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THE SILK ROAD

The predominant Asian culture is Chinese. Its innovations in art and architecture and the richness of its religious and philosophical reflection make it one of the greatest civilizations.

In the second century BC, the Han Emperor sends his envoy, Zhang Qian, to form alliances with tribes. Preferring peace, China had chosen to establish trade routes. The main product was silk, which gives its name to this road.

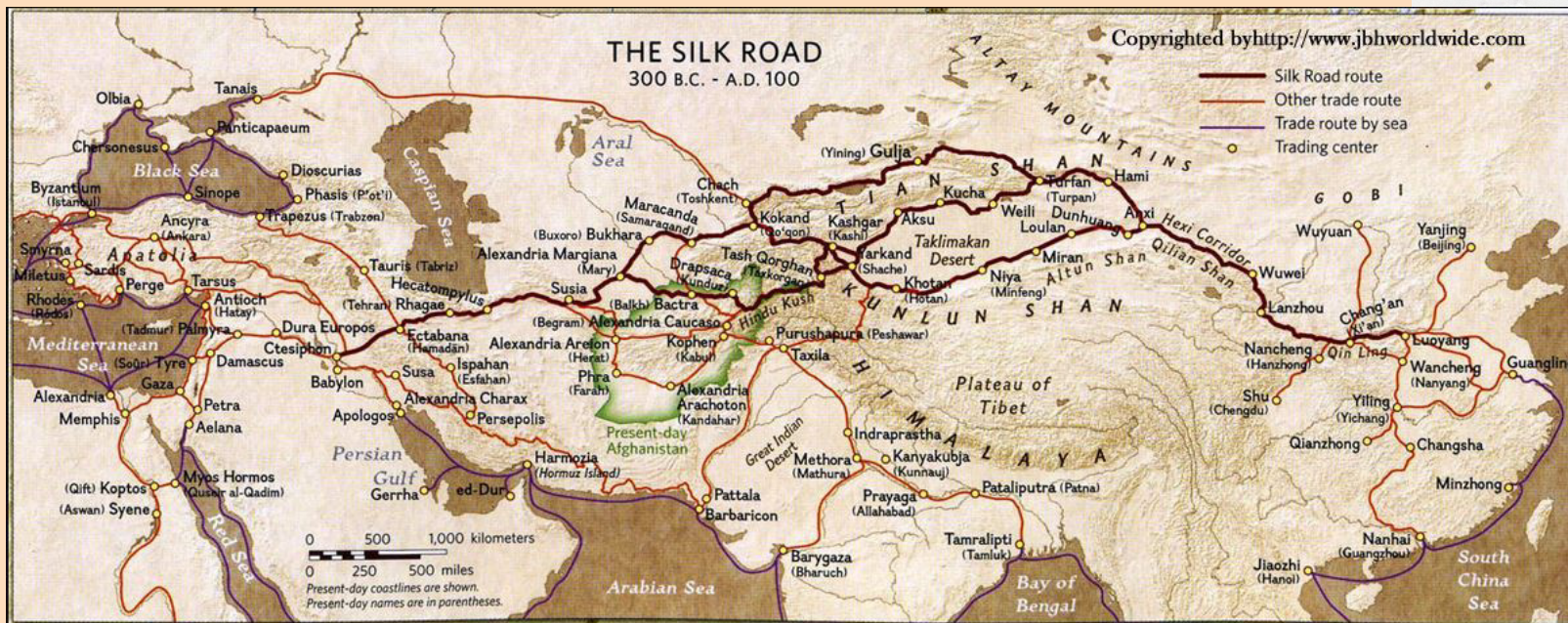
The manufacturing technology became a secret, well-kept secret whose disclosure was punishable by death. A luxury product, silk, reserved for the court and export, became a currency.

Camel caravans depart from Chang'an, the capital, to Central Asia. From Dunhuang, a road crossed the Pamir Mountains to the Kushana Empire in Bactria and reached India.

The northern route passed through the oasis of Turfan and ended in the Parthian Empire, from where luxury goods was transported to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea.

Silk arrived in Rome, where the aristocratic ladies have been waited for it.

Conversely, China has discovered new products: glass, jewelry, printed kinds cottons from Persia and India, etc...



