

Einladung zum Gastvortrag

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Was There A Bamboo Route between the East and the West before Zhangqian's Arrival in Bactria?

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According to Sima Qian's (145-87 BC) *Historical Records*, upon returning from his first-mission to *xiyu*, the Western Regions in 126 BC, Zhang Qian (164-113 BC) reported to Emperor Wudi (r. 141-87 BC) that when he was in Balkh of Bactria, he saw bamboo sticks and cloth of Sichuan transported via India. He believed that in southwestern China, there was a trade route to Bactria, from Sichuan and Yunnan through Myanmar and India. Given the fact that early international trades were dominated primarily by exotic treasures and important local products and the journey between China, India and Bactria were long and arduous, to transport ordinary bamboo sticks was a perplexing phenomenon. For more than two thousand years, Zhang Qian's report has not received sufficient attention from scholars. Some modern scholars even questioned the credibility of his statement. However, the archaeological excavations in southwestern China have revealed a large number of bronze scepters related to bamboo or in shape of bamboo. Those archaeological evidences suggest that in the first millennium BC, from the region of Sichuan and Yunnan to its borders to northern Myanmar, there was a widespread belief associated with bamboo. Moreover, some archaeological finds in Bactria (today's northern Afghanistan) and Taxila (today's northwestern Pakistan) have also attested to their connections to bamboo. The material evidences seem to indicate that the bamboo sticks imported by Bactrian from Sichuan with arduous efforts might have contributed to their beliefs. The scepters made of bamboo were used for sacrificing for and communicating with gods, or symbolizing identity and status. What is more, no later than the 2nd century BC, there was already a trade route between Yunnan and the South Asian subcontinent, a "bamboo route" before Zhang Qian travelled across the Western Regions.