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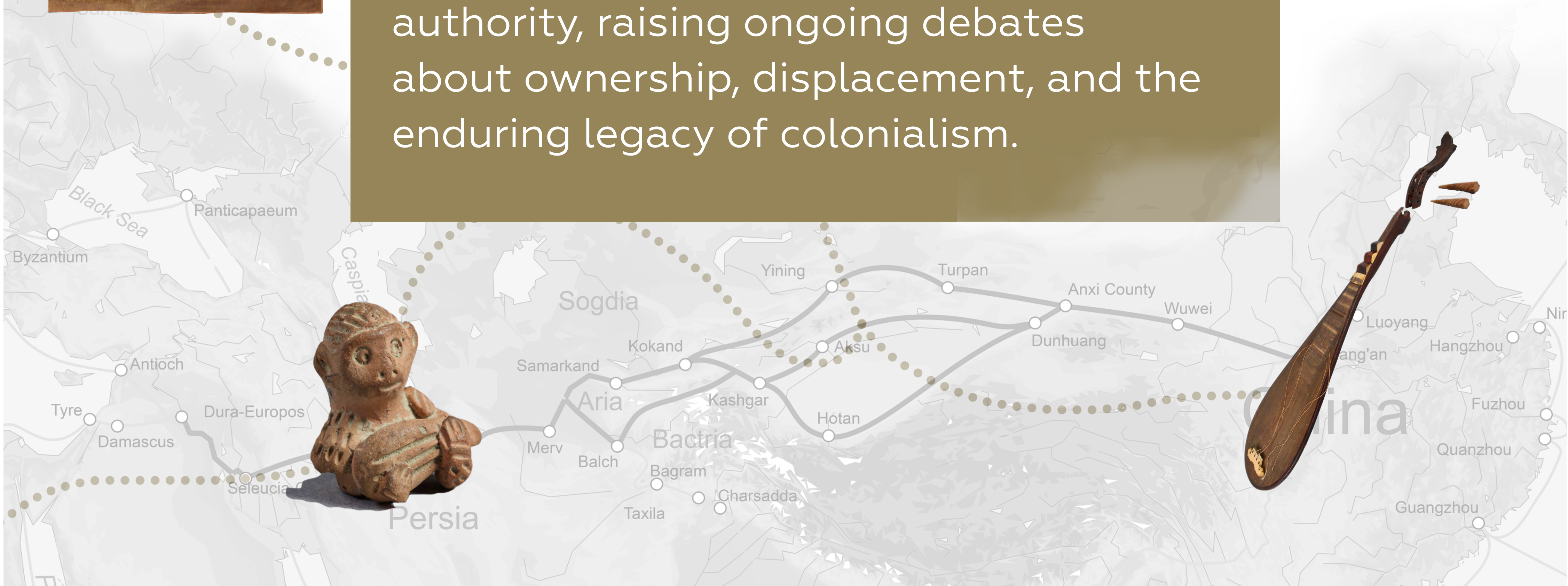
Unseen Notes

A Fragment's Stories



The Silk Road was a vast trade network that connected the East and West. In the 3rd century, it enabled a dynamic exchange of goods, ideas, and art across regions. This lute from Niya, an ancient oasis town in China, reflects the rich cultural intermingling through its collective design and shared musical traditions that travelled along the Silk Road.

The lute, collected by British-Hungarian archaeologist Aurel Stein in 1907 and housed in the British Museum, reflects the entanglement of collecting, colonialism, and power during the British imperial era. Figures like Stein pursued the prestige of imperial supremacy—often without local consent—treating excavated artefacts as trophies. Such expeditions enabled the large-scale removal of cultural heritage and reinforced institutional authority, raising ongoing debates about ownership, displacement, and the enduring legacy of colonialism.



The neck of a wooden lute with three remaining tuning pegs with gut strings and fret bars. The body, supposed to be pear-shaped, is now missing over time. Similar to lutes seen in ancient Chinese murals and carvings from the Gandhara region, it reflects cultural links across regions through the Silk Road and may be the earliest known pear-shaped lute.

Lute Neck

Niya, Xinjiang, China

AD 200-300

Carved wood, Gut strings

Field Collection by Sir Marc Aurel Stein

1907,1111.90

Why is this lute here and why only a fragment?

Such questions whisper to us when we meet unfamiliar objects in museums. How might we let them matter to us? Try looking beyond what remains.

Perhaps the maker hummed a tune it would one day sing. Perhaps their hands carried quiet hopes, or small, unspoken worries. Who might have drawn music from its strings?

