linear progression toward either a more connected world or a greater awareness of such connectivity can be identified through the case studies presented in this thesis, the lens of globalisation and world systems theory in fact shed light on how periods of rapid and deeply affecting changes alternating with periods of consolidation of said changes are what ultimately allowed the network to continue, while in some cases causing the material impact of these changes to be more visible during the periods of consolidation such as the Tang. Political developments along the network cannot be considered separately from this, nor can they entirely explain it, as in such a complex network these power structures themselves are also deeply affected by other developments and spheres of influence within it, and small changes can be become amplified through these connections, often creating parallel or coinciding developments, but never a mutually exclusive connection.

By and large, scholarship on the ancient Silk Road trade network considers most of China's active sphere of cultural influence to stop squarely at its own borders, and paints any adoption of Chinese cultural elements beyond these borders purely as a result of the receiving culture's agency. While other players along the Silk Road trade network have certainly left more tangible traces in the material record, this image has left a disconnect in Silk Road scholarship between China as a major driving, even founding, force of the network on the one hand, and yet a rather invisible one when it comes to the particulars of its lasting cultural impact. This thesis has argued, based on a few selected thematic case studies, that this image needs to be reconsidered in order to arrive at a truly comprehensive understanding of the workings of the Silk Road trade network and its cultural impact during the first millennium C.E. and beyond. The goal has not been to diminish the active agency of other players along the Silk Road network in these developments, but rather to fill a gap in our current understanding of them. Due to lack of previous scholarship considering this perspective, this thesis could only provide a first cautious step in this direction, with hopes of providing substantial enough new insight to warrant the further investigation and consideration of it by others. To close, we finally turn our attention to a few recommendations as to further research and gaps in the academic discourse on these topics which this thesis has revealed but was unable to incorporate or which logically follow from it.

This thesis has touched upon several topics as concerned with the case studies presented above, and in doing so has also allowed for several other areas of research within the subject of Silk Road and Chinese archaeology which may would further enhance the conclusions made here and allow for more in-depth conclusions as to the role of China within this trade network through time, but which fell outside the scope of the thesis proper. Limitations were faced in terms of time, length, and access to materials, which has revealed gaps in our current knowledge that further research and publication on this topic would help to close. One example which arose during the writing of this thesis was a consideration of musical traditions and the evolution of instruments, and the way these developments were shaped by the environment of the Silk Road trade network, and

shaped it in turn. Sadly, a lack of surviving archaeological evidence and accessible previous research into this topic prevented its inclusion, but this remains a key avenue of research to be pursued in the future in order to shed further light on these key players in the Silk Road trade network and bring further life to the image of this network we have so far been able to shape.

Further research is also needed where it concerns the various non-Chinese peoples which already lived within the Chinese territory during these periods and those that came before, as well as the peoples to the east and southeast of China which at various times were conquered by the Chinese and regained their independence. Emphasis in both research and popular understanding is often placed on the foreign nature of the northern dynasties during the Six Dynasties period, as they not only reached high political status and power, but also adopted many Chinese customs and cultural aspects. The above has also stressed the key role of these foreign peoples and their role in shaping China's position within the Silk Road network, however it is important to recall that these were not the first non-Chinese peoples to live within the territory of the modern People's Republic of China, or indeed on the lands occupied by the canonical Chinese dynasties at the time. Very little is known about the peoples that occupied the southern areas into which many Chinese people migrated during the Six Dynasties period (Hansen, 2015a, p. 166), a gap in knowledge which the research of the various case studies above has served to emphasize. As they left no written records, archaeological research would be especially valuable to elucidate their reaction to these migrations and the potential influence of these interactions on subsequent developments. The influx of steppe nomads from the north was also not limited to the area north of the Yangtze, as many Xiongnu served in the militaries of the southern states (Dien, 2007, p. 6). Finally, due largely to preservation and excavation biases resulting in a particular selection of available materials related to the materials in the dataset and the wider topics chosen for this thesis, the focus has been skewed largely toward the overland routes of the network. However, an equally rich and fascinating trade network existed which traded by sea, and which was indeed in many ways irrevocably connected to the overland routes. The section of the trade of luxury goods in

Chapter 3 highlighted this briefly, and showed that more research is needed in order to fully understand and do justice to this complexity. Though more difficult to pursue due to modern international issues of heritage in the oceans and the rate of preservation underwater, this remains a key avenue of research to pursue when it comes to the topics covered in this thesis which should not be forgotten.

