



CITIES OF THE SILK ROAD

Saturday 5 September 2009, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

10.00 am **Registration**

10.20 am **Welcome**

10.30 – 11.10 **Discovering Damascus**
Ross Burns

Damascus is still viewed by many as exotic and challenging, masking the reality of an open and fascinating city that provides an immensely varied picture of the world's oldest continually inhabited capital. It was not until the eighteenth century that the first attempts were made to record accurately the city's classical and Islamic monuments.

Assumptions that the Arab Umayyad dynasty lacked the technical and artistic expertise to build a major monument like the Great Mosque of the Umayyads in Damascus continued however, to colour European understanding of the city's origins.

This lecture concentrates in particular on the Great Mosque of the Umayyads that sums up the city's eventful history and its strong associations with the worlds of classical Antiquity, Early Islam and the Arab Middle Ages.

11.10 – 11.50 **Memories from Tashkent: life between two cultures in the City of Stone**
Rae Bolotin

Rae Bolotin's family moved from Belarussia to Tashkent where she was born and grew up. Being of European background but living in a compound shared with a native Uzbek family allowed her to observe cultural contrasts in everyday living – food and customs, construction of housing, education, traditional crafts, division of labour, and political views. This presentation is about her personal recollections of the daily life and interaction between two very different cultures.

11.50 – 1.30 **Lunch**

1.30 – 2.10

Bukhara: microcosm of Central Asia
Leigh Mackay

Bukhara exemplifies both historical and contemporary Central Asia. From a key staging post on the Silk Road, it became a centre of medieval Islamic culture, an Emirate renowned for its wealth, brutal rulers and slave trading, and a 20th century site of rivalry between Islamic reformers and fundamentalists, Bolsheviks and liberal democrats. Today its mosques and madrassas, with their turquoise domes and patterned brickwork, not only attract tourists but also form a living museum where Bukharans live, work and pray.

2.10 – 2.50

Afternoon tea

2.50 – 3.30

Samarkand; the golden crossroads.
Heleanor Feltham

The most fabled city of the Silk Road, constantly renewed and rebuilt, Samarkand inspired conquerors, explorers and poets from Alexander and Tamerlane to James Elroy Flecker. Its architecture is primarily Timurid, and the main square, the Registan, flanked by mosques and madrassas is arguably amongst the most beautiful and impressive built environments. The architecture of the domed and arched necropolis glowing with multicoloured tiles is almost as impressive. Beyond the Timurid city lie the older ruins of Sogdian Afrasiab, and the local museum houses the splendid murals that show silk-clad merchants and their multinational contacts. Monks and merchants, travelers and traders and today, fascinated tourists have found at the end of their golden road, a place that always justifies the journey.

3.30 – 4.15

Kashgar: oasis city on China's old Silk Road
Dr Farid Bezhan

Kashgar is regarded by many visitors as the best-preserved example of an old Islamic town centre in Central Asia. This illustrated talk is presented from the perspective of Dr Bezhan's research into the cultural traditions and monuments of Kashgar, his contribution being a study of the Islamic history of Kashgar with special reference to the historical monuments of that region. The Kashgar project is an international project of the Monash Asia Institute working in collaboration with scholars in western China, in particular the Xinjiang Normal University (especially the Oasis Institute and the School of Cultural Studies) and the Institute of Archaeology in Urumqi, in association with Professor Marika Vicziany.



ABOVE: BEEHIVE-SHAPED GRAVES BUILT OF SUNDRIED MUDBRICKS IN A RURAL CEMETERY ON THE ROAD TO BESHKEREM, NEAR KASHGAR (COURTESY JOHN GOLLINGS PHOTOGRAPHY)

COVER: THE GREAT MOSQUE OF THE Umayyads, DAMASCUS – COURTYARD FROM THE NORTHERN ENTRANCE (IMAGE COURTESY ROSS BURNS)

REGISTRATION FORM

(Complete and post or fax with payment to address below)

CITIES OF THE SILK ROAD

SATURDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2009

TAASA/VisAsia/AGS/Powerhouse/NGV/QAG Members \$75

Non Members \$85

Full time Students with ID & Pensioners with proof (not Senior Card holders) \$30

Lunch not provided. No refunds available.

Please reserve _____ place(s) for:

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____ Amount \$ _____

Total Amount \$ _____

I enclose a cheque made payable to TAASA for \$ _____

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Card No: _____/_____/_____/_____/_____

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Please send payment to:

Judith Rutherford

189 Deepwater Road, Castle Cove, NSW 2069

Tel/fax: (02) 9417 2585

Email: judithrutherford@bigpond.com

SPEAKERS

Dr Farid Bezhani is an ARC Research Fellow at the Monash Asia Institute and a member of Monash's Kashgar team. He is the author of numerous books and articles about Persian language and literature, published in both English and Farsi. Dr Bezhani has an M. Phil from Delhi University and a PhD from Monash University. Born in Afghanistan, he arrived in Melbourne about ten years ago and has established a reputation as a leading scholar on Islam in Central Asia on the Kashgar team.

Rae Bolotin is an Australian sculptor whose artistic practice draws inspiration from, among other sources, her childhood in Uzbekistan. Rae's work has been exhibited in the Wynne Prize AGNSW, numerous times in Sculpture by the Sea, as well as in solo and group exhibitions in Australia and internationally. Her work is held in public and private collections.

Ross Burns retired in 2003 from the Australian Foreign Service, including a term as Ambassador to Syria from 1984 to 1987. Since his undergraduate days at Sydney University (history and archaeology), Ross has retained a keen interest in the history of the Middle East. He is the author of two books on the archaeology of Syria – 'Monuments of Syria' (I B Tauris London 1992 – recently re-published in a third edition) and 'Damascus – A History' (Routledge London 2005). He is currently undertaking a doctorate at Macquarie University on the cities of the Roman eastern provinces.

Heleanor Feltham has degrees from UNSW, University of Sydney and UTS (International Studies) specialising in Central Asian material culture. She tutored English at University of Sydney for two years before joining the Powerhouse Museum in the 1970s. A founding member of the Asian Arts Society of Australia she has published popular and academic articles on a variety of subjects, as well as developing education and visitor programs for the Museum and teaching adult education courses including the annual UNSW Summer School on the Silk Road.

Leigh Mackay is a former journalist with a strong interest in the history and culture of Central Asia. He has a BA in Linguistics and Philosophy from the University of Sydney and an MA in Islamic Studies from the University of New England. Leigh's interest in the region, and Islamic culture generally, began while travelling in Turkey and Afghanistan and living in Iran. He served for three years as a Southeast Asian correspondent for Australian Associated Press, based in Indonesia. Leigh still works in the media, and maintains regular contacts with sources in Uzbekistan and elsewhere in Central Asia. Leigh is currently President of the Oriental Rug Society of NSW.



The Asian Arts Society of Australia (TAASA) provides a forum for enthusiasts and experts to share their interest in, and pursue the study of, a wide range of arts from the entire Asian region

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A TAASA Seminar
Saturday 5 September 2009
Target Theatre
Powerhouse Museum

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