To my beloved Katarina, Flora, Francis and Luke
P. F.

For Judy and John, my parents
N. P.



BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2018 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Text copyright © Peter Frankopan, 2018
Illustrations copyright © Neil Packer, 2018
Map on pages 6-7 Modified Gall Projection © Oxford Cartographers E&OE
Maps on pages 38-39 and 70-71 by Martin Lubikowski, ML Design, London © 2018
Map on pages 12-13 is an artistic sketch depicting historical information.

Peter Frankopan and Neil Packer have asserted their rights under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author and Illustrator of this work

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-4088-8593-0

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Printed and bound in India by Replika Press Pvt Ltd

All papers used by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc are natural, recyclable products from wood grown in well managed forests. The manufacturing processes conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com and sign up for our newsletters



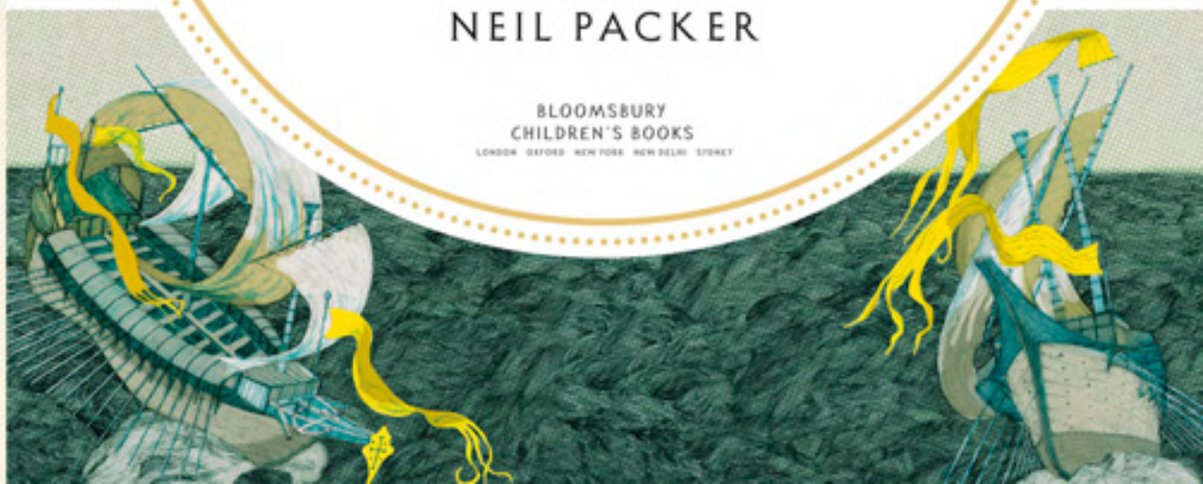
THE SILK ROADS

A New History of the World

PETER FRANKOPAN

Illustrated by
NEIL PACKER

BLOOMSBURY
CHILDREN'S BOOKS
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY





The World Today

Maps are wonderful ways to help us think about the world. This is a map of the world in the early 21st century. It does not tell us much about what people think of each other or what is going on in the world but you can still learn a lot by studying it, and considering why we know so much more about some parts of the world than others.

Modified Gall Projection

© Oxford Cartographers E&OE

Introduction



When I was a boy, I had a map on my bedroom wall. I used to stare at it when I woke up in the morning and before bedtime, admiring the size of the continents and the oceans, looking at the location of the mountain ranges, deserts and rivers, and trying to memorise the names of all the countries and their capital cities.



At school, I learned a lot about the history and geography of the country and continent where I lived. I loved learning about Britain and about Europe. But when I spoke with my parents, it was often about things elsewhere that I felt I should know about. In many parts of the world, people were fighting each other – and I could not understand why. Places were changing, sometimes in a way that was good and sometimes in a way that was bad. When I listened to the news, I realised that millions of people's lives would be affected either way.

We study history to understand the past, but also to try to help explain the present. History is a bit like tracing back your footsteps and trying to work out how and why you took a particular route to where you are now standing. It is interesting and exciting to look at individual turns or steps you made, but it can also be revealing to look at the journey as a whole.

Staring at the map on my wall, I wanted to learn about Russia, whose leaders at that time built nuclear weapons that were pointed directly at targets very close to where I went to school. I wanted to learn about the Middle East, where there seemed to be terrorist acts taking place almost every day, but which I also realised was the birthplace of lots of religions. I wanted to find out about China, Iran, India, Pakistan and Southeast Asia – places that were not just the size of empires but had dominated the past and seemed to be enormously important in the modern world too. I longed to learn about the people, history, geography and culture of Africa and to understand if there were similarities and differences between one part of the continent and another.



