

FOREWORD

It is both a pleasure and an honor to write this foreword for the new edition of Dr. Elfriede Regina Knauer's book, *The Camel's Load in Life and Death: Iconography and Ideology of Chinese Pottery Figurines from Han to Tang and Their Relevance to Trade along the Silk Routes* (henceforth *The Camel's Load*). This is a work of genius, a veritable classic. About fifteen years ago, I watched it grow from scattered notes that Kezia had taken during her far-flung travels, from observations made in countless museums, and from meticulous records of reading done in libraries too numerous to list.

This is a unique book, and only Kezia Knauer could have written it. Why? First, it draws on a variety of bodies of knowledge and expertise that are normally only commanded one at a time. Most prominently, seldom does a premier scholar of Western Classical art, archaeology, history, and literature display any interest in or ability to deal with Oriental antiquities. Mysteriously, Kezia possessed an affinity with the East (perhaps it was her childhood name, the one by which I am referring to her in the first part of this essay and near the end, that linked her to the Orient). Whatever it was, Kezia found herself drawn to the East and revelled in studying its diverse cultures.

Second, *The Camel's Load* could only have been written by someone whose mind is like a computer in storing vast amounts of data, but superior to a computer in being able to judge the relatedness of disparate facts and images. Kezia constantly astonished others by being able to draw upon an enormous quantity of knowledge about artifacts and texts, not merely to recite raw facts, but to draw them together and put them in meaningful, illuminating contexts.

Above all else, however, the uniqueness of *The Camel's Load* depends upon Kezia's sharp eye and penetrating intelligence. Kezia was distinguished by her ability to **see** things that escaped ordinary mortals. She could effortlessly catch the smallest, telling details and proceed to make sense of them in ways that left onlookers breathless. Although I could cite endless examples of Kezia's preternatural perceptivity, I shall mention only two instances from the latter part of her life.

The first is her masterful solution to the iconography of the "Queen Mother of the West," which depended upon her ability to look at numerous images in a completely novel fashion and in the light of her profound understanding of Kybele (Cybele). Kezia initially delivered this paper at a conference organized by me that was held in Rainey Auditorium in the University of Pennsylvania Museum on May 5 and 6, 2001. When she finished her presentation, the entire audience leaped to their feet and erupted in loud cheers and applause, a reaction which seldom occurs in academic settings. Almost effortlessly, but with enormous erudition and powerful analysis, Kezia solved a problem that had perplexed scholars for a century before she turned her attention to it. I later published that paper in *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World* (University of Hawaii Press, 2006; republished with *addenda* in: *Coats, Queens, and Cormorants*, 2009, 435-473). When my editor at the University of Hawaii Press took a glance at the manuscript, she told me that there was one paper in the volume that would have to be omitted. I asked her which one, and she told me that it was Kezia's. She said we'd never be able to get all the permissions for the illustrations. I told the editor that Kezia's monumental paper would be omitted only

'over my dead body,' and then spent five years tracking down all the permissions for the sixty-plus images in it (some were on postcards and brochures from obscure museums, others had changed hands several times, and so forth). I don't regret one minute of the time I spent in tracking down all those permissions.

The second instance of Kezia's stunning perceptivity that I would like to mention here is what I believe to be the last paper she wrote ("Leonardo da Vinci's Gioconda and the Yellow Shawl: Observations on Female Portraits in the Renaissance," *Raccolta Vinciana* 33 (Milan, 2009), 1-79. A short German version was published posthumously in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, „Ein Bildnis von himmlischer Schönheit," September 4, 2010.). Probably no painting on earth has been more intensely viewed and studied than the 'Mona Lisa', yet it was not until Kezia focused her gaze upon it that Leonardo's masterwork yielded up so many of its secrets. In this stupendously important, but low-keyed paper, Kezia comes to a startling conclusion, namely, that Gioconda's sartorial style, especially her yellow shawl, is that of 'courtesan'. In other words, she was a woman of pleasure (what 'Gioconda' implies). Incidentally, it is curious that yellow in Chinese culture is also the color of erotica (*huangse* [lit., "yellow color," i.e., "pornographic"]).

Many of Kezia's most outstanding articles have been collected in her big *Coats, Queens, and Cormorants: Selected Studies in Cultural Contact between East and West*, published in 2009 by AKANTHVS, who also brought out the first and second editions of *The Camel's Load*.

Enough of singing Kezia's praises more generally. I wish now to concentrate on the work at hand, namely, *The Camel's Load in Life and Death*. What makes this little book so special? I say "little," and Kezia – with her usual humility – used to characterize it that way too. Like all of her writings, however, it is so densely full of information and insight that, although it is only around 160 pages in length, it packs the weight of many books twice its length. There is a vast amount of valuable information in Kezia's book, including information that she herself discovered in Chinese museums and at other locations in and around China, which cannot be found in any Chinese or Japanese publication. Her book is a classic, and consequently it will have lasting value, regardless of what is written in the future in any language. Anyone who wants to do a good job of writing about camels on the Silk Road between the Han and the Tang dynasties, no matter what language they do it in, will be compelled to read her book.