Ultimately, it remains difficult to find sources concerning Silk Road trade during the period between the Han and Tang dynasties, and especially the role and impact of China on the network, as the above has also shown through being based at times on inferences and scattered references where it concerns this period and this angle, and having to rely in some instances on only single and/or non-peer reviewed sources. Most sources focus on outside influences on Chinese society. This is true across the board for the Han, Six Dynasties, and Sui and Tang periods, but the overall attention paid to this topic in research increases with each subsequent period. As this thesis has aimed to demonstrate, the field would benefit greatly from further excavations, wider publications and an application of modern techniques of analysis to existing finds, as well as further critical re-evaluations of accepted knowledge based on potentially outdated past interpretations. This thesis has shown that studying these dynasty-transcending developments within a framework of globalising world systems can help us to better understand such complex networks and how they influenced, responded to, and developed at times parallel to or separately from such political developments as the changing of a dynasty or the dissolution or unification of large imperial territories.

Abstract

The Tang (唐) dynasty (618 – 907 C.E.), and to a lesser extent the Sui (隋) dynasty (589 – 617 C.E.) that directly preceded it, is often considered to be China's premier 'Golden Age', the height of its cultural expression and the peak of its international trade. By contrast, the preceding period of disunity, often called the Six Dynasties period (六朝) (220 – 589 C.E.), stands out as a time of great chaos, uncertainty, and isolation in the minds of many both today and at the time of the Tang. A clear schism thus exists in our image of China in the first millennium C.E.. Yet this image comes to us mainly from written sources both ancient and modern, and is rarely independently analysed based on the archaeological remains of the periods. The aim of this thesis is to place archaeological material from China, which played a role in the ancient Silk Road trade network during the first millennium C.E., on a level with the historical sources, to find where they may coincide with or contradict each other, thus enriching our understanding of China's role in the world of the first millennium C.E.. In order to do so, the thesis poses the question whether this schism of China's active participation in international trade between the Six Dynasties and Tang periods can be traced in the archaeological evidence of trade from these periods, by studying a selection of Chinese archaeological material dating to the first millennium C.E. and analysing it through the lens of a world-systems and globalisation theoretical framework. The material used comes from Paul Ruitenbeek Art Gallery in Amsterdam, as well as several museum collections and academic and non-academic publications, as this is a topic not widely explored in academia. The Case Studies are organised into the themes of 'Trade and travel represented', 'Exported items: luxury and practicality', 'Currency on the Silk Roads', and 'Influential style and beauty'. Ultimately, based on the combination of historical context, previous research, the case studies, and the theoretical framework, the conclusion is reached that while significant changes can be observed in China's political situation and its involvement within the Silk Road trade network throughout the first millennium C.E., and these developments are at times closely influenced by each other, they are not intrinsically linked, as it was in fact the adaptability of the network and its various players that allowed the network to persist over such a long

period of time. Further research is needed to gain a true understanding of China's role in the Silk Road trade network during the first millennium C.E..

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Appendix A: Map of the Han dynasty

From Hansen, 2015a, p. 107.

The Han Empire (207 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.)

