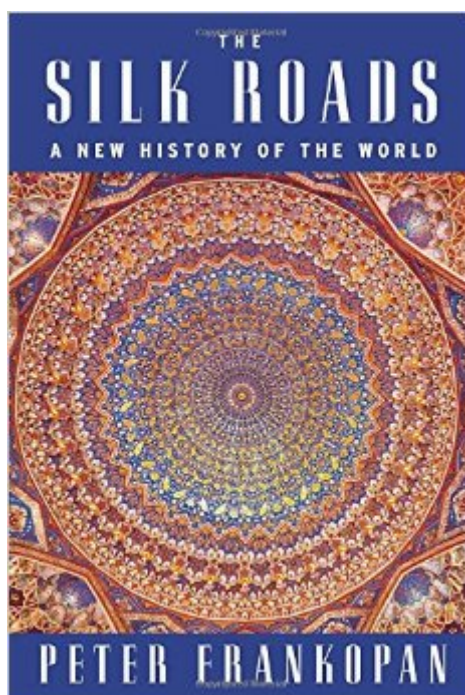


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The Silk Roads: A New History Of The World



Synopsis

“This is history on a grand scale, with a sweep and ambition that is rare | A proper historical epic of dazzling range and achievement.” —William Dalrymple, *The Guardian* “The epic history of the crossroads of the world—the meeting place of East and West and the birthplace of civilization. It was on the Silk Roads that East and West first encountered each other through trade and conquest, leading to the spread of ideas, cultures and religions. From the rise and fall of empires to the spread of Buddhism and the advent of Christianity and Islam, right up to the great wars of the twentieth century—this book shows how the fate of the West has always been inextricably linked to the East. Peter Frankopan realigns our understanding of the world, pointing us eastward. He vividly re-creates the emergence of the first cities in Mesopotamia and the birth of empires in Persia, Rome and Constantinople, as well as the depredations by the Mongols, the transmission of the Black Death and the violent struggles over Western imperialism. Throughout the millennia, it was the appetite for foreign goods that brought East and West together, driving economies and the growth of nations. From the Middle East and its political instability to China and its economic rise, the vast region stretching eastward from the Balkans across the steppe and South Asia has been thrust into the global spotlight in recent years. Frankopan teaches us that to understand what is at stake for the cities and nations built on these intricate trade routes, we must first understand their astounding pasts. Far more than a history of the Silk Roads, this book is truly a revelatory new history of the world, promising to destabilize notions of where we come from and where we are headed next.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“The Silk Roads” is a wonderful invigorating work of history. It is directed to the general reader rather than the specialist. I found it be absolutely riveting. The essence of the book is that, in the West, our history is viewed through a very narrow lense. Schools teach its students of the Roman Empire, the subsequent Dark Ages, the Norman conquest in 1066, Henry VIII and the Tudors, the American War of Independence, the Industrial Revolution and the First and Second World Wars. The vast bulk of a map of the world from western Europe to China is passed over very quickly. With “The Silk Roads”, Peter Frankopan has attempted to redress this imbalance. As the author states: “For centuries before the early modern era, the intellectual centres of excellence of the world, the Oxfords and Cambridges, the Harvards and Yales, were not located in Europe or the west, but in Baghdad, and Balkh, Bukhara and Samarkand”. Moreover, Frankopan gives the reader a perspective on the rise of Mesopotamia, Alexander the Great, the rise of Christianity in the eastern Roman Empire and then the subsequent rise of Islam throughout much of Asia. He then proceeds to discuss the Crusades, the rise of Genghis Khan and his mighty Mongol Empire and then the rise of China more specifically. He concludes by bringing the book up to the present day with the rise of Europe and the USA before suggesting that there is a reorienting of history underway again. In other words: “we are witnessing the birthing pains of a region that once dominated the intellectual, cultural and economic landscape and which is now re-emerging. We are seeing the signs of the world’s centre of gravity shifting back to where it lay for millennia”. Whether you agree or not with Peter Frankopan’s conclusions, the book remains a tour-de-force. Thoroughly recommended.

