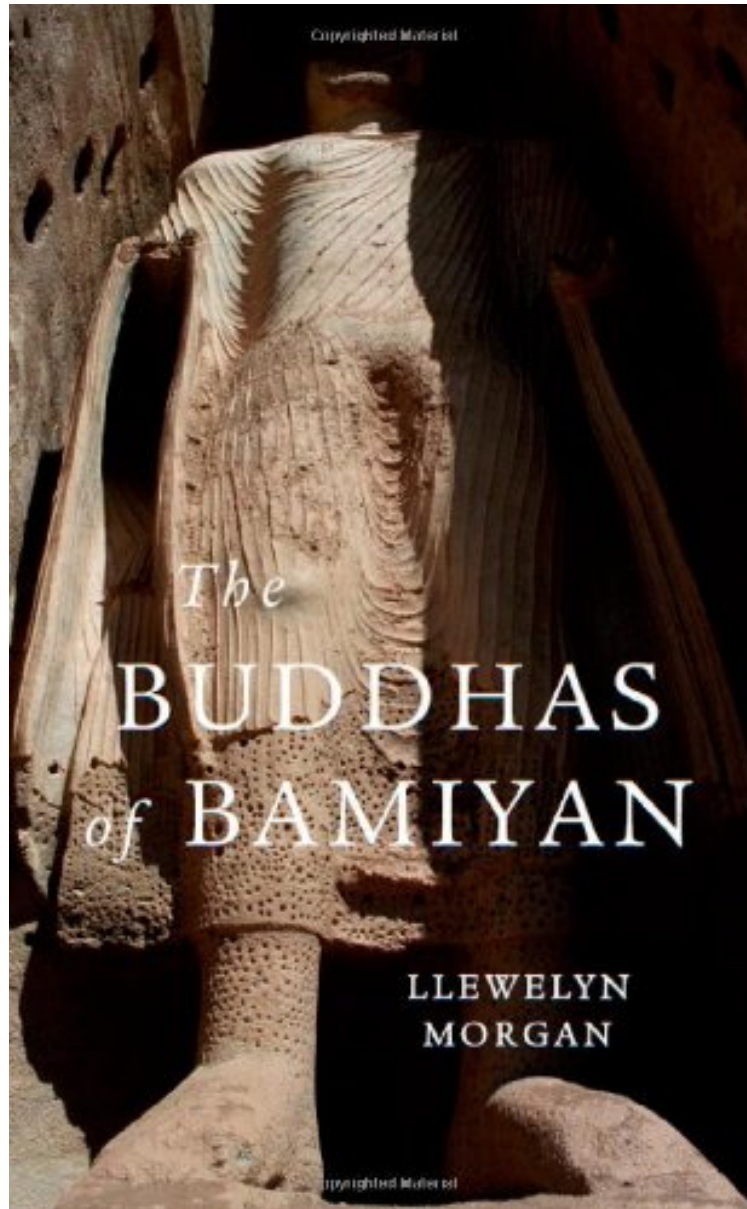


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The Buddhas of Bamiyan (Wonders of the World)

Llewelyn Morgan

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Llewelyn Morgan : The Buddhas of Bamiyan (Wonders of the World) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Buddhas of Bamiyan (Wonders of the World):

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. One StarBy keehongnot much of visual aide.5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful cultural/historical accountBy Prof. Christof KochWonderful cultural/historical

account of the two colossal standing figures of Buddha in the Hindu Kush - along the Silk Road - in Afghanistan. These monumental statues, 53 and 35 meters high, were hewn directly from sandstone cliffs in the 6th century CE and covered with stucco. Admired and written about by Chinese, Indian, Islamist and European travelers throughout the centuries, both statues were dynamited by the zealot Taliban in 2001. The author does an outstanding job of analyzing the reception of travellers from many distinct cultures to these statues - the biggest in the world - spending a lot of time on the French and the British spies, soldiers and classicists (often the same) around the time of the first Anglo-Afghan war in 1840 and their misguided search for roots of Alexander the Great ("Europe's favorite psychopath" in the author's memorable phrase). Ironically, the two empty shells left in the cliffside following their wanton destruction are, in some sense, more authentic Buddhist monuments than any physical statues. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great intro to the giant Buddhas By P. Stern Excellent introduction -- concise, accessible, scholarly and information-packed, deeply sympathetic to its subject without falling prey to romanticism. Highly recommended! I just wish I had been able to see them

