

(2024 September 15) The Silk Road as Imaginary as the Yellow Brick Road: The Wonder that was Ancient India India - Mount (LRB)

<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v46/n17/ferdinand-mount/one-way-traffic>

"There was scarcely any direct trade between China and the West until the Mongols flattened the barriers in the 13th century, making the trip possible for Marco Polo. . . silk . . . usually reached Rome . . . mostly by boat, via India, where much of the stuff was actually manufactured. It was dwarfed in value by the tons of Indian pepper, spices, ivory, cotton, teak, sandalwood, rhubarb and precious stones. . . .When Alaric the Visigoth held Rome to ransom in 408 ad, he demanded, on top of gold, not silk but 3000 lbs of black pepper. . . .

- Ferdinand Mount

"The existence of the 'Silk Road' is not based on a single shred of historical or material evidence. There was never any such 'road' or even a route in the organisational sense, there was no free movement of goods between China and the West until the Mongol Empire in the Middle Ages"

- Warwick Ball

"trade did not follow the flag, because there was usually no flag to follow. These were not colonies of conquest, or servile satrapies. They were zones of peaceful influence, expanded by merchants and monks and not by force of arms. . . .

the last and greatest achievement of the Indosphere: the spread of much of culture that we recognise as distinctively modern. The innovations range from the invention of the algorithm to the delights of the Kama Sutra In mathematics, the written sign for zero and the numerals that we call Arab are only the most conspicuous achievements. The great mathematician Aryabhata (476-550), in his masterwork composed when he was only 23, covers square and cube roots, the properties of circles and triangles, algebra, quadratic equations and sines, and contains a decent approximation of the value of pi at 3.1416. . . . accounting methods . . . which became the basis of double-entry book-keeping and modern commerce."

- Ferdinand Mount