

The Wars for the Silk Roads

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Introduction

The Silk Roads are the trade routes that connect Asia with Europe and Africa since the ancient times. Due to their importance of the Silk Roads for trade there were many wars for their control over the centuries. The following chapters refer to some of these wars. Each chapter is an independent essay, which was written at different dates, and therefore the booklet's chapters can be written in any order.

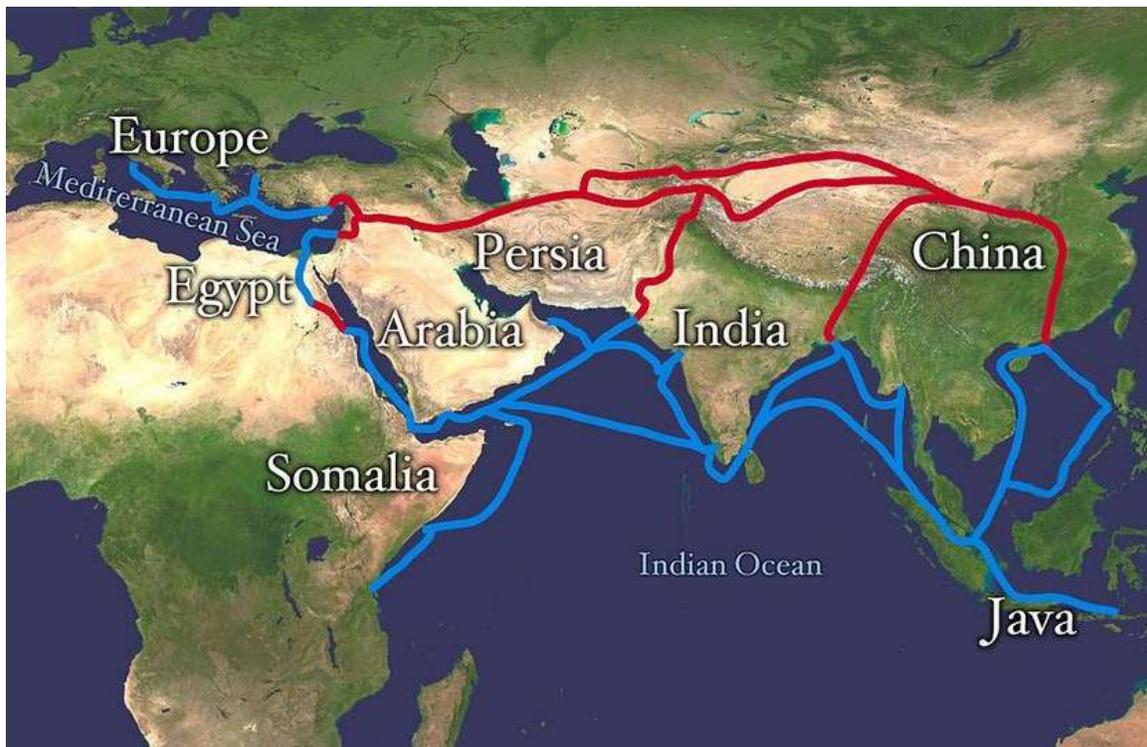
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The Wars for the Silk Roads

The ancient Silk Roads were the sea and land economic corridors which connected Asia to Europe and Africa. Through these economic corridors the silk and the spices of Asia could reach Europe and Africa. According to George Friedman, some spices, like pepper, could sell as high as gold. The two most important points of the silk roads were Cairo (Egypt), as far as the sea lanes were concerned, and Constantinople (Istanbul), as far as the land routes were concerned. See map 1 from wikipedia.

