

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE VIVA! AND WORKING ON THE SILK ROADS

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Doeser, Merv, researcher, Senior Lecturer, Silk, Silk Road, Tim Williams, Turkmen people, Turkmenistan, Turkmenistan
Ministry of Culture, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, University College London, viva

My day started early, checking over my notes for a PhD viva I was examining this morning here at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London.

I don't need to go into much detail of the experience as the candidate has already posted his experience of the process below (see James Doeser's post "Pass – no corrections!"). It was an interesting thesis, and as James said, we had a lively discussion about the data gathered, the approaches and the outcomes. Sadly we failed to live up to his pre-viva fears that it could be "At worst ... an aggressive demolition of a new researcher by two senior academics with egos and reputations to protect." Damn – will try harder next time!

Now I'm back in the office working on a thematic study of the Silk Roads for ICOMOS ([International Council on Monuments & Sites](#)). It is a broad survey of the evidence for the Silk Roads between Asia and Europe through Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent. The aim of the study is to provide a platform to help the countries along the routes to develop a strategy for protecting, conserving and communicating this rich archaeology. In part it is hoped it will lead to multi-country nominations of sites (small as well as big) for the UNESCO World Heritage List, but mainly it is about sharing knowledge and experience amongst the countries. My role is to pull together existing information and synthesis this into a broad understanding of the routes and their impacts (great cities, the spread of religions, ideas and technologies, etc) – and the scale of diversity, change and adaption along the routes. It is a massive job (and a lot bigger than I'd planned it to be when I took the study on – but that is the fun of research, it takes you further and pushes you into new areas). The database behind the project has been assembled in a computer-based Geographic Information System (GIS), with a variety of maps, chronologies and information about places and empires. This will be distributed amongst the archaeologists working along the routes, but we also plan to make a lot of it available on the internet to everyone through Google Earth. I have a deadline for the draft report of the end of next week – so I need to get back to it!

However, some of the rest of my day will be spent organising things for an excavation, survey and site management project I run at [Ancient Merv](#), in Turkmenistan (Central Asia). This is a long-running project on one of the great Silk Roads cities – in the 10th century CE Merv was perhaps the third largest city in the world! Today it is a World Heritage Site and managed by the Turkmenistan Ministry of Culture, who are our partners on the project. I'll post up some info on the planning later today.

Tim Williams

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