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**JUPING YANG (ED.), *ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS
AND THE SILK ROAD*,
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This book marks a new study on the ancient civilizations along the Silk Road prior to the 7th century A.D. The term “Silk Road” has, in modern scholarship, tended to refer to a network of trade routes that ran from East to West. But in this volume, Juping Yang (ed.), who also serves as the Director of the project “Hellenistic Civilizations and the Silk Road”, and his team pay special attention to the ancient civilizations that contributed to the opening and development of these routes. The book’s emphasis focuses on the Hellenistic Kingdoms of Asia Minor, Central Asia and South Asia, and the empires of Parthia, Rome, the Kushans and Sasanians. Special attention is also paid to Sogdiana’s role in fostering East-West relations. Trade and commerce serve as the unifying factor of the work, especially in terms of the role that China played. The book’s strength lies not only in its historical analysis of important literary sources on the topic, but it also incorporates recent archaeological discoveries made in China. What appears as yet another publication on the role of trade routes that appeared along the Silk Road is in actuality a work concentrating on conflict and interaction among these different civilizations. In addition, the work stresses the role played by the Scythians in fostering the exchange of goods, peoples and ideas as participants in this commercial highway.

The book is divided into seven chapters with each concentrating on a particular civilization or society and its role in the history of the Silk Road. Xiaoxiao Pang and Kebing Gao open the work with “The Hellenistic World and the Silk Road”, which concentrates primarily on the roles of the Hellenistic kingdoms

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in regional trade. Pang's investigation is based on case studies of several Alexandrian foundations situated in Central Asia and northwestern India. He argues that the independence of the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom and the later nomadic invasions in Central Asia exerted positive effects on commercial relationships in this area (47). Gao analyses the reasons why the maritime trade between Egypt and India failed to prosper during the Ptolemaic period. He concludes that warfare with the Seleucids and Rome led to an erosion of Egypt's maritime hegemony. Moreover, pervasive state involvement in overseas trade, such as imposing a high-income tax and a monopoly on imports and exports, dissuaded merchants from undertaking risky overseas ventures (53).

Sansan Wang's "The Parthian Empire and the Silk Road" discusses the cultural communication between the Parthian Empire and China. Wang argues that statues of lions with wings, used in tombs of Han Dynasty, originated from the image of griffin. He further supposes that the Parthians introduced the myth of griffin to China (95). The Parthian Empire also played a significant role in spreading Buddhism to China. For example, the Buddhist monk An Shigao (安世高) is the earliest known translator of Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Chinese, while his family name *An* indicates his origin from *Anxi* (安息), the Parthian Empire as it is called in the Chinese sources (102).

Xiaoxiao Pang's, "The Kushan Empire and the Silk Road", examines the establishment and development of Kushan cities in Central Asia and Northwest India. These cities were linked by land and water routes, and thus effected the direction of the Silk Road in the South Asian subcontinent. For example, interaction among various peoples is represented by elements of different cultures on Kushan coins, especially Buddhism. Pang explains that the role of the Kushan kings in promoting the spread of Buddhism does not mean that they were Buddhists. Rather, he proposes that royal support for Buddhism was propaganda intended to placate the Buddhist population and not a sign of religious devotion (184).

In chapter four, "The Roman Empire and the Silk Road", also written by Keping Gao, the author investigates when and how relations between China and Rome began. The Roman Empire may have been known by the Chinese as early as the 2nd century, because an embassy from "Ta-chin" (大秦) visited China with gifts to the Chinese emperor in 166 A.D. However, the gifts they brought were products from nearby lands such as India and Vietnam. Gao thus proposes that these so-called "ambassadors" were probably Roman merchants. Moreover, the name "Ta-chin", according to Gao, does not necessarily refer to the Roman Empire, but to its eastern provinces where prosperous cities were situated along the Silk Road (200).

In "The Sasanid Empire and the Silk Road", Yiming Li focuses on the relations between the Sasanid Empire and China. He first analyses the diplomatic exchanges, discussing at length several examples of Sasanid ambassadors who

travelled to China to forge an alliance against the Turks (284). The communication between the two countries is also reflected in the trade and commerce that passed between them, evidenced by the multiplicity of items from Persia found in Chinese tombs (296). This topic is further elaborated by Hamidreza Pasha Zanous in the appendix, “The Persians Along the Silk Road”, wherein he analyzes the Chinese account of the circumstances surrounding the flight of the Persian Prince Peroz III along with most of the imperial family, when he sought refuge in the Chinese imperial court following the Arabian conquest of Iran. He argues that two statues of foreign dignitaries at the Qianling Mausoleum of Shaanxi Province depict Sasanian princes, even though the inscriptions that had once accompanied them are now unreadable (343).

Xiaoyan Qi’s “Sogdiana and the Silk Road” focuses on Sogdians who served as middlemen and on those who, having migrated to China, became military officials in the Chinese government. These officials acted as liaisons between the Chinese government and Sogdian communities. Qi pays special attention to the coins of the Ikhshid Dynasty in the early 7th century, which were greatly influenced by the Chinese coins of “Kaiyuan Tongbao” (开元通宝). She proposes that the Ikhshid Dynasty issued these coins for political reasons: to win the support from China (366).

The book concludes with Longhai Zhang’s “The Scythians and the Steppe Silk Road”. Zhang maintains that the silk found in Europe before the Han Dynasty likely originated in the Eurasian Steppe Belt and was transported there by nomadic peoples, such as the Scythians. Based on information supplied by Herodotus, Zhang reconstructs the northern steppe routes from the Black Sea to China (397). The analysis rests chiefly on Scythian art displaying a variety of cultural influences, Greek, Near Eastern and Chinese. He argues that such products reveal a sophisticated cosmopolitanism that was part of the everyday life of these nomads.

This is an essential collection that offers new insights into our understanding of the Silk Road, in considerable measure due to the information gleaned from Chinese sources. It serves as essential reading for anyone interested in learning more about the history, culture, and trade of the Silk Road.