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L. COURTEILLE CREATIONS
RCS 484 057 609

FRAGRANT CONCUBINE

Tomb of Xiang Fei, in memory of Iparhan, the Scented Concubine. Built in 1640



A figure in Chinese legend who was taken as a consort by the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735-1796) of the Qing dynasty in the 18th century. Although the stories about her are believed to be mythical.

A Kashgarian Muslim Uyghur girl named Iparhan («Musky Woman»). Even more remarkable than her beauty was the scent her body naturally produced; captivated, the emperor sought her as an Imperial Consort for his harem. She was given as a gift to the emperor and carefully escorted all the way to the imperial palace in Beijing, washing every day along the road in camel's milk to preserve her mysterious fragrance.

Upon her arrival at the imperial palace, the Fragrant Concubine was given a garden and a luxurious room as a sign of the Qianlong Emperor's devotion. Homesick and distraught, she remained disconsolate as the emperor made ever-increasing efforts to recreate her distant village, building her a mosque, miniature oasis and bazaar outside her windows in an effort to bring her happiness.

Finally she relented and came to love him when he sent messengers to Kashgar to return with a jujube tree bearing golden fruit and the Fragrant Concubine became the emperor's cherished consort until her death. An enduring symbol of national unity and reconciliation, her body was brought back to her home of Kashgar, where she is now entombed, in a procession of 120 bearers in a journey that took over three years.

“Concubines were historically the unmarried mistresses of powerful men. Much like courtesans in the West and usually young women of lower rank, often approved by the wife.

Their children could inherit and rule in the right circumstances. Qianlong had 42 concubines over his 60 year rule but many more women in his harem .

It just makes you realize what a difference a few hundred years can make to the prospects of women. Lydia often focuses on strong women in history, distilling the essence of their power into large, beautifully strange jewels.”

Melanie Grant



Fragrant Concubine Ring

18k gold - 26.85g, 4 diamonds 0.065 cts,
12 sapphires 0.12 cts, 8 apatites 9,8 cts,
4 aquamarines 5,55 cts,
4 cavansites 7,1 cts, email

JADE

Jade is a material that symbolizes the intimate alliance of aesthetics and religion within Chinese jewelry. Various philosophical and religious schools are attribute spiritual and moral virtues to jade.

Since prehistoric times, jade has been a natural mineral substance that has gained gem status.

It has been researched, harvested and fashioned to make tools, weapons, ornaments, many instruments and symbols of power used by many civilizations.



In China, the cutting of jade is a tradition that dates back around 6,000 years. The first jewels date from the Neolithic period (from 4000 to 2000 BC approx.). This material is indeed very difficult to work with because, unlike other stones, it does not split. To give it a smooth and round appearance, the craftsman has to spend long hours polishing it with an abrasive.

Held in high esteem by Chinese scholars and aristocrats, jade was not only a precious object: some of these stones were traditionally applied to the body to protect against harmful influences.



In the earrings (on the left image), Lydia Courteille associated the Crane with beans, which stands out, in the Chinese symbolic- prosperity, rebirth, happiness and fertility.

JADE BURIAL SUIT



Jade shroud for
Liu Xiu,
jade, gold et bronze, 182 cm.
© Museum of Hebei province

The jade shrouds is a ceremonial suit made of pieces of jade in which royal members in Han dynasty China were buried.

They form a set intended to preserve the dead in the afterlife.

The jade is supposed, by its magical properties, to protect the body of the deceased through the centuries.