For 1,400 years, two colossal figures of the Buddha overlooked the fertile Bamiyan Valley on the Silk Road in Afghanistan. Witness to a melting pot of passing monks, merchants, and armies, the Buddhas embodied the intersection of East and West, and their destruction by the Taliban in 2001 provoked international outrage. Llewelyn Morgan excavates the layers of meaning these vanished wonders hold for a fractured Afghanistan. Carved in the sixth and seventh centuries, the Buddhas represented a confluence of religious and artistic traditions from India, China, Central Asia, and Iran, and even an echo of Greek influence brought by Alexander the Great's armies. By the time Genghis Khan destroyed the town of Bamiyan six centuries later, Islam had replaced Buddhism as the local religion, and the Buddhas were celebrated as wonders of the Islamic world. Not until the nineteenth century did these figures come to the attention of Westerners. That is also the historical moment when the ground was laid for many of Afghanistan's current problems, including the rise of the Taliban and the oppression of the Hazara people of Bamiyan. In a strange twist, the Hazaras' descendants of the conquering Mongol hordes who stormed Bamiyan in the thirteenth century had come to venerate the Buddhas that once dominated their valley as symbols of their very different religious identity. Incorporating the voices of the holy men, adventurers, and hostages throughout history who set eyes on the Bamiyan Buddhas, Morgan tells the history of this region of paradox and heartache.

Llewelyn Morgan's exquisite story telling brought me back to the 'peaceful valley' and the magnificent Buddhas of Bamiyan. Written with great authority and affection, this entrancing book ensures their rich history and meaning will not be lost. (Lyse Doucet, BBC) In March 2001, [the Buddhas of Bamiyan] were dynamited and demolished, on the orders of Mullah Omar, the spiritual leader of the Taliban... The excuse was that they were idols, but the rest of the Taliban didn't exactly support the order. It was not an Islamic act. There were resentful claims and justifications from Omar's people that the West had never paid attention to Muslims... The richly enjoyable Oxford lecturer Llewelyn Morgan takes all of those rationalizations into consideration, but goes much, much further, mostly back in time, to unearth the practically schizophrenic thousand-year-old personalities of the pair of Buddhas, and how Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Chinese, Mongols, Hazaras, Englishmen, Hindus, Persians, and even the Greeks have hacked at them, and chiseled into them a piece of themselves. Always entertaining and never too academic, Morgan has done what no others have been able to do, including UNESCO, Japan, and Switzerland, who have all pledged to rebuild the Buddhas. He brings them to life, again, and let them tell their tales, still etched in stone, words in air. (Jimmy So Daily Beast 2012-05-29) Morgan expertly traces the history of the once impressive sixth-century Buddha statues of Bamiyan, Afghanistan through ancient accounts such as those of the well-traveled seventh-century Chinese monk Xuanzang, 19th-century writings by European explorers and soldiers, and video footage of the statues' destruction by Taliban leaders in March 2001. The Buddhas' ghostly absence from their still-remaining niches (the statues were 38 and 55 meters in height respectively) serves as a sober reminder of a cultural heritage now lost. Morgan argues that the styles evident in the statues were a mixture of many cultures (Greek, Indian, Chinese) and that every culture could see something of its own story in them... This work does a worthy job of telling their story and outlining the distinct history of the region. It will serve as an informative and enjoyable introduction to the topic for the lay reader. (Brian Renvall Library Journal 2012-08-01) About the Author Llewelyn Morgan is University Lecturer in Classical Language and Literature at the University of Oxford.