Expansive and informative for all who have not had the privilege of Central Asian travel, this book leaves me with some anguish. First, the joy of the read. The author’s depth of knowledge and resource access, coupled with his polyglot skills, weave a centuries long tale of intrigue across a region of the world little known or travelled today. The endnotes are extensive, if somewhat dated. He has the ability to enliven each decade’s heroes and villains. As a history aficionado and world traveler, I am grateful for his bringing to life the real world, and the historical world, of Central Asia. It has been little understood in the West - or the East. Now the hard part. The Islamic world of the 8th through 16th centuries was one of humanity’s global centers. This history should be better understood, in light of its achievements and of today’s relevance. Yet, the author serves this world as its hagiographer. Apologist is too strong a word, certainly. The endless cycle of hatred and

violence between Shi'a and Sunni within this center of gravity during this time is passed over in one brief paragraph. The Councils of Nicaea and those that followed are described in excruciating detail. The story of the European debacle of the same time is repeatedly narrated, engrossing the reader in its internecine religious wars. The Asian steppe peoples' incursions of the 12th through 14th centuries are described too often as an enlightened event for all. Piles of skulls and cities entirely wiped off the face of the earth are ignored in favor of the administrative advantages of Mongol rule. Horsemanship is ignored in favor of bettering western siege towers. India subcontinent history, certainly as important as European, fairs poorly at best in this vast chronicle. Chinese history is ancillary to the main event. A secondary theme is economics. All trade is based upon 'luxury goods' in demand by voracious Asian and European rulers. Information is 'quickly transmitted' across the sands, mountains and rivers - this when 30 miles a day was the fastest a horse or man could travel. Decisions described by scholarly journals as economics based are ascertained as truth, often without reference. This is surprising given the plethora of multi-linguistic sources. Religion and money dictate virtually all decisions made over 3,000 years of history. I would suggest this is too myopic a view. This book would appear to be designed to the glory of Islam, its history and its advantage to all whom came in contact. Lesser peoples and religions are scorned. Animisities within African, European, Asian and Indian cultures flow for pages. Islam is simply a series of improvements upon past glorious battles and architecture. I have visited virtually every city and region described herein. The peace of Islam today is one of absolute submission - the real definition of the word Islam: submission. Other books in the vein of Central Asia would include The Poison King, Balthazar's Odyssey, The Ornament of the World, The Emergence of Modern Islam, Chasing the Sea, The Shield of Achilles and best, Millennium by Felipe Fernandez-Armesto. Would love to rate it higher, but the perverse noise against non-Islamic culture and societies is bothersome. The ridicule of Western advances coupled to dictatorial domination and horrific tortures could just as easily describe Islamic, Indian, Chinese or Russian worlds. As for his Palestinian views, well, they are biased, leave it at that... Can't wait to enjoy My Fair Lady, his Mediterranean yacht for charter...

I was very disappointed after reading all the wonderful reviews. Maybe they are reading a different book? I had assumed we would be learning about the history of the silk roads and the many dynasties that rose and fell along the route - the Songdians, the cities of the Tamir Basin for example. I thought this would be an Asian centric book showing the silk roads impact on Han Dynasty China and the steps that had to be taken to keep the route secure. I thought we would learn of the earliest use of the silk road in trade between Sumeria and what is now northern

Afganistan based on the early trade in Lapis and how this led to the later creation of Faience. Or perhaps how the silk road brought Buddhism to the west and mixed the artistic sense of the descendants of Alexander's army with the Central Asian Buddhist cave dwellers. I was very wrong in my expectations. Maybe I am missing something but this is still a Western-centric view, centered on Byzantium and medieval Europe. The first steppe dwellers we meet in any depth are the Mongols, who by that time, are a thousand years later than the early steppe dwellers who so profoundly influenced world culture both East and West. This book spends most of its time in detailing the trade and fortunes of the West instead of focusing on the various kingdoms of the silk road. What is going on here? How could all the reviewers have missed this? This book is not as advertised a new history of the world, but rather a view of the economic impact of trade on the western world. For example, how does Columbus come to bear on the silk road? We read here about his expedition but no analysis relating to the silk road at all. That is one of many examples to show that the author does not seem to have much interest in writing about the silk road, but rather about how luxury good trade impacts the western world. This is my first book review although I have read dozens that I may not like. I am only writing this because it is not that I do not like what is written, but rather it is not what the book title implies and I want to give fair warning to others who may be like me in their interests.

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