Regional kingdoms

Commanderies under direct administration

Frontiers of Western Han Empire
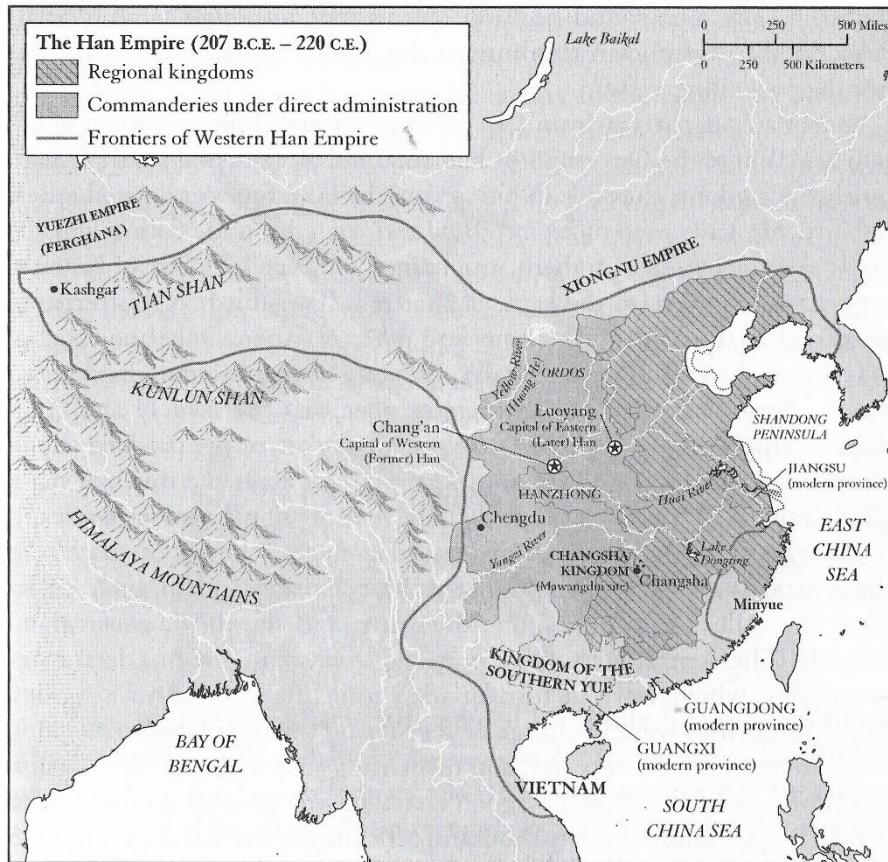
Appendix B: Map of the Six Dynasties period

From Hansen, 2015a, p. 142.