I never got the chance to do that at school. Instead, I was taught a lot about Henry VIII and his six wives (divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived – in that order). I wish I'd had a book that could have told me about all the other places. I wanted to understand how everything fitted together. Why, for example, was there nothing worth studying in between the Romans arriving in Britain and the Battle of Hastings – a thousand years later?

And so I decided to spend my life reading and writing about history and looking for connections that would help explain the past better than how I had been taught as a child. I have had lots of help from scholars and writers, many of whom lived hundreds – and in some cases thousands – of years ago. One very important person was called Ferdinand von Richthofen (his nephew became a famous First World War fighter pilot, known as the Red Baron). He thought long and hard about how to come up with a name to describe the way that Asia, Europe and Africa are connected. He could have chosen the name of any of the goods and commodities that were transported over thousands of miles – like spices or ceramics; he might even have chosen something to do with languages, travel or biology. But he decided on something that caught the imagination of other scholars – something that has stuck to this day: the Silk Roads.

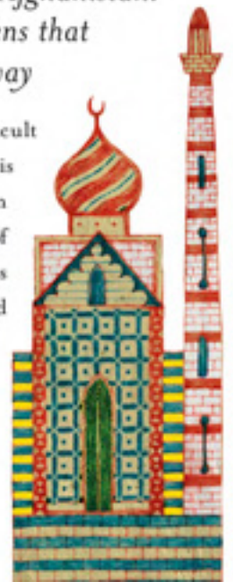
The Silk Roads do not have a start or an end point, because they are not actually real roads at all. They are a web of networks that have allowed goods, people and ideas, but also disease and violence, to flow east to west and west to east – from the Pacific coast of China and Russia to the Atlantic coasts of Europe and Africa, and also from Scandinavia in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south. You might even think of the Silk Roads as the world's central nervous system, linking all the organs of the body together, or perhaps as veins and arteries pumping oxygen and carbon dioxide away from and towards the heart. To understand the body, you need to look under the skin, and you also need to see how the body as a whole works, rather than just looking at one part of it.

In this book, we are going to visit places you might not have heard of before. Some have disappeared and are now gone: Merv, in modern Turkmenistan, was once so large and so beautiful that it was called 'the mother of the world'. The magnificent city was destroyed by fighting 800 years ago, and never recovered.

Some places have changed. Today, Kabul is known as the capital of war-torn Afghanistan. But 500 years ago, the city had gardens that were famous hundreds of miles away. Mosul, in Iraq, is a city that was recently devastated by ISIS, who inflicted terrible suffering on the inhabitants, whom they used as human shields. However around 1000 years ago, it was famous for its magnificent public buildings, its bathhouses and its craftsmen who produced some of the finest arrows, saddles and stirrups in the world.

Kabul is known as the capital of war-torn Afghanistan. But 500 years ago, the city had gardens that were famous hundreds of miles away

Some people will tell you that we are living through difficult times. It might feel that way sometimes. But the truth is that this is the best time to be alive – ever. Travel has never been easier: you can get from one side of the world to another more quickly than any of your ancestors could. There have been astonishing improvements in health, for example with the survival rates of mothers and newborn babies rising dramatically in recent decades, or with the number of people who have access to clean water.



These improvements mean that children all over the world have better prospects than their parents and grandparents – or any of their ancestors – of surviving childhood and growing up healthy.

The chances of children being able to read and write are also now greater than at any time in the past. We can find things out faster and more cheaply than any generation before us in human history. We have extraordinary freedom to move, to learn and to live. It might not feel like you have superpowers. But you really do.

