

ANNOTATIONS

FRANKOPAN, Peter: *Hedvábné stezky. Nová historie světa.* Praha, Vyšehrad, 2022. 608 s.

The annotation works with the translated version of the original publication. The translation to the Czech language from English was done by Aleš Valenta. The publication "The Silks Roads. A New History of the World" was written by Peter Frankopan, Professor of Global History at Oxford University. The title of the book stems from the author's focus on world history from the perspective of the Silk Roads. It thus brings a new perspective to the understanding and interpretation of history. The European space is dominated by a Eurocentric interpretation of history, where what happened in the territory of a given state or its immediate surroundings is considered pivotal. Other states and nations, which can be considered distant and without much influence on events in Europe, are often forgotten. They are only remembered when Europe and its history collide at some significant point and it is important to mention them. Peter Frankopan, on the other hand, highlights those nations that are 'marginalised' from our perspective. He thus presents an interpretation in which the Silk Roads have become central to the development of a given state and even civilization. Thanks to them, the continents of Africa, Europe and Asia have been connected since ancient times. Specifically, Frankopan focuses on the space where these three continents meet. Through this interconnection, not only goods, but also ideas, beliefs and ideas were exchanged. The Silk Roads influenced all who passed through them, both positively and negatively.

The chapters are arranged chronologically from the perspective of world history. At the beginning, Frankopan describes the origins of the Silk Roads themselves. What brought them into being and what their impact was. It begins 4,000 years BC in the area of the Fertile Crescent. It was its strategic location at the crossroads of trade between continents that gave rise to the first civilisation. However, the author looks beyond this region. It is also possible to get a glimpse into the events in China, which gave its name to these trade arteries thanks to the production of silk.

Furthermore, the book focuses on one important article that travelled the Silk routes. It was about faith and ideas of faith. First, the various religions travelling on these routes are compared - Greek religion, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism - mainly in terms of the exchange of ideas and beliefs. All of them influenced each other and exchanged their own theses and ideas. Then Christianity came on the scene, which had a significant impact not only in Europe but also in Asian areas. Frankopan devotes an entire chapter to the development of Christianity itself, and even its influence on the political scene. He continues his discussion of faith with the emergence of Islam as a new rival to existing religions. The rapid rise and growth in popularity of this religion is

thus depicted, with it very quickly reaching as far west as Spain and as far east as the borders with China. The rise of Islam destabilised an already escalating situation in the Middle East, throwing two powerful empires - the Persian Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire - out of balance.

After the rise of the Islamic states, the situation gradually stabilised and trade and the desire for wealth and luxury revived. As a result, the fur and slave trade grew. The former was dominated by the steppe tribes of East Asia. Among these are the Khazars as important traders with their Islamic counterparts. The human trade was dominated by northern Europe, which was thus gradually able to amass considerable wealth, which eventually led to the creation of Kievan Rus.

However, European states did not let the Islamic threat go unnoticed. Thus began a series of crusades that had far-reaching consequences. While the Crusades are often viewed as a military conflict, the author takes a different view of the event. Namely, from a business perspective. Access to the Silk Roads represented incredible wealth opportunities for anyone who would dare trade on them. The city-states of Pisa, Genoa and Venice were the main beneficiaries. They became major and pivotal players in the area. Their competition with each other to obtain better trading conditions won them considerable wealth. In the light of Christianity, however, they represented a 'grey area', as they were not concerned with the faith of the seller, but with duties and revenues. This can be seen in the Fourth Crusade. However, the failures of the Crusades did not influence these trading powers to continue their efforts. Once they had put down roots, they would never leave. Sometimes the disputes were often very heated.

Another threat came from the east. But at a time when Christianity needed allies in the fight against Islam, another adversary appeared – the Mongols. The author describes the rise of the Mongols and the administration of their empire. However, they too made abundant use of the Silk Road and all the bonuses it brought. The Mongol empire thus extended as far as Eastern Europe. And the Silk Roads were extended as well. Thanks to the establishment of trade sea routes created by the aforementioned Italian cities, it was possible to get almost anywhere. However, besides people, diseases also travelled. One of them was the bubonic plague, or the Black Death. The consequences were far-reaching. It was not only the number of people who lost their lives, but also the restructuring of society and the global financial crisis.

But there were those who wanted to find a way out and sought it in direct trade with India. People like Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama provided a way for others to get rich. Thanks to their voyages of discovery, luxury goods began to be imported to Europe, along with precious metals. The slave trade grew in proportion. However, the countries of northern Europe also wanted to participate in world trade and compete with Spain and Portugal. Great Britain and the Netherlands found a new way to take the lead. Gradually, they pushed out their rivals and Great Britain began to become a maritime power.

In the 19th century, a new power emerged to threaten the territory of Central and East Asia - the Russian Tsardom. Russia became increasingly aggressive in the late 19th century, threatening British positions in India. As Russia increased its territory, it moved closer to the territories controlled by the British Crown. It was equally interested in the rich oil reserves found in Persia. Persia became the focus of disputes between Britain and Russia. Each tried to sway Persia to its side. Thus, according to the author, the First World War was not determined by the situation in Europe, but by events far from Europe's borders - in Asia. After the end of the war, the Allies maintained their positions in Persia, but greatly abused the privileges they had gained and exploited the government there. This has already defined the course of future relations.

The author also places the importance of Eastern Europe and the Middle East in the causes of World War II. Hitler needed large amounts of food to be able to feed the entire German nation. Thus, his target became the rich areas of black soil in Ukraine and other territories to the south. However, his goals remained unfulfilled. After both world wars, Great Britain - once the world's greatest power - stood on the brink of destruction. A new player emerged in the form of the United States of America. It played an important role in the history of the Silk Roads. Its position in Asia's oil-rich regions has structured the course of history in the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century. Their activities to secure oil supplies have led to the emergence of terrorist organisations.

Peter Frankopan brings a new perspective to the interpretation of history, where the main centre has always been the West Asian regions. From antiquity to the present day, these have been the areas that have determined world events. The emergence of the Silk Roads has had a huge impact on shaping history. Through them, powers have risen, but they have also fallen.

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