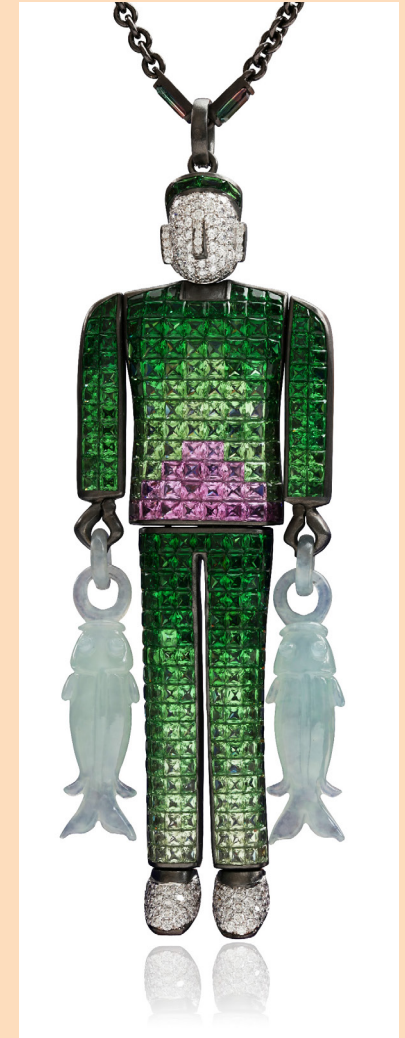
The pieces that make up these shrouds are mainly square or rectangular, fixed by threads passed through small holes at each corner.

The type of thread used depends on the status of the person buried, the Book of Later Han tells us - jade burial suits of emperors used gold thread; princes, princesses, dukes, and marquises, silver thread; sons or daughters of those given silver thread, copper thread; and lesser aristocrats, silk thread, with all others being forbidden to be buried in jade burial suits.

The complexity of the realization required several years and a large staff.

If Prince Liu Sheng and his wife had the privilege of the golden thread, another fallen prince, Liu Kuan, was not even entitled to his jade shroud.

Therefore the protocol was not always strictly followed, and, perhaps these costumes were more common among the aristocrats of the Han dynasty, but most of them disappeared, victims of looting.



Fisherman Holding Two Koi Carps Pendant

18k gold 52,12grs, watermelon tourmalines 0,58gr,
tsavorites 7,60grs, pink sapphires 3,96cts,
diamonds 1,43ct, jade 4,80grs,

MOGAO CAVES

The Mogao Caves hang like honeycombs in a beehive on a cliff in the Mingsha Hills, southeast of the center of Dunhuang, an oasis located at a religious and cultural crossroads on the Silk Road, in Gansu province.

They contain the world's richest collection of paintings, manuscripts and Buddhist statues.

Dug throughout over a millennium, spanning nine dynasties from the 4th to the 14th century, they bear witness to the most glorious period of Buddhist art.

Located in a tiny oasis nestled against the western slope of a steep valley, the caves are hidden from view until you are directly in front of them.

Almost 500 caves still in good condition contain more than 45,000 murals and 2,000 colored stucco sculptures (the rock of the caves being too sandy to be carved directly). Most of the caves linked together by balconies, walkways and corridors.



The predominant colors - green, blue, white, black and pink - are still vibrant although in areas the pigments have changed: oxidation is apparent in the vermilion reds which have turned to a chocolate brown.

Thanks to the desert climate of Taklamakan, the murals and sculptures have been well preserved for over 15 centuries.

These caves were places of worship of great importance on the Silk Road.

A local legend says that in 366 AD. BC, the Buddhist monk Lie Zun had a vision of a thousand Buddhas, and convinced a pilgrim on the Silk Road to build the first chapels.



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CHINESE GUARDIAN LIONS – FO

With increased trade during the Han dynasty and cultural exchanges through the Silk road, lions were introduced into China from the ancient states of Central Asia by peoples of Sogdiana and Samarkand.

The concept became popular in Chinese Buddhism, features a pair of highly stylized lions—often one male with a ball and one female with a cub—which were thought to protect the building from harmful spiritual influences and harmful people that might be a threat.

Fo lions are traditionally carved from decorative stone.

The lions are always presented in pairs, a manifestation of yin and yang, the female representing yin and the male yang.

Symbolically, the female lion protects those dwelling inside (the living soul within), while the male guards the structure (the external material elements).



Bracelet Lions de Fo

OR rhodié noir 18k - 86.91 grs.,
2 lions jades - 49 grs.,
20 tourmalines - 4.3 carats
52 pierres de lune - 71.75 carats
1 pierre de lune - 58 carat
168 tsavorites - 2.8 carats
195 saphirs - 3.53 carats
26 rubis - 0.63 carats
376 diamants blancs 3.17 carats

Golden Horde

The Mongol Empire was the largest in history, stretching from the Japan Sea to the Caspian Sea.

