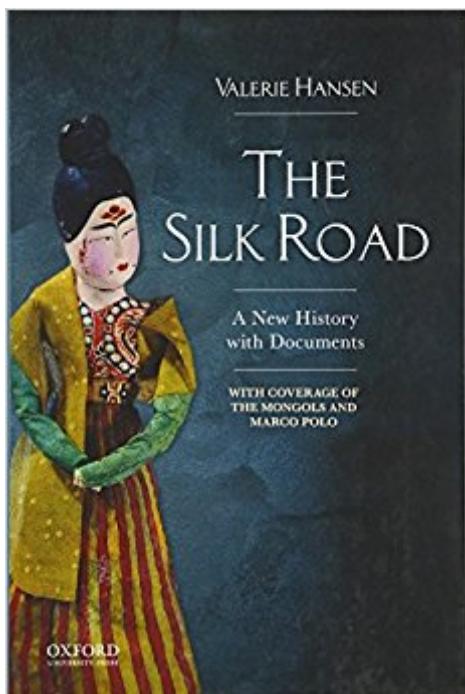


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# The Silk Road: A New History With Documents



## **Synopsis**

The Silk Road is iconic in world history; but what was it, exactly? It conjures up a hazy image of a caravan of camels laden with silk on a dusty desert track, reaching from China to Rome. The reality was different--and far more interesting. In *The Silk Road: A New History with Documents*, Valerie Hansen describes the remarkable archeological finds that revolutionized our understanding of these trade routes. Hansen explores eight sites along the road, from Xi'an to Samarkand, where merchants, envoys, pilgrims, and travelers mixed in cosmopolitan communities, tolerant of religions from Buddhism to Zoroastrianism. Designed for use in the classroom and based on the award-winning trade edition (OUP, 2012), *The Silk Road: A New History with Documents* offers a selection of excerpted primary sources in each chapter. The wide-ranging sources include memoirs of medieval Chinese monks and modern explorers, letters written by women, descriptions of towns, legal contracts, religious hymns, and many others. A new final chapter provides coverage of the Silk Road during the period of Mongol rule.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 496 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (June 14, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0190208929

ISBN-13: 978-0190208929

Product Dimensions: 9.2 x 1.3 x 6.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #128,789 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #100 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Middle East #177 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Asia #205 in Books > History > Asia > China

## **Customer Reviews**

"The Silk Road was already the best introduction to the reality behind this commonly used phrase. With the new documents, this version gives an even more vivid picture of how the 'Silk Road' actually functioned. It is perfect for classroom use."--Christopher P. Atwood, University of Pennsylvania "In 2013 the International Convention of Asia Scholars recognized *The Silk Road: A New History* as the best new book about Asia for teaching the humanities. That is no small praise, and I could not readily agree more. Indeed, for anyone who teaches the Silk Road--or Asian or

world history--this updated version that includes a remarkable array of original sources is an absolute boon. Not only because it is beautifully written and cogently offers up a magisterial overview of Inner Asian history up through the Mongol conquest, but also, more importantly, because it weaves into its narrative the excitement of discovery that lies at the heart of the humanities."--Johan Elverskog, Southern Methodist University "The Silk Road is a remarkable achievement, especially considering the extreme complexity of the subject matter. This useful and timely text provides teachers and students of Chinese, Asian, and world history a much-needed collection of primary sources on the Silk Road in the first millennium and beyond. The selected prayers, contracts, personal correspondence, and graffiti tell extremely vivid, personal, factual stories and promise to generate stimulating class discussion. Instructors and students alike will benefit greatly from Hansen's informative introductions and carefully selected maps and images."--Cong Ellen Zhang, University of Virginia

Valerie Hansen is Professor of History at Yale University. She is the author of several books, including *The Open Empire*, Second Edition (2015), and, with Kenneth R. Curtis, *Voyages in World History*, Third Edition (2016).

The first edition of this book (without documents) was already a five-star work, so this should get ten or fifteen. It is a really excellent work of history. Dr. Hansen has an incredible level of expertise. I never understand how some people can learn so much in one lifetime--a Buddhist would say she is the reincarnation of an old Silk Road traveler. She also writes very well, making this a "good read" to rival the old accounts by Hedin and Stein that got many of us interested in the Silk Road in the first place. The documents are a fascinating lot, most familiar to Asianists but some rarely published. The book appears to be written to combat a widespread idea that the Silk Road was enormously heavily trafficked, with huge trade directly from China to Rome. I have not encountered this idea (except, more or less, in older popular literature). I'm not sure why it was so worth combatting (no expert has seriously argued the Rome connection for decades), but Dr. Hansen knows far more about such issues than I do. She emphasizes in every chapter that the Silk Road was little trafficked, until I am reminded of John and Charles Wesley's cynical description of the path of wisdom: "a narrow path with here and there a traveler." Admittedly, we are not to imagine their path of error either--"thousands throng together there." But Hansen's book shows that there was in fact quite extensive trade. I think there is a matter of comparison-set here. She seems to be comparing the Silk Road with the I-5 at rush hour. I would tend to compare it with other long-distance trade routes

of the same time period. By that comparison, the Silk Road looks pretty good--I expect it was far more traveled than the road from Teotihuacan to Tikal, or from Tiahuanaco to Nazca, or even from Rome to Paris. The point is: an awful lot of stuff, including huge amounts of information, got over that road. Dr. Hansen says rather little about the spread of foods, medicines and medical knowledge, falcons and hunting knowledge, and much else that indicates a fair amount of traffic. That said, this is a great work that every historian should read. It is more thorough and balanced than other recent works.

Bought for a World History class - it was fluid and offered new perspectives.

great

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