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**Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads. A New History of the World*, London, Bloomsbury, 2015, 656 pp., ISBN: 978-1-4088-3997-3.**

Peter Frankopan is Senior research fellow at Worcester College and the director of the Centre for Byzantine Research from Oxford University. His interests took him far back into history. His stories speak about people, goods, ideas, religions, cultural and political events that changed the world. He was following the famous silk roads, from antiquity to present times, and the results are absolutely remarkable. The entire history was reinterpreted in this book and all new trends of our modern times entered into world scene as following a pattern of cultural and economic exchange.

As reputed historian William Dalrymple noticed in his review published on November 6, 2015, in the Guardian, “this [Peter Frankopan’s *The Silk Roads. A New History of the World*] is history on a grand scale, with a sweep and ambition that is rare [...]. This is a remarkable book on many levels, a proper historical epic of dazzling range and achievement”. Let us see why.

The “silk roads” label is relatively a recent one, coined in 1877 by Ferdinand von Richthofen, a German geographer, as Peter Frankopan mentions in his book. But the routes between East (ancient India and China, in particular) and the Mediterranean Sea have been busy long before the historical route was documented. “Silk roads” have a wonderful history of their own, full of incredible legends and stories about brave warriors; powerful Gods whom, in ancient times, lived among people; beautiful women or extremely useful goods and knowledge that changed the world. Even “the middle of the world” was (and still is, culturally speaking) located somewhere on the silk road. Frankopan even mentions his surprise to find “an important medieval Turkish map in Istanbul that had at its heart a city called Balasghun, which I had never even heard of [...] and yet was once considered the centre of the world” (Preface, p. xiv).

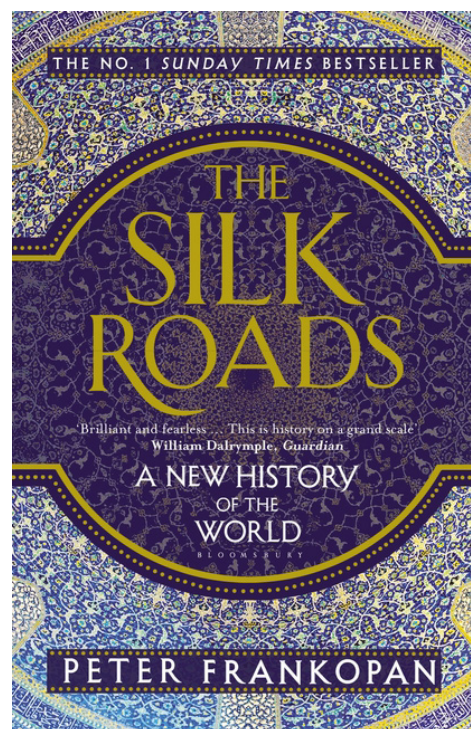
Many things about ancient times were already known to historians and researchers, but Peter Frankopan had the inspiration to go deeper in the archives, and to quote more unknown texts to sustain his point of view. The explanatory notes he offers regarding the importance of silk road in antiquity, for example, show a high erudition.

Reading the book, we learn that the silk road can be also called “the road of faiths”, “the road to revolution”, “the road to heaven”, “the road of gold”, “the road to war”, “the road to superpower rivalry”. All these - and many more - are, in fact, the subjects of Peter Frankopan’s chapters. Each story completes the other one and so the history goes further beyond pure scientific facts, as Frankopan has the ability to write beautiful prose for a general audience, and the ideas can be followed since ancient times to present day.

From the very beginning, Peter Frankopan explains that “there was good reason why the cultures, cities and peoples who lived along the Silk Roads developed and advanced: as they traded and exchanged ideas, they learnt and borrowed from each other, stimulating further advances in philosophy, the sciences, language and religion. Progress was essential” (Preface, p. xviii).

## Mihaela Gligor

The Romanian Academy Cluj-Napoca  
“George Baritiu” History Institute  
mihaelagligor@gmail.com



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Historically speaking, the silk roads were, even since antiquity, a network of roads - and cultures, and faiths, and communities, and languages - , not a single, distinctive highway. The geographical centre of this narrative was Asia Minor, Central Asia, the Caucasus, China and the Middle East. These territories met, traded, and dominated one another in all domains - from politics to culture and religions - along routes of communication. Peter Frankopan has a pressing reason to promote the silk roads' history from cultural relegation. Since in present days we are living in a globalised present, most of us are profoundly ignorant of our past and of our common foundational myths. Peter Frankopan's volume reminds us that some brand new things are basically extremely old, and that one-way system is a recent invention.

Iconic moments of the most incredible events that took place on silk roads are presented here. Frankopan mentions the possibility that Indian Mahābhārata influenced the Greek Iliad and vice-versa. Stories about the third century BC Indian emperor Ashoka the Great, whose life was transformed by the Buddha; or about the Chinese noble who was buried (in the sixth century AD) with a silver ewer depicting the Trojan war; or about the Chinese cloth "of inestimable value" (silk) that was draped over the Ka'aba in the early 12th century; details about the Mongols' invasion of 1259-1260 or the important strategic and socio-economic achievements of the Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, British and Americans are important facts from the history of silk road, a place where people lived happy and wealthy. During centuries, silk was, after all, not simply a luxury good, but an international currency too. And it shaped and changed the lives of those living on the road.

And continues to do so even today, when the silk

road still has a powerful political influence on the region. The actors are different now - Iran, Israel, USA, Russia, or India and China, instead of armies of Alexander the Great, or Genghis Khan troupes, or Mameluke rulers of Egypt - and most of them are trying to secure the fragile peace in the area, fighting with Taliban or trying to put a stop to war in Syria. The delicate issue of modern pipelines or the western fashion houses (like Louis Vuitton and Prada), who are now present everywhere in the world, are also very well presented by the author. Times changed, but the new globalised world is more interested than ever in the silk roads. The region that in antiquity took the central stage of history is again rising to dominate global culture and politics.

Peter Frankopan succeed in reinterpreting the past and also offered a silky description of our present. As William Dalrymple noticed in his Guardian review, "Frankopan marches briskly through the centuries, disguising his erudition with an enviable lightness of touch, enlivening his narrative with a beautifully constructed web of anecdotes and insights, backed up by an impressively wide-ranging scholarly apparatus of footnotes drawing on works in multiple languages".

The book is an amazing presentation of world history. Cultural, political, religious, social and intellectual aspects of society are extremely well explained. The References and the explanatory notes, as well as the Index or the maps, are very useful for students, researchers or simple readers who will definitely learn something new reading this book.

Peter Frankopan's *The Silk Roads. A New History of the World*, who covers several continents and many centuries, is brilliant and captivating. World history was never written so charismatic.