

Historic photographs of the Silk Road

Reference: 2019-10-ROY

Supervisor(s)	Dr Malini Roy (Head of Visual Arts – primary supervisor), Melodie Doumy (Curator, Chinese Collections)
Department, Location	Visual Arts - St Pancras, London
Start date/timeframe	Our preference would be to host the placement from January 2020-March 2020 although there can be some flexibility.
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent). For a part-time placement, the student would be required to spend a minimum of 3 days/week on site at the Library.
Remote-working	If needed, there would be scope for the student to be based off site for up to 2 days a week.

Context for placement
<p>The Visual Arts section of the British Library is responsible for developing, curating and promoting the Library's collection of prints, drawings, photographs and associated ephemera from the Asian region. This rich and diverse collection documents areas in South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal and Bhutan), and neighbouring countries and areas such as Iran, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and China during the 16th-20th centuries.</p> <p>Within this broad collection are numerous photographic images related to the Silk Road, a series of geographically, historically and economically important trade and migratory routes from China through to the Middle East. Many of these photographic images date from the late 19th century through into the 20th century and document archaeological sites.</p> <p>Through the British Library's partnership with the International Dunhuang Project (IDP), a selection of the Library's photographic collections relating to the Silk Road have been digitised and made available online through the International Dunhuang Project website. Yet in many cases these images have received only sporadic and unsystematic cataloguing in the British Library databases.</p> <p>As such, there is an opportunity for a placement student to undertake additional research into this diverse collection of photographs in order to cross reference those images that have been digitised with the metadata held by the International Dunhuang Project and the British Library Visual Arts department. We are keen to provide detailed catalogue entries for each photograph that has been digitised, both on the British Library and International Dunhuang Project databases. This means creating new records where these do not currently exist or enhancing existing records. This project will make these collections more accessible to researchers and other audiences, in the UK and internationally, and facilitate greater research into and engagement with this important region.</p> <p>Within the context of this project, the placement student would be able to research both the specific sites visualised in the images and the wider context of the Silk Road and international trade routes. The placement would also allow the student to gain an insight into the documentation of these routes during the 19th and 20th centuries and the history of the British Library collection.</p>

Expected tasks and outcomes
<p>The aim of the placement will be to identify those photographs that have been digitised by the International Dunhuang Project from the Visual Arts section of the British Library and undertake to create and/or enhance the Library's catalogue records related to these images.</p> <p>In the first instance the student will be tasked with identifying how many digital images from the Visual Arts section are held by the International Dunhuang Project and facilitate the transfer of these images from IDP to the Visual Arts hard drives. The placement will then shift to focus on creating and enhancing the relevant metadata for these images, undertaking primary and secondary research into them. Within this there is scope for the student to shape the project in line with their own research interests.</p> <p>Whilst the creation of descriptive metadata and identification of digitised material will be the primary focus of the placement, the student will also have the opportunity to author blog posts on their findings for both the British Library's <i>Asian and African Studies</i> blog and the <i>International Dunhuang Project</i> blogs. These blogs in turn can be used to create a collection guide that can be posted on the British</p>

Library website to assist users in accessing and using these collections. The student would also be encouraged to give a staff talk about their research.

Other potential activities, depending on timings, staff capacity and the interests of the student, would include working with the Library's marketing and social media teams to publicise images from the collection to a broader public audience through the Library's Twitter and Instagram accounts.

Training and experience expected to be gained by student through the placement

At the onset, the student will be given an overview of the British Library collections related to the Silk Road and the work of the International Dunhuang Project. This will situate the material that is the focus of the placement within the wider British Library collection. Practical training on cataloguing standards and how to use the Library's Archives and Manuscript cataloguing system (IAMS), as well as 4D, the database used by the International Dunhuang Project, will be given along with continued support on how to access and export data from these systems.

In addition the student will be advised on the handling and preservation of collection items by either the Preservation or Visual Arts team.

During the placement we would plan to arrange job shadowing with colleagues in the International Dunhuang Project, wider curatorial teams from the Asian and African Collections department and other colleagues relevant to the project. The student will be invited to departmental and section meetings in order to gain a wider understanding of the work of the department. The student would also be encouraged to attend relevant staff training events such as those provided by the Digital Scholarship and Training teams and the regular staff talks given as part of the Library's *21st Century Curators* series.

The student will also receive support and guidance in relation to writing the blogs for Asian and African Studies and the International Dunhuang Project as well as how to write the collection guide that will be posted on the British Library website.

The placement would be an excellent introduction for any PhD student with an interest in pursuing a curatorial career or further academic research into Silk Road studies, international history and/or photographic history. It is an excellent opportunity to put knowledge of the period and region to practical application and the placement would also give clear and demonstrable experience of collaboration within institutions and the management of metadata.

The placement will also give the student a practical experience regarding the issue of handling, preservation and digitisation of collection items within large cultural institutions. It will provide specialist knowledge of the systems and standards required for cataloguing and metadata in such institutions.

Throughout the placement, there will be opportunities for the student to meet other research fellows, placement students and collaborative doctoral researchers based at the Library.

Posts on the [Asian and African Studies](#) and [International Dunhuang Project](#) blog command an international and predominantly non-academic readership; contributing to this will enable the student to publicise their work to thousands of readers and will hone their skills in writing for popular audiences. There is also potential for the student to write an article and submit this for consideration by the peer-reviewed British Library [Journal](#) (or another academic publication).

Required knowledge and skills

The project would particularly suit someone with research interests in areas such World History, History of Art or the Silk Road, and who has an understanding or experience of research using archival materials and sources.

This is a training and development opportunity open to current PhD students only. It is not intended to lead to a permanent post at the Library. Please note that the Library is unable to provide a stipend for PhD research placements. Applicants must obtain the support of their PhD supervisor in advance and, as part of their process, consult their HEI to ascertain what funding is available to support them.

Application deadline: 5pm on Monday, **18 February 2019**. Information on how to apply is available on our website: <https://www.bl.uk/news/2019/january/phd-research-placements-2019>