In writing *The Camel's Load*, Kezia plumbed the relevant Western-language literature. She also dealt extensively with materials derived from East Asian literature and, above all, firmly based her findings on a nearly exhaustive coverage of the material evidence concerning her subject that was recovered from Chinese sites.

The Camel's Load is one of the most extraordinary books about the Silk Road that has ever been written. One might expect that an entire book concerning the burdens carried by camels would be a dull and dreary affair. Quite the contrary, far from being a mundane, plodding, pedestrian account, this small gem of outstanding scholarship affords an exciting and informative experience for anyone fortunate enough to get their hands on it. Not since Edward Schafer's *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of T'ang Exotics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1963) and related works has anyone written about the Central Asian nexus

between China and the West as entertainingly and with such precision. Indeed, *The Camel's Load* is unique in its combination of meticulous attention to details, sustained focus on revelatory minutiae, and sheer erudition. I do not know of any other study in any language with which *The Camel's Load* can be compared. In fact, it would probably have been virtually impossible for any other scholar than E.R. Knauer (hereafter ERK) to write such a book. First of all, ERK was trained as a classical (Greek and Roman) art historian with a strong philological and archaeological background. Secondly, she was a tireless investigator of library resources, no matter how obscure and difficult to obtain they may be. Third, she had an incredibly sharp and perceptive eye that could spot telling visual evidence that others fail to notice entirely. Fourth, she was a born ethnographer who was able to bring together data obtained from the observation of the cultures of recent and contemporary groups with historical materials. Fifth, ERK had an uncanny instinct for utilizing archaeological findings in illuminating ways. Sixth, she was an absolutely intrepid traveller and indefatigable museum goer who had literally journeyed to the ends of the earth in search of visual and textual documentation for her various research projects.

The Camel's Load is beautifully printed on glossy paper and employs an unusually clear type face. Included are 94 photographs, many of them in color that accurately reproduces the subtlest shades of the objects portrayed. Even the black and white photographs are extremely sharp and clearly convey the tones of the artifacts depicted. The photographs come from an astonishing variety of sources and are carefully labelled. A large number of those showing rare pieces and places were taken by the author herself.

Although *The Camel's Load* is a work of enormous learning, it brings the ancient and medieval Silk Road alive in a nearly breathtaking manner. Reading through it, one almost feels as though one is present while the medieval Central Asian grooms tie on the saddles, packboards, bags, masks, ewers, and what not that are heaped upon the backs and sides of the camels, while the yellowish brown beasts shuffle their feet in the sand, bray, and spit. The deft analytical lens of the author enables us to penetrate the symbolic world of the rugs, rabbits, tiger skins, demons and monsters, and other trappings on the camels. To browse through ERK's book is to be transported through time from the Han to the Tang (206 BC-AD 907 (with side trips back to the Bronze Age and up to the recent past) and through space from Chang'an to Rome.

In *The Camel's Load*, one becomes familiar with the economics of international trade, the transportation of silk and glass, weaving technology, the peculiarities of camels, the modus operandi of robbers, funerary practices, and countless other fascinating topics.

I simply cannot praise this marvelous book highly enough. While it is suffused with an ineffable charm seldom seen in academic works, at the same time it is a solid scholarly contribution, as is evident from the fact that on many pages the footnotes take up more space than the main text. This virtuoso volume is definitely worth whatever effort is necessary to obtain it. The reprinting of *The Camel's Load* in this new edition is most welcome, since this means that it will be available to many more readers than before.

Finally, Kezia's splendid book, most deservedly, was awarded a prize for "grande originalité" from the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* in Paris. This prize is, in fact, named after the great French Sinologist, Stanislas Julien, and is one of the most coveted and prestigious in the entire world of Chinese Studies. How extraordinary, yet altogether fitting, that this celebrated prize for Sinologists should have been awarded to a Classical scholar of Kezia's remarkable stature and wide-ranging purview!

What is perhaps most remarkable is that Kezia achieved this without knowing Chinese. This is all the more testimony to her unerring sense of how to pursue scholarly questions, her critical acumen, and her amazing ability to ask the right people and the right questions. If Kezia did not know something that she needed to know in order to bring one of her investigations to a good conclusion, she would make inquiries with colleagues in various specialties. That's how it was with Chinese, and I was honored from time to time by having Kezia ask me very precise, technical questions about Chinese language, culture, and history. Most of all, though, what enabled Kezia to make her breakthroughs was her ability to process a mass of visual data acquired from a wide variety of sources, and then to process that data in the light of a broad command of the development of Eurasian civilization from the Bronze Age to the Renaissance. Only Kezia could achieve such inspiring flights of imagination and discovery. I was fortunate to have been her friend and Sinological accomplice for more than two decades.

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