

# Inspector Rex's History Snippet #16

## The Silk Road

[https://www.ancient.eu/Silk\\_Road/](https://www.ancient.eu/Silk_Road/)

The **Silk Road** was an ancient network of **trade** routes, formally established during the **Han Dynasty** of **China**, which linked the regions of the ancient world in commerce between 130 BCE-1453 CE. As the **Silk** Road was not a single thoroughfare from east to west, the term 'Silk Routes' has become increasingly favoured by historians, though 'Silk Road' is the more common and recognized name.

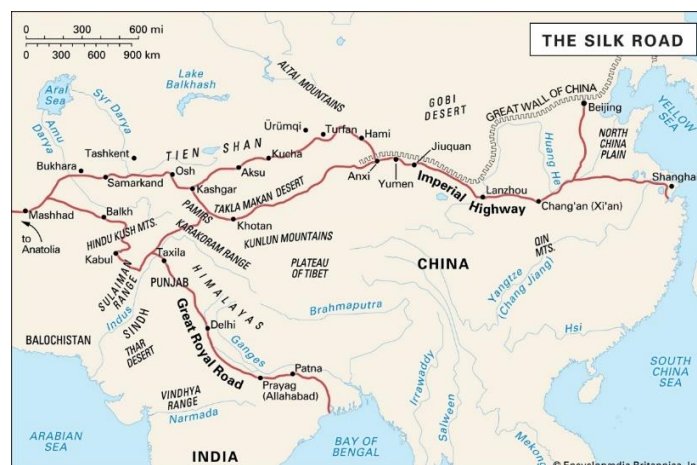


The European explorer **Marco Polo** (1254-1324 CE)

travelled on these routes and described them in depth in his famous work but he is not credited with naming them. Both terms for this network of roads were coined by the German geographer and traveller, Ferdinand von Richthofen, in 1877 CE, who designated them 'Seidenstrasse' (silk road) or 'Seidenstrassen' (silk routes). Polo, and later von Richthofen, make mention of the goods which were transported back and forth on the Silk Road.

The network was used regularly from 130 BCE, when the **Han** (Chinese) officially opened trade with the west, to 1453 CE, when the Ottoman **Empire** boycotted trade with the west and closed the routes. By this time, Europeans had become used to the goods from the east and, when the Silk Road closed, merchants needed to find new trade routes to meet the demand for these goods.

The closure of the Silk Road initiated the Age of Discovery (1453-1660 CE) which would be defined by European explorers taking to the sea and charting new water routes to replace over-land trade.



*However, pre-dating the Silk Road was the Persian Royal Road (which I didn't know about - Inspector Rex).*

## Persian Royal Road

The history of the Silk Road pre-dates the Han Dynasty in practice, however, as the Persian Royal Road, which would come to serve as one of the main arteries of the Silk Road, was established during the **Achaemenid Empire** (500-330 BCE). The Persian Royal Road ran from **Susa**, in north **Persia** (modern day Iran) to the **Mediterranean** Sea in **Asia Minor** (modern-day **Turkey**) and featured postal stations along the route with fresh horses for envoys to quickly deliver messages throughout the empire. **Herodotus**, **writing** of the speed and efficiency of the Persian messengers, stated that:

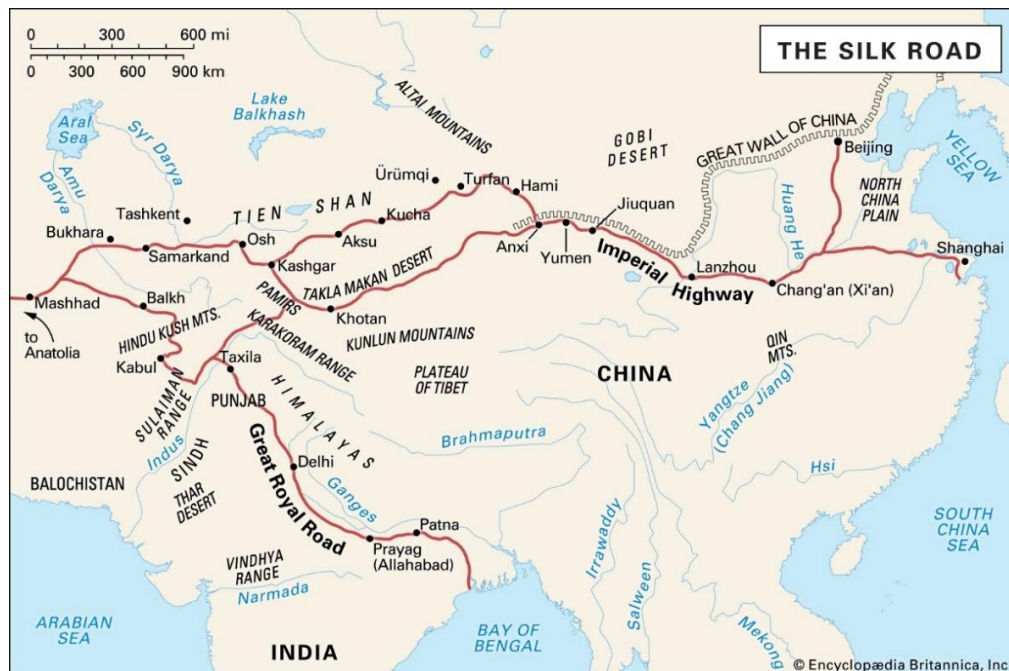
*There is nothing in the world that travels faster than these Persian couriers. Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor darkness of night prevents these couriers from completing their designated stages with utmost speed.*  
(Histories VIII.98)

These lines would, centuries later, form the creed of the United States of America's post office.

The Persians maintained the Royal Road carefully and, in time, expanded it through smaller side roads. These paths eventually crossed down into the Indian sub-continent, across **Mesopotamia**, and over into **Egypt**.



## Comments by Inspector Rex



1. In the map of the Silk Road, the Central Asian Republics feature about the top left. Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan, which also includes the famous city of Samarkand. The Amu Darya which flows into the Aral sea was also known as the Oxus. In ancient history it was the boundary between Greater Iran and Turan (a later association with Turkic peoples, and mentioned significantly in the *Shanameh* (*The Persian book of Kings*) by Ferdowsi – a fascinating read).
2. In the map of the Persian Royal Road, notice (on the right) the ancient kingdoms of **Sogdiana** and **Bactriana** (Bactrian, two-humped camels). The former covered the southern half of Kazakhstan), the latter covered parts of Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.  
(The ending 'stan' means 'land of' so that Uzbekistan is the land of the Uzbeks).  
Notice there is an 'area' called Persia – originally called **Pars** (this needs much more explanation – connection to Aryans). Two ancient cities mentioned there are **Pasagardae** (built by Cyrus the Great, founder of Persia and the **Achaemenid** dynasty – the first Persian dynasty) where his tomb lies (and visited by Alexander the Great) and **Persepolis** (built by Darius the Great).  
Cyrus conquered the Medes (see map for the 'area' Media and formed the one country of Persia).  
Notice the area called 'Parthia' which was part of the unified country of Persia.  
The third dynasty of Persia were the **Parthians** (247BCE – 224CE) = 471 years.