



The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia

Frances Wood

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The Silk Road, a series of ancient trade routes stretching across Central Asia to Europe, evokes exotic images of camel trains laden with bales of fine Chinese silk, spices, and perfume, of desert oases surrounded by snow-capped mountains, of bustling markets thronging with travellers buying and selling grapes, coriander, Baltic amber, and Mediterranean coral. Along this route, silks were sent from China to ancient Rome; princesses were dispatched in marriage alliances across the deserts; bandits and thieves launched attacks throughout history.

Covering more than 5,000 years, this book, lavishly illustrated with photographs, manuscripts, and paintings from the collections of the British Library and other museums worldwide, presents an overall picture of the history and cultures of the Silk Road. It also contains many previously unpublished photographs by the great explorers Stein, Hedin, and Mannerheim.

More than just a trade route, the Silk Road witnessed the movement of cultural influences. Frances Wood traces the story of the civilizations and ideas that flourished and moved along its vast geographical expanse. Indian Buddhism was carried into China on the Silk Road, initiating a long history of pilgrimages along the lonely desert routes; Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam also made their way eastwards along its route.

The nineteenth century saw a new interest in Central Asia and the Silk Road, as Russia and Britain vied for power on the frontiers of Afghanistan. A new breed of explorer, part archaeologist, part cartographer, part spy, was seen on the Silk Road, while some of the ancient cities, long buried in sand-blown dunes, began to give up their secrets. This book brings the history of the Silk Road alive--from its beginnings to the present day, revealing a rich history still in the making.

The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia Details

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From Reader Review The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia for online ebook

Bob says

This book has a lot of very lovely illustrations -- it is about half illustrations. The text was mostly dry, of the general form like [person or group I never hear of] did something at [place I never heard of], without a lot of additional explanation. It all seemed disconnected. Nevertheless, the book was helpful in giving a sense of history of the region from ancient times up through the middle of the 20th century.

Koen Setyawan says

Menceritakan jalur sutra dari zaman ke zaman. Jalur sutra bukan hanya jalur perdagangan, melainkan urat nadi adonan berbagai kebudayaan tempat berbagai bangsa saling bersinggungan, berhubungan, dalam perang dan damai, tempat muncul dan hilangnya peradaban dan tempat tinggal berbagai suku bangsa. Jalur sutra adalah jembatan budaya yang menghubungkan dunia Barat dan Timur. Penulis menyusun kisahnya dari remah-remah catatan kuno dan terbaru, agenda para penjelajah, hikayat dan dongeng para pendeta, catatan para pedangan dan pedang kaum pencoleng.

Jenny says

I read the paperback edition of this book and it has no maps in it which is significant since the book is about the exploration of the Silk Road. Other editions have end paper maps. The author explains that she tried to use the best known of the names for the places in the book, however some of the choices make it difficult to locate the places referenced on modern maps and others sound very dated -- using Peking rather than Beijing, for example.

The Silk Road uses 245 pages of text and photographs to cover more than 2000 years of history with an emphasis on European encounters with The Silk Road and its history. More information the people and cultures along the Silk Road would have been interesting.

Chairul Rahmat says

enoyying

Dennis Boccippio says

My interest in central Asia has been piqued since a recent homestay trip in Mongolia. Since then, the "istan's", for me hidden behind the opacity of the Cold War for most of my life, have been a source of mild intrigue. Reading "The Silk Road" has added significant color - if not necessarily clarity - to my familiarity with the tangled history of the region.

The book is readable, if not necessarily fully accessible, to non-academics, presuming significant familiarity with the region and its peoples (both past and present). While not "lavishly" illustrated, it certainly draws from an eclectic sample of material which keeps the interest level up. Descriptions and details are rich. The historical narrative is far from linear, and overall the book would have benefitted from a greater use of maps than the single, stylized map in the front matter.

I wouldn't recommend this book as a casual read, although for fans of history - specifically multicultural and oft-overlooked corners of world history - it may be worth the plunge.

Tony says

THE SILK ROAD. (2002). Frances Wood. ****.

