



# 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 It also contains many previously unpublished photographs by the great explorers Stein, Hedin, and Mannerheim.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.

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