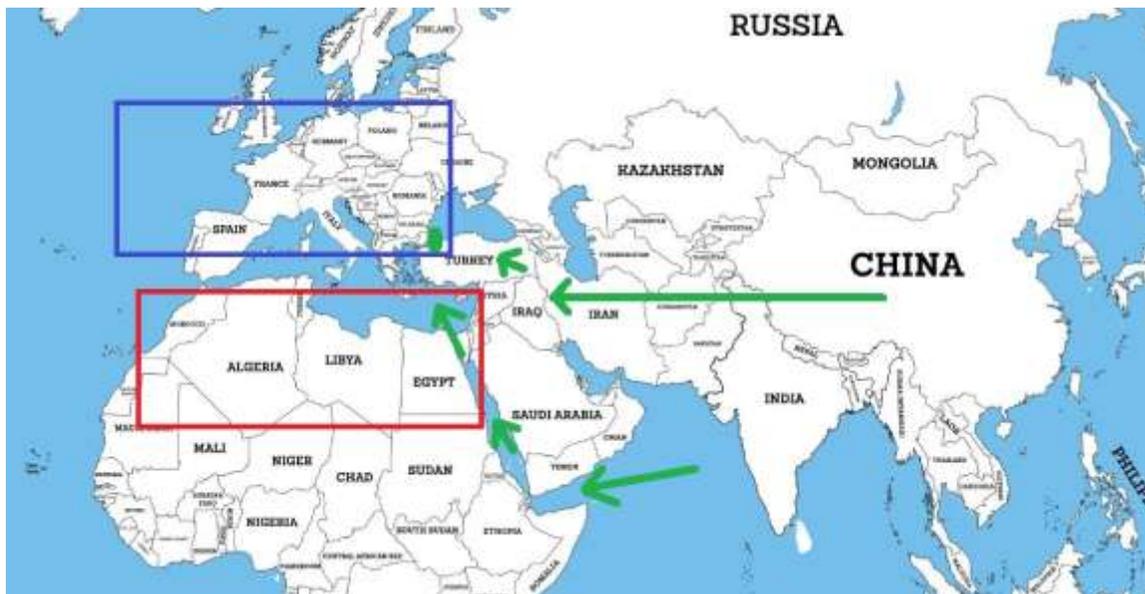
Map 1



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_Road#/media/File:Silk_route.jpg

For centuries there was a lot of competition between the Christians and the Muslims about the control of the Silk Roads. Whoever controlled these routes could impose taxes on the merchandise and earn huge amounts of wealth. Most of the time the Muslims were controlling the southern part of the Mediterranean Sea (Africa), and the Christians were controlling the northern part of the Mediterranean Sea (Europe). When the Muslims beat the Greeks in 1453, and took control of Constantinople (Istanbul), they dominated the sea and land lanes of the Silk Roads. See map 2.

Map 2



What is very interesting is that today the situation is very similar, except that the important merchandizes are not spices, silk and wool, but oil and natural gas. Today Erdogan in Turkey, who is already in control of Constantinople (Istanbul), is trying to establish a friendly islamist government in Egypt i.e. Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, and at the same time he attacks Israel and Syria, which are the only alternative routes to Europe. Trade and merchandize can change but geography always remains the same.

The Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires

[The Roman Empire \(27 B.C. – 476 A.D.\)](#)

The map shows the evolution of the Roman Empire (27 B.C. – 476 A.D.), from her genesis to her fall in 476 A.D. Her eastern part, the Byzantine Empire, survived for another 10 centuries, until Constantinople (Istanbul) fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1453 A.D.

http://cdn1.vox-cdn.com/assets/4821916/Roman_Republic_Empire_map.gif

Map of the Roman Empire



The Ottoman Empire (1299 B.C. – 1923 A.D.)

The following map shows the evolution of the Ottoman Empire, from its birth in 1300, to the replacement of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 with the conquer of Constantinople (Istanbul), to its peak in the period 1500-1650, to its destruction after World War 1 (1914-1918), and to the creation of the Turkish Republic as we know it today by Kemal Attaturk in 1923.

