

## **A Review of The Silk Roads: A New History of the World by Peter Frankopan (Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2015)**

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This ambitious book by a young scholar in the field of the Byzantium history from Oxford was praised by reviews in many newspapers and popular magazines. *Irish Left Review* called him no more, no less than the "Herodotus of the twenty first century." This is very complimentary for any scholar of the past.

Frankopan combines successfully a deep knowledge of history and showy literary talents. It is simple to read even for a foreigner. This book continues a large series of popular books devoted to the history of the whole world, which was begun by Herbert Wells and was continued by many authors from David Christian (1998) to Ian Morris (2010).

This book can be considered within the framework of so-called Big History (Christian 2004; Spier 2010; etc.). However, it is not really big history. The title of the book is somewhat of a metaphor. The author gives indeed full attention to communications in Eurasia, but the Silk Road is for him something like the earth's axis on which the globe of world history was put.

The West is not at the center of the book, and this is good news. The axis between the Middle East and Far East is at the center of the work. However, for this reason, different, distant world regions (Australia, South and even North America) receive little attention. Such a book seems atypical of American, European, and even Russian traditions where history is generally shown as a continuous line from Greeks and Romans to present-day West-Europe.

Because the communications between the West and East are the center of attention of the book, it is partly aligned with those works which consider world history as a network of communications (McNeil, McNeil 2003). The Silk Road is a label which was invented by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen. In fact, it is of course not a lone road, but a whole network of roads—communications and paths between the different 'poles' of the Old World, from the Mediterranean and China. Frankopan mentions many diverse and interesting facts that will be unknown to 'middlebrows'. The book contains very many exotica and references to diverse sources and various scientific publications in multiple languages.

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The book should be enjoyed by those who like to look at the great pictures of history. All the more, the book was written by a scholar of history who has also written other high-ranking works rather than by a journalist. Of course, there are some factual errors, but it is impossible to avoid them when one person begins to write the whole history of the world in six hundred and fifty pages. Being a specialist in the field of some problematic topics (nomads of Far East Eurasia), I say that these themes were presented in the book quite competently.

The titles of all the book's sections are also metaphorical. Chapter 8 is called *The Road to Heaven* (which refers to the story of the crusaders), Chapter 9 is called *The Road to Hell* (on Chinggis Khan's conquest), Chapter 25 is called *The Road to Tragedy* (covering Saddam Hussein's attack on Kuwait until present day). This intrigues the reader slightly, because each of us can have other associations with such titles.

In any event, we have a book of more than six hundred pages before us. This is a brilliant collection of the empiric stores written from the viewpoint of anti-Eurocentrism. However, the book gives precious little for understanding the laws of world history. Doing this requires to read the classic volumes by William McNeil (1963) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), or the new studies of Jack Goldstone (2009), Ian Morris (2010), and Peter Turchin (2016).

I would recommend Frankopan's book as a captivating fiction for all lovers of history. However, if you want to become aware of what happened in history and why, you should read other books. "The fox knows many things; the hedgehog one big thing."

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