Pause..... Let this fragment drift into your own story — a memory, a feeling, or the face of someone you remember.

THE LUTE'S SECRET STORY..

children's worksheet. Suitable for 5-8 yrs

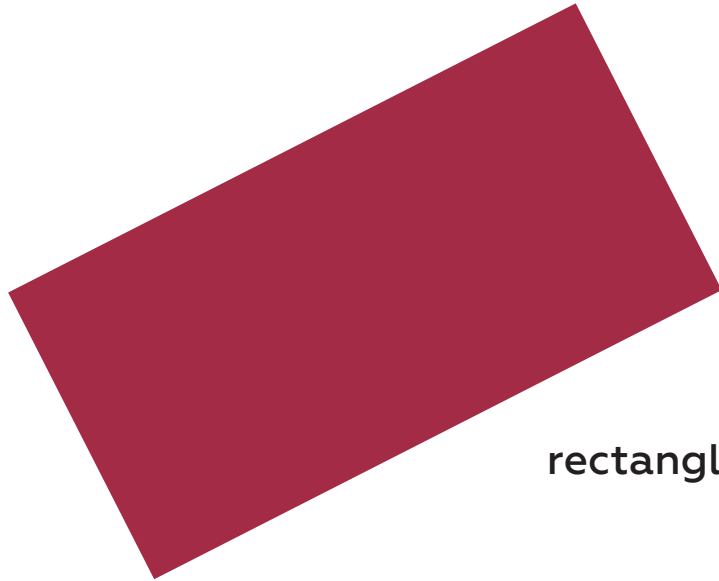
Bongo the monkey is looking for a shiny new lute to play music on. He is travelling along the Silk Roads a very, very old path where people long ago traded treasures. Can you help Bongo find his new lute?



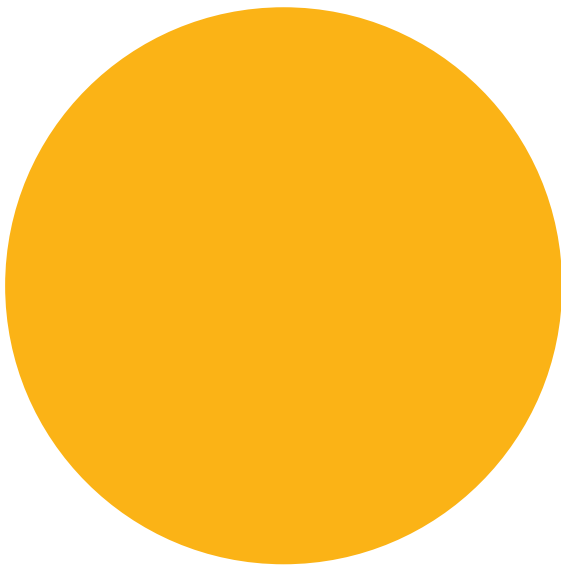
Here is Bongo's lute!
Look carefully at it.
What shape do you think this lute is?



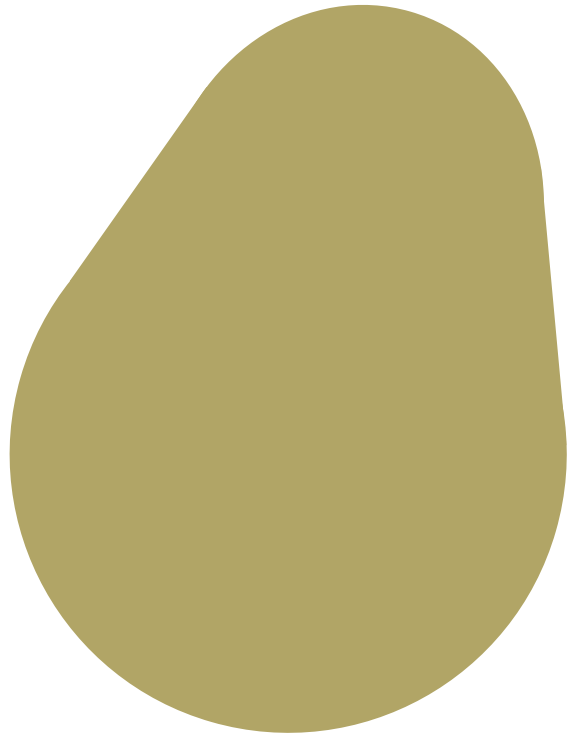
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rectangle