http://cdn3.vox-cdn.com/assets/4224911/ottoman_empire_gif.gif

Map of the Ottoman Empire



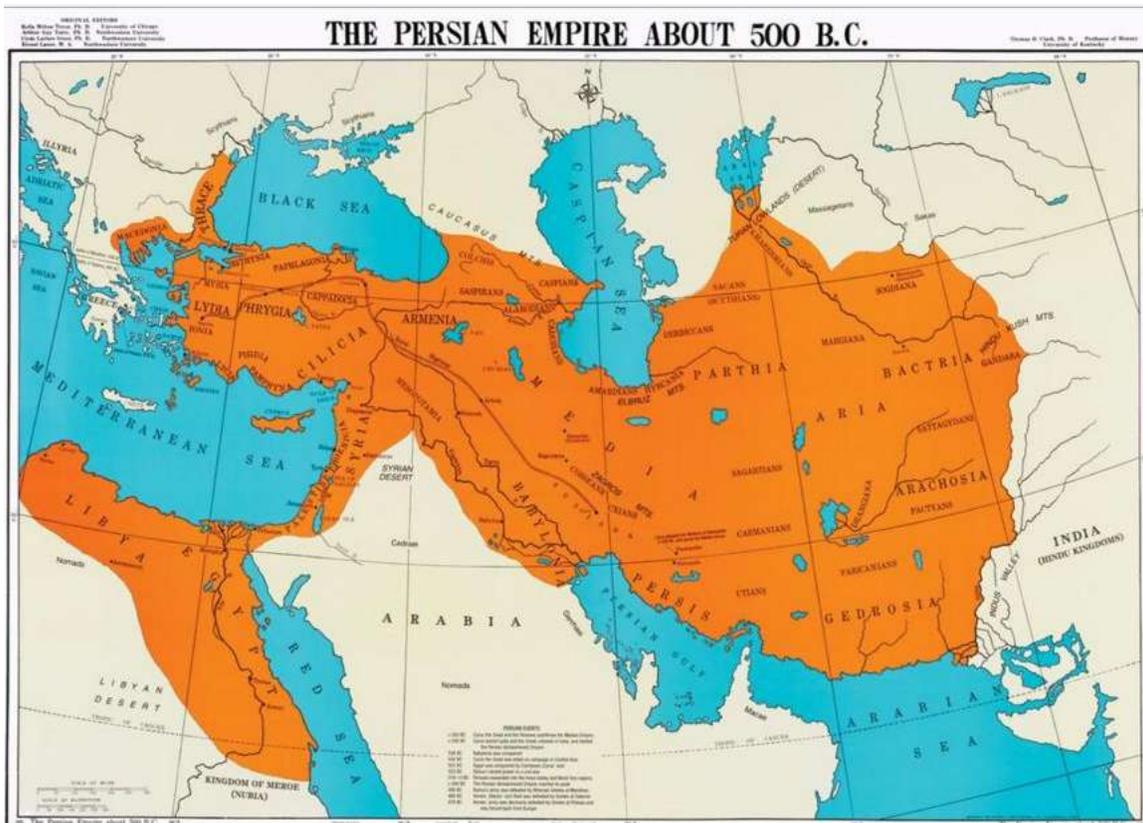
<http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/83/89983-004-C90ACD71.gif>

The Greek-Persian Wars and the Silk Roads

The following map shows the Persian Empire at 500 B.C. It was the time that the Persians (Iranians) were trying to conquer Greece, launching two invasions during the period 500 B.C. – 450 B.C. In the first one they were defeated in Marathon, and in the second one they were defeated in Salamis. See “Greek-Persian Wars”.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Persian_Wars