China Divided: The Six Dynasties Period (220 – 589)
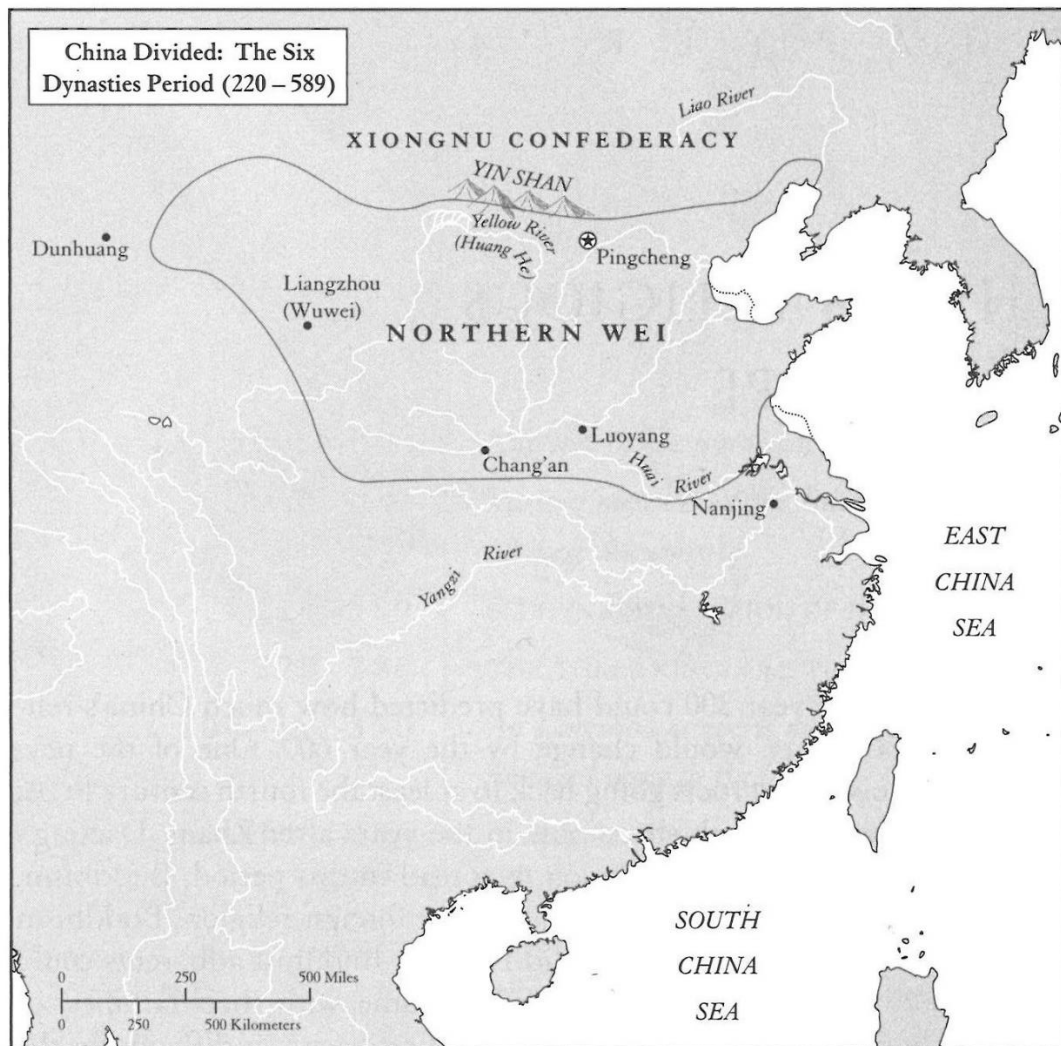
Appendix C: Map of the Sui and Tang dynasties

From Hansen, 2015a, p. 174.

Appendix D: Timeline of key events and dynasties

From Hansen (2015b, p. xiv-xv).