This was a special publication of The Folio Society, a worthy addition to any armchair traveler's library. Imagine you are on vacation. Starting out from Anxi, you go on to Hami, then Bezeklik, then Turfan, and Karashahr, to Kucha, to Aksu and Tumchug, and finally reach Balkh. Where are you? You are on the northern route of the Great Silk Road, wondering how you will ever walk again after you get down from your camel. As you may have guessed, the Great Silk Road was a principal trade route in olden times. Today, it is a tourist destination for, mostly, Chinese and Russians. The route skirts the top of the world, above Kashmir and Tibet and Nepal. Just the route outlined above took 30 days by camel – about 500 miles. It was the principal method of allowing trade between China and Europe in such luxury goods as silk and jade. The author goes further than the description of sites along the way; the development and influences of various religions in the region are also recorded. For example, the "dates of the prophet Zarathustra or Zoroaster are uncertain. Some place him in the thirteenth century BC, others in the sixth century BC, and his origins similarly are set as far apart as Azerbaijan and Mongolia...Zoroastrianism was adopted by a number of Sogdians who carried it along the Silk Roads, into China where it was tolerated for a while during the Tang, and into India where it still survives." Among the varieties of religious expression present in the region, we can also trace Manicheism to Mesopotamia with the prophet Mani. His teaching prospered in the Silk Road region. If you are willing to skim a few chapters, like me, because of ignorance of the land and peoples, you will still come across items of interest that ought to be familiar. The author discusses a variety of travel books about the region. Included among them is Marco Polo. Most people knew that he was telling fibs, but at least they were entertaining. One of the key features of the book is the remarkable number of illustrations, both those of the region, and those of the art of the time. I enjoyed this book. Recommended.

Ann Chamberlin says

Although this book had great illustrations and pointed me in the direction of good books to read, especially among early western travellers, it seemed to me the author of this one was too dependent on quoting others--especially for a University Press book.

Stephen says

The Silk Road consists of several chapters in central-Asian history, with generous photographs of the

landscape or art connected to the region. If readers are interested primarily in the Silk Road's heyday, the volume may be mildly disappointing, as the chapters on exploration, archaeology, and looting in the 'modern' age (19th century and continuing) constitute half the book. There is much of interest, however, and all of that archaeological looting is still firmly connected to central Asia's golden age. I would read it as a supplement to a more substantive history of the Silk Road trade than a history of it, however.

Silvio Curtis says

I've been aware for about a year and a half that Central Asia was a major gap in my knowledge of history. I hoped that this book would help fill that in and it had plenty of solid information in it, mixed in with surprising anecdotes from the ancient chronicles. It talks about the history of quite a few of the peoples who've lived in the region, or at any rate the history of their dealings with China and Europe. For most of them it does a good job of giving a sense of where these peoples came from and so forth to distinguish one from another by, though it's hard to piece together the timeline of civilizations in any of the cities that lasted through several of them. The last third of the book is about the less interesting topic (to me) of late nineteenth/early twentieth century adventurers-cum-archaeologists-cum-spies (yes, some of them were spies of a sort).

Indah Threzez Lestari says

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Ayse Arf says

A really good introduction to the Silk Road and its metamorphoses over time. It's not the most comprehensive history, but that's sort of what makes it good. There's such a huge amount of information about this trade route's thousands of years of history that dwelling on the details would have made this book totally inaccessible for the casual reader. I may not remember from reading this which languages were at which times and in which places lingua franca on the road, but I at least remember what most of the languages were. I gave it three stars just to indicate that if you want a really detailed or meticulously organized history, this isn't really it in the traditional sense. I liked it, though!

Grace Tjan says

This book is a well-illustrated, very readable introduction to the Silk Road and the various countries that it traverses. Wood's brisk narration is lively, and she has a knack for selecting interesting passages from various travelers' reports on the area, from Marco Polo (who Wood believes to have never traveled to China at all) to Aurel Stein, whose controversial excavations at Dunhuang shed light on esoteric documents that had been sealed up in a cave for a thousand years. Besides Western travelers, we also hear from Asian sources such as Faxian and Xuantang, the famous Tang-dynasty monk who brought Buddhist scriptures to China. For those enamored of the romance and mystery of the Silk Road, this book does not disappoint in its generous depiction of lost cities, buried treasures, exotic goods and ancient legends.

Robert Wilson says

This book is a pretty good introduction to the eastern end of the Silk Road, and it is very well illustrated. It does not, however, venture very far beyond the eastern part of the silk road. While it is well written, I was a little surprised by some of the items it focus on, such as Tsarist era officials and explorers. All and all a goof but incomplete introduction to the Silk Road.

Ginger says

This is one of those books that has some dry parts, but then there will be a burst of wonderful learning. I did lots of online research while reading this one. It got me more interested in Jade and Silk and the 'mysterious' East. China has a very rich history and because I know next to nothing about it, this book helped me to learn a little bit more, this is always good.

Fredrick Danysh says

Trade has been conducted over land routes between Europe and Asia for thousands of years. The caravan routes were called the Silk Road. This is a history of that trade.