Map 1 Persian Empire

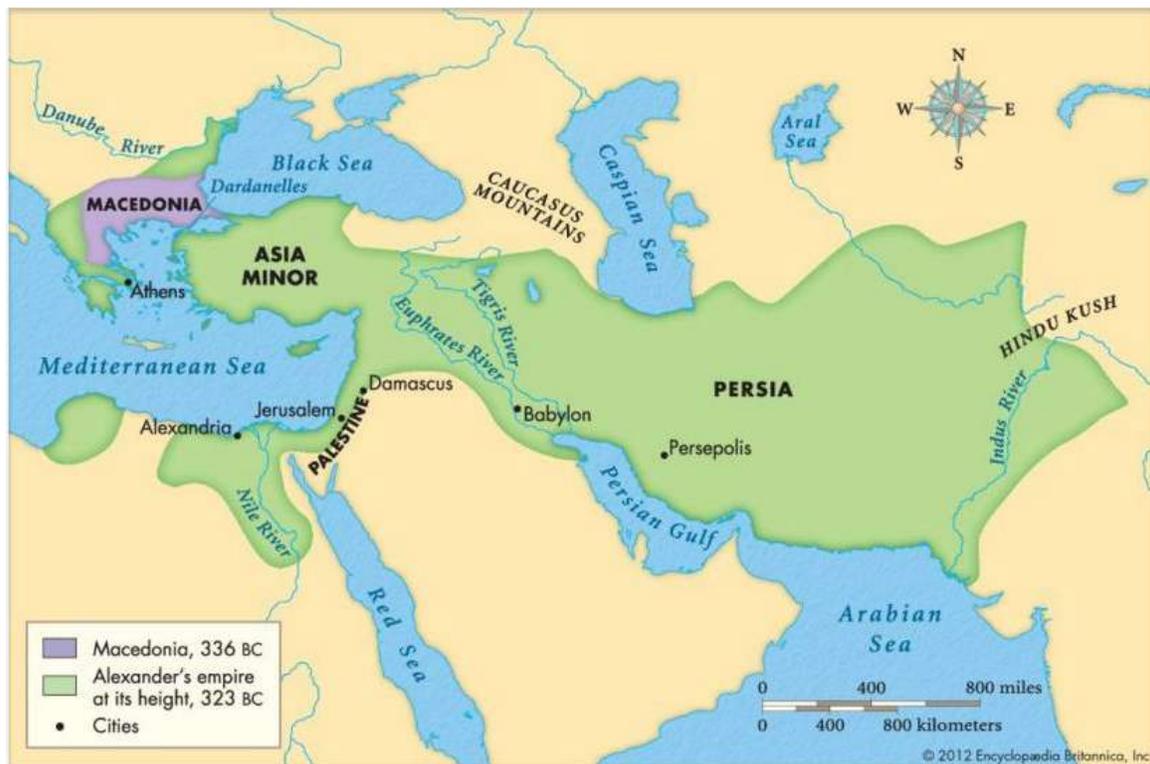


During the period of the Persian Empire, the trade routes were safe, and communications were highly developed. It was a great period for the Silk Roads and trade.

About two hundred years later, the Greek King Alexander the Great, invaded Persia from Macedonia. The decisive battle during Alexander's invasion of Persia was the Battle of Gaugamela, near today's city of Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan. After their defeat at Erbil the Persians were finished, and Alexander became the master of the Silk Roads. See "Battle of Gaugamela".

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gaugamela

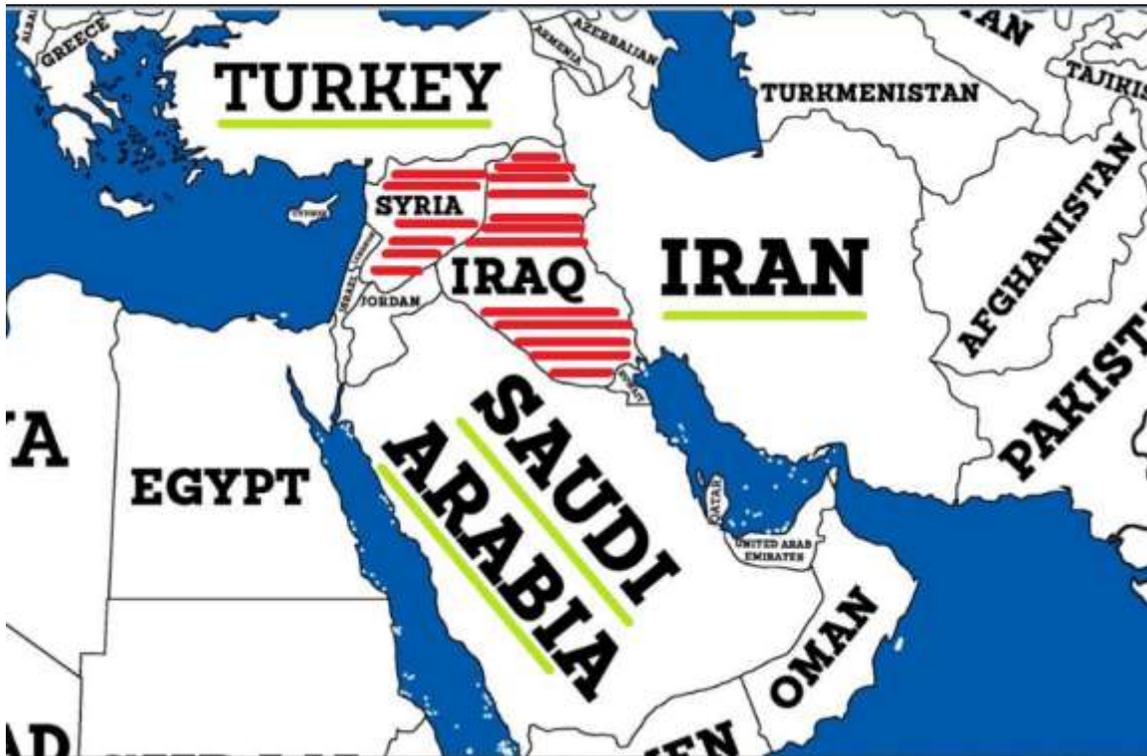
Map 2 Macedonian Empire 323 B.C.