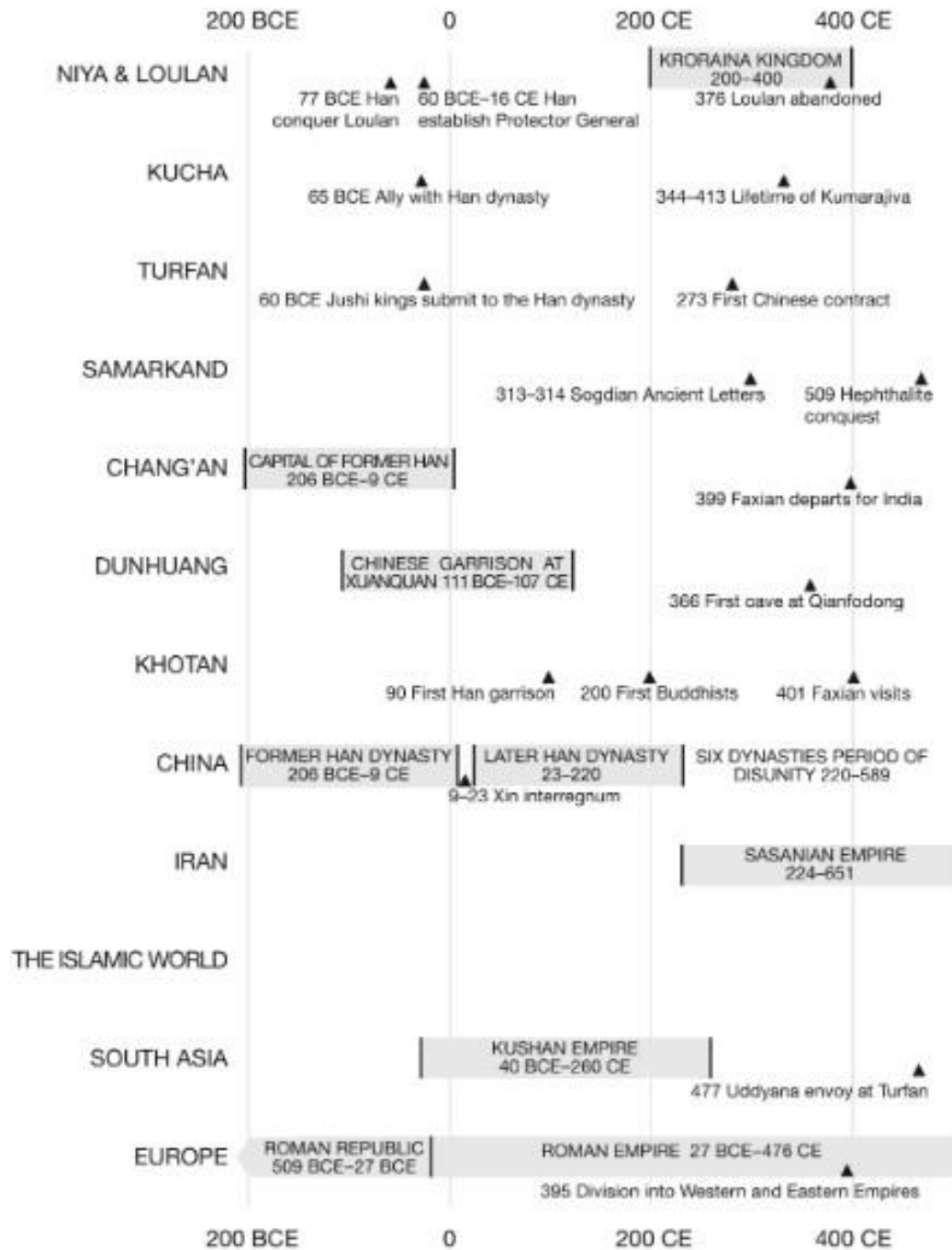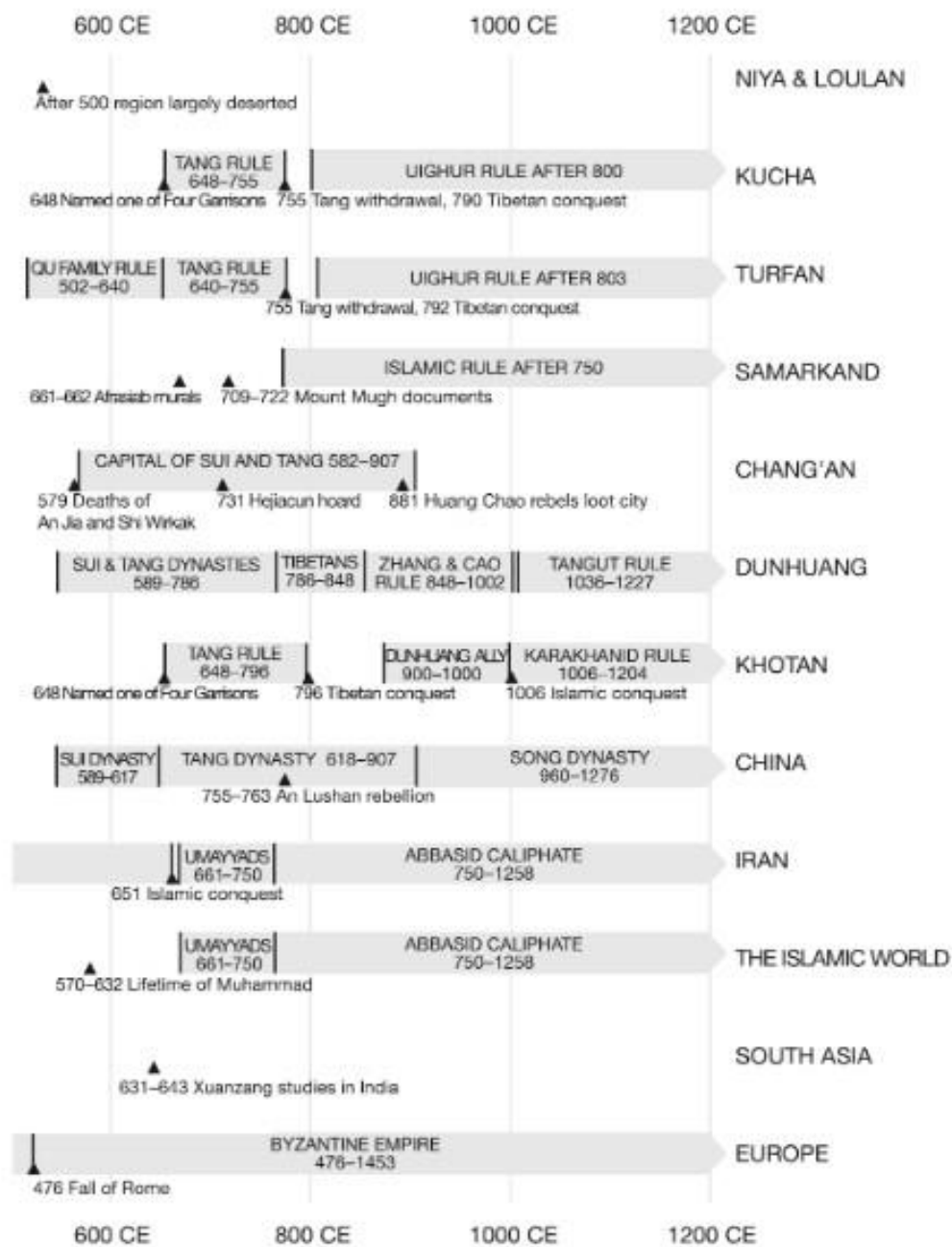|	600 CE	800 CE	1000 CE	1200 CE	
	▲ After 500 region largely deserted				NIYA & LOULAN
	TANG RULE 648–755	UIGHUR RULE AFTER 800			KUCHA
	648 Named one of Four Garrisons	755 Tang withdrawal, 790 Tibetan conquest			
	QU FAMILY RULE 502–640	TANG RULE 640–755	UIGHUR RULE AFTER 803		TURFAN
		755 Tang withdrawal, 792 Tibetan conquest			
		ISLAMIC RULE AFTER 750			SAMARKAND
	661–662 Afrasiab murals	709–722 Mount Mugh documents			
	CAPITAL OF SUI AND TANG 582–907				CHANG'AN
	579 Deaths of An Jia and Shi Wirkak	731 Hejiacun hoard	881 Huang Chao rebels loot city		
	SUI & TANG DYNASTIES 589–786	TIBETANS 786–848	ZHANG & CAO RULE 848–1002	TANGUT RULE 1036–1227	DUNHUANG
	TANG RULE 648–796		DUNHUANG ALLY 900–1000	KARAKHANID RULE 1006–1204	KHOTAN
	648 Named one of Four Garrisons	796 Tibetan conquest		1006 Islamic conquest	
	SUI DYNASTY 589–617	TANG DYNASTY 618–907	SONG DYNASTY 960–1276		CHINA
		755–763 An Lushan rebellion			
	UMAYYADS 661–750	ABBASID CALIPHATE 750–1258			IRAN
	651 Islamic conquest				
	UMAYYADS 661–750	ABBASID CALIPHATE 750–1258			THE ISLAMIC WORLD
	570–632 Lifetime of Muhammad				
					SOUTH ASIA
	631–643 Xuanzang studies in India				
	BYZANTINE EMPIRE 476–1453				EUROPE
	476 Fall of Rome				
	600 CE	800 CE	1000 CE	1200 CE	

Appendix E: Ruitenbeek object photos

All photos in this appendix were taken by Benjamin de Groot, commissioned by Dr.

M.E.J.J. van Aerde, at the courtesy of Paul Ruitenbeek.

Camel and rider

Woman in red on horseback

Musician on horseback

White-glazed woman on horseback

Packhorse or mule

Bronze mirror

Bronze cup