The Mongols left their native steppes under the leadership of Genghis Khan (1162-1227).

He succeeded in unifying and organizing the dispersed nomadic tribes of Mongolia, Manchuria and Siberia.

Afterwards he crossed the Gobi Desert to the south, completely destroying the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand in 1220.

Kublai Khan (1216-1294), the grandson of Genghis who completed the conquest of China in 1279 and founded the Yuan dynasty, fixing his capital in Beijing.

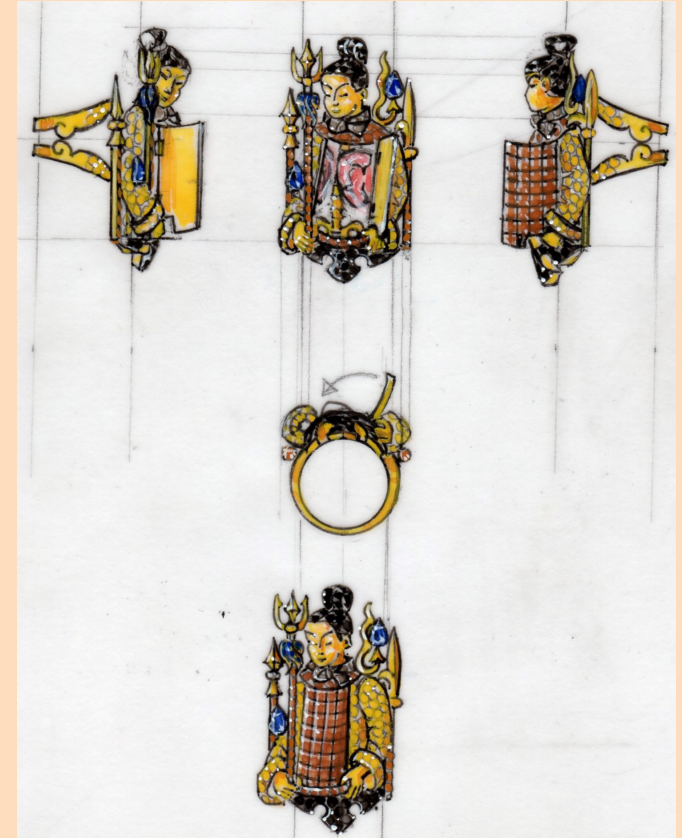
Since the Mongols controlled much of the territory of the ancient Silk Road, they reestablished land trade with Europe and a cosmopolite culture was born. Marco Polo's father and uncle were travelling through Asia and met Kublai Khan.

Marco Polo himself was to remain more than 17 years in the service of Kublai Khan. In 1368, Ming dynasty, had controlled the country.

Tamerlane (1336-1405), a descendant of Kublai Khan, was Tartarus, born near Samarkand.

He united the dispersed kingdoms of the Mongol Empire, invaded India and controlled a vast territory in Central Asia.

Babur, a descendant of Tamerlane, established the Mughal Empire of India in 1526 and is considered one of the most sophisticated the world has known.



TERRACOTTA ARMY

The eternal guard of the first emperor of China.

This terracotta army of 7,000 life-sized warriors was arranged in battalions and accompanied by 600 horses, 100 chariots and a staggering quantity of bows, arrows, spears and swords, which remained in perfect condition.

These figures, all facing east, were responsible for watching over Qin Shi Huangi, who died in 210 BCE.

Each warrior's head has been created with individual features, presumably from a live model, and the set offers an endless palette of expressions, ages and beards.