<http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/49/89949-004-3D198429.gif>

In the 21st Century the Persians (Iranians) found again their way to the Mediterranean Sea, through their influence in Syria and Iraq. This time it is not the Greeks that will try to stop them, but an unholy alliance between the Arabs and the Turks. The Arabs and the Turks have a common interest to reduce the Persian (Iranian) influence over the Silk Roads, but each one of them wants greater control over the Silk Roads for himself. That's why I call their alliance "unholy".

Map 3 (Arabs+Turks) VS Iranians



Alexander the Great and the Silk Roads

The following map shows the ancient Silk Roads, which were trade routes that connected East Asia to Europe. With blue you can see the sea routes and with red the land routes.

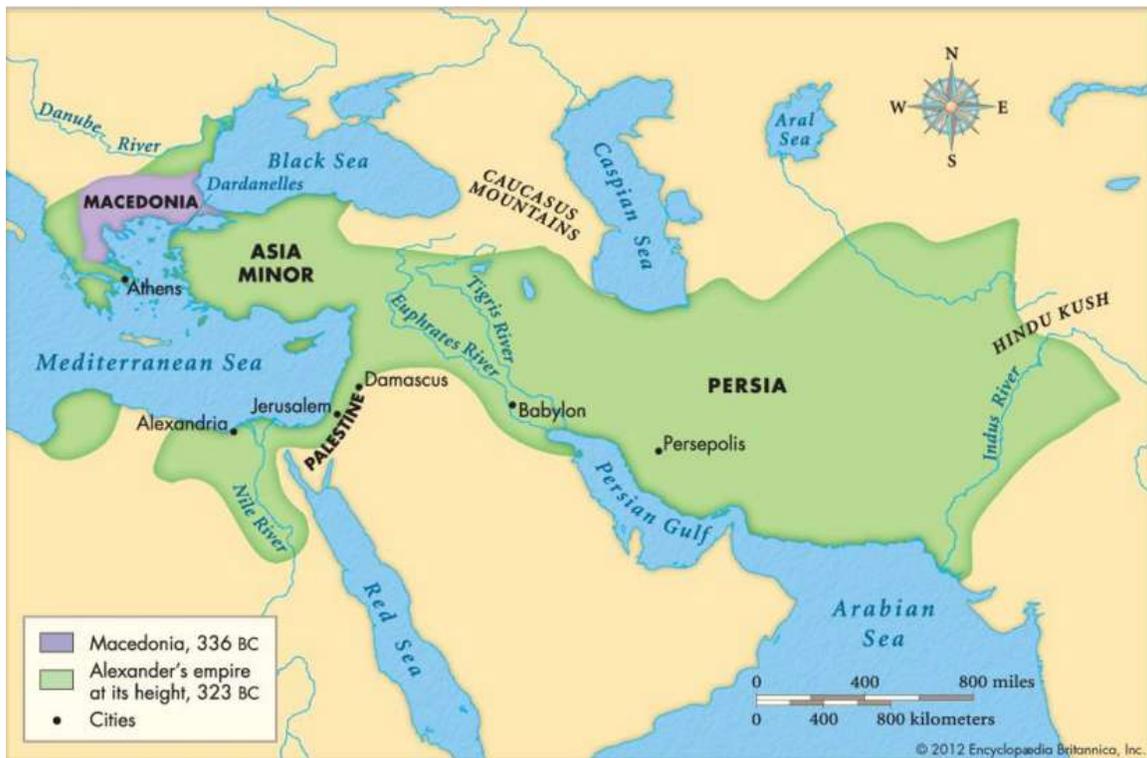
Map 1 : The Silk Roads



https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%94%CF%81%CF%8C%CE%BC%CE%BF%CF%82%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BC%CE%B5%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%8D#/media/File:Silk_route.jpg

A large part of the wars in history were due to the effort of controlling the Silk Roads, in order to secure the trade routes, to cut out parties that were charging commissions and taxes, and to block competing trading routes. The Greek King Alexander the Great conquered Persia (Iran) and Egypt, and he had the Silk Roads under his control, as you can see at the following map.

Map 2 Empire of Alexander the Great 323 B.C.



<http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/49/89949-004-3D198429.gif>

I must say that the Silk Roads did not include any 100% sea route until the Suez Canal was opened by the British in 1869, when the Red Sea was finally connected to the Mediterranean Sea. Until then the sea routes of the Silk Roads would reach Egypt through the Red Sea, then they would become land routes, and in