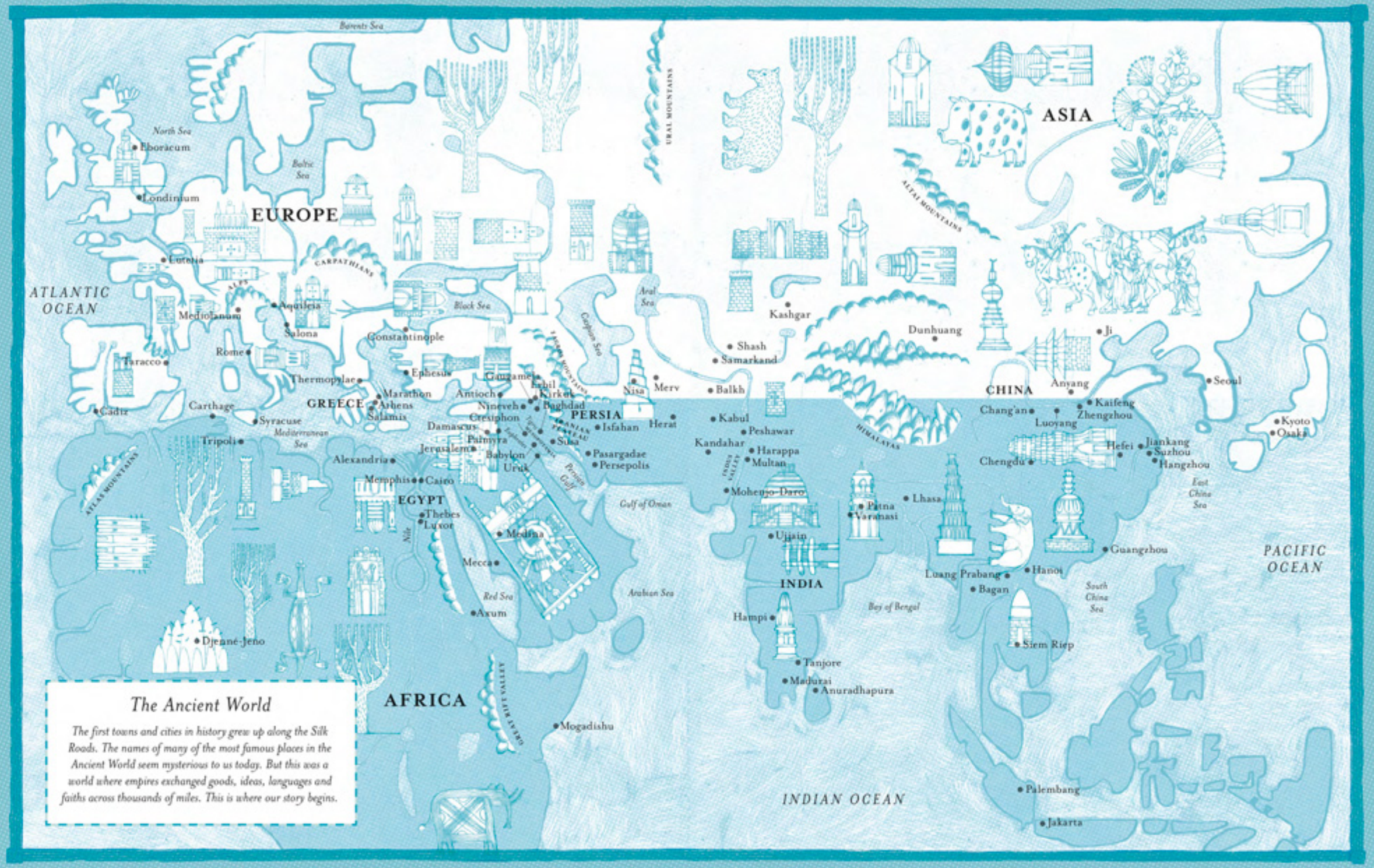
I began a long journey with the map in my bedroom all those years ago. I still love looking at maps, gazing at places that I don't know much about and trying to learn more about them. I hope that's something we all might be able to do.

To understand the world of today and tomorrow, you need to understand the world of yesterday. And to do that, the best place to start is at the beginning. As luck would have it, that means starting with the Silk Roads.



We have extraordinary freedom to move, to learn and to live

PETER FRANKOPAN



The Ancient World

The first towns and cities in history grew up along the Silk Roads. The names of many of the most famous places in the Ancient World seem mysterious to us today. But this was a world where empires exchanged goods, ideas, languages and faiths across thousands of miles. This is where our story begins.

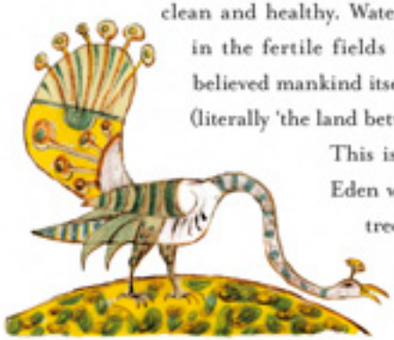


CHAPTER ONE

The Roads of the Ancient World



The heart of Asia is where civilisation was born. In ancient Mesopotamia along the banks of the mighty Tigris and Euphrates rivers and steeped in the Indus Valley stood the very first towns and cities known to mankind. The abundance of water oozing from the banks was vital for the inhabitants of the cities built there; citizens of Babylon, Nineveh and Uruk in Mesopotamia and Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and Dholavira in the Indus Valley would be able to go about their business refreshed, clean and healthy. Water was also important to help crops grow in the fertile fields along the riverbanks. Little wonder that many believed mankind itself was created in the fertile fields of Mesopotamia (literally 'the land between the rivers').



This is where it was widely believed that the Garden of Eden was located, 'planted by the Lord God' with 'every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food'. Control of the thriving fields and cities allowed kings to reign and empires to be built.