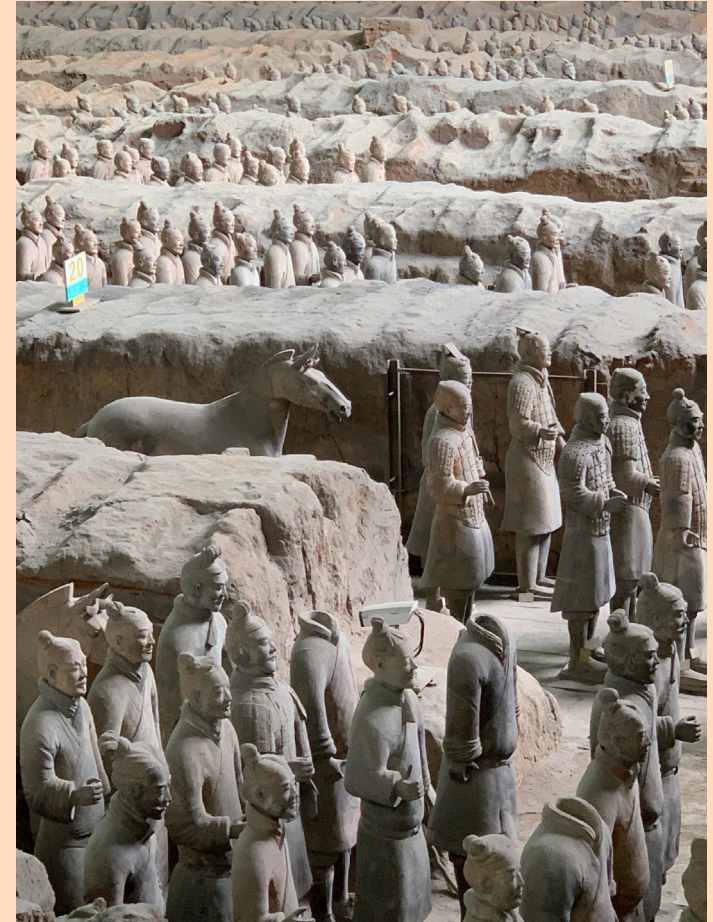
The cellars also contained jewelry and coins.

This army pays homage to the emperor and visionary leader.

Qin Shi Huangi managed to unify the Chinese regions - until then in conflict - and built the Great Wall.

Terracotta Army Necklace

Gold - 97.40g,
1 Jasper - 20.53g,
7 tanzanites - 3.48g,
sapphires 58.92 - carats,
brown diamonds 1.38 - carats,
black diamonds - 4.4 carats



THE TAKLAMAKAN DESERT

The Silk Road runs along with deserts. The Taklamakan Desert is in Southwest Xinjiang with the tormented relief and the impassable rocks that constitute a terrible furnace in summer.

The dangerous sandstorms - called Burans. Due to the very high temperature (sometimes 50 °C), the caravans were forced to travel at night in the moonlight.

With a bell around its neck, each camel is connected to the previous one by a rope. Strange voices had been heard in the desert.

Marco Polo had trusted that they were demons, evil spirits, who had talked to divert travelers. No one can survive in this hostile environment.

The strange sound is a natural din - blowing on the sands.



DINOSAUR GEMBONE

Dinosaur Bone used in the ring is known as gembone and has been described as one of the most rare and beautiful fossils in the world.

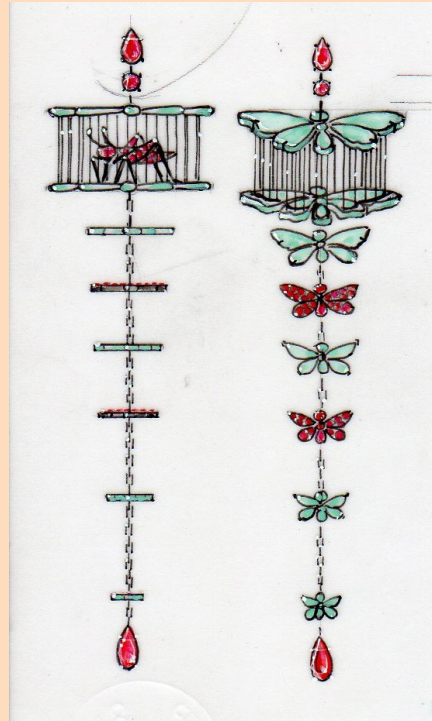
Specimens can be traced back to dinosaurs that roamed the earth during the late Jurassic Age around 150 million years ago.

The different colors and very unique pattern in gembones are caused by minerals such as chlorite, chromium, iron-oxide and manganese that enter the cells during formation.



Desert Fox Ring

Gold - 18k 25.50 grs dinosaur gembone 12.20 grs garnet - 11,65 carats
ruby - 4,8 carats
brown diamond-5.14 cts
diamond - 0.65 carats



Contact : larissa@lydiacourteille.com