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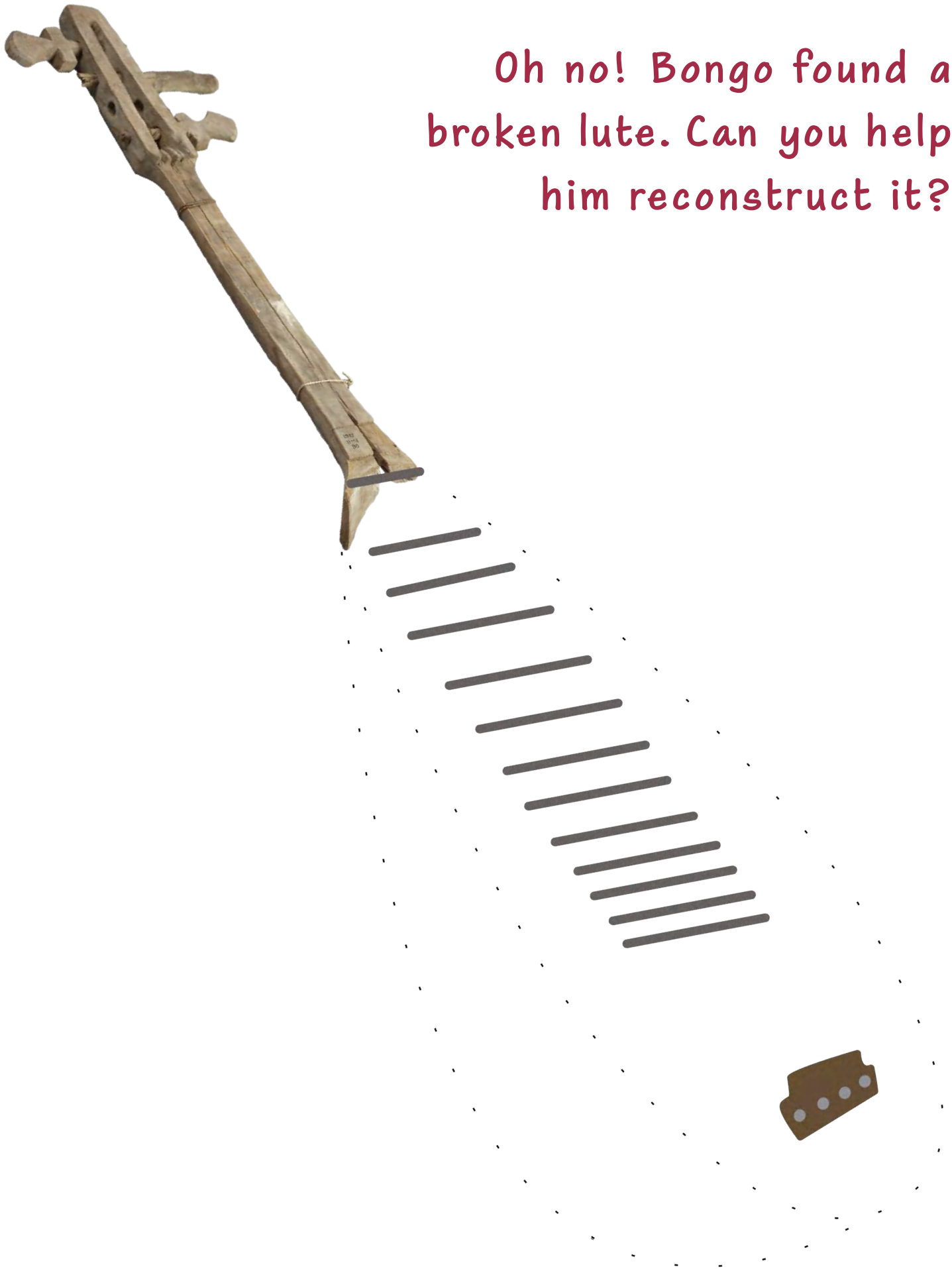


pear

The lute comes from Niya, a small town in China! Can you help Bongo find the way to Niya and get the lute?



Oh no! Bongo found a
broken lute. Can you help
him reconstruct it?



Who do you think played this lute long ago? What kind of music do you think they played? was it soft and gentle, or loud and happy?

Now lets draw the person playing the lute!

Thank you for helping Bongo and Bakku!
You've coloured, guessed, travelled, and
imagined just like a real museum explorer.
Now you know about the lute and where it
comes from.

**WHAT
TREASURES DO
YOU WANT TO
DISCOVER NEXT
TIME?**

