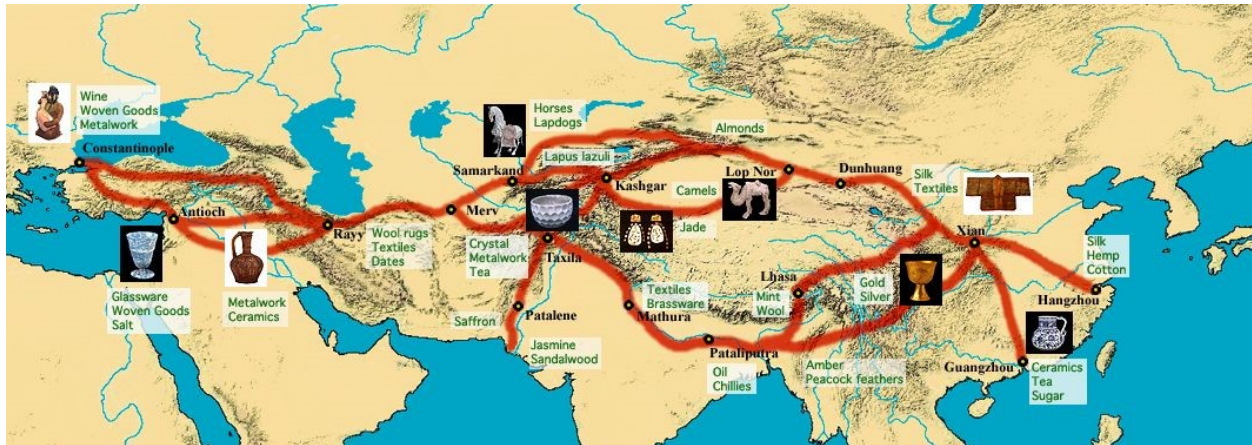


The Silk Roads



Commerce drives civilizations. In early times, before decent ship building techniques and sea navigation methods, commerce and trade occur across land. And the biggest routes known were the Silk Roads, bringing silk from China to Europe.

My new book, currently still in the writing stages, involves the Rainey character traveling the Silk Road in order to get to Japan. Can't get a Japanese sword in the year 1300 without going to Japan for it. The story has given me a reason to study the history of the Silk Roads. Strangely enough, they were never called Silk Roads when they were actually being used for trade. The name was coined by Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877. And yes, he apparently was the Red Baron's uncle. Small world. 😊 Anyway, I am not able to use the term in my new novel in order to keep it historically accurate.

I read a book called *The Silk Roads* by Peter Frankopan during my research. The trade and the rich cities along the routes have a fascinating history. Most conquerors in Asia made sure the trade routes stayed intact as they were a source of great wealth. Cities like Baghdad became major political centers due to their locations on the routes. There is a romantic feel to caravans of camels traveling across deserts and mountains to bring the riches of the east to the west and vice versa.

Everything was traded along the routes. Silk was one item that was considered currency. Metals, textiles, jade, ceramics, spices, and many other commodities were all traded along the route. Caravans generally never traveled the whole route. They would travel between a few of the great cities, finding what they wanted to buy before returning to their starting point where they traded for goods to take back in the other direction. It created a market for many middlemen along the route. The demand for goods from distant lands made the trading cities very wealthy. Cities like Constantinople, Damascus, Rhages, Merv, Samarkand, Kashgar, Dunhuang and Xian.

And not only goods. Knowledge traveled as well. Many of the European accounting methods originated in China, as did gunpowder. Knowledge of steelmaking in Europe from Roman times made its way east. Religions spread in both directions.

Unfortunately, two things brought the age of the Silk Roads to a close. The first was Ghengis Khan. He conquered most of Asia and in the process, razed many of the great trading cities to the ground as a fear tactic. I've always wondered if he regretted doing that. Baghdad, built near old Babilon and at one time

the most populous city in the world, was one place left in ruin by the invading Mongols in 1258. The city never fully recovered and was just a backwater city at the dawn of the 20th century. The second reason was why it never fully recovered.

Sea faring was becoming more advanced. The ships were bigger, carrying more cargo, and could travel from east to west and back again much faster. Navigation technology had advanced considerably. It was also safer as you avoided bandits and armies all across the land routes. Of course, there were pirates on the Indian Ocean, but your odds were better of avoiding raiding parties out at sea than on land. And lastly, all the middlemen located in the Silk Road cities were cut out by ships. More profits for the sailors.

My new book, set in and around the year 1300, takes place in a time when caravans on the land routes were slowly being usurped by ships on the Indian Ocean. Some of the cities, like Samarkand, the Mongols didn't destroy and by 1300, they were still very rich, as detailed in Marco Polo's writings. But their days were numbered. The Mongol empire was already splitting into smaller entities and the Crusades were coming to an end. It was a new era, with European cities like Genoa and Venice exerting their sea power and being able to bypass Constantinople itself as a trading city.

Parts of the world have never been totally isolated from each other. Goods and knowledge traveled the old Silk Roads since about the time of Alexander the Great, who expanded trade eastward almost to China. It solidified all the way from Rome to Xian in the 1st Century BCE. With all the wars and conquests through the ages, the Silk Roads were eternal in bringing the known world together.

I'm having a blast writing about my main character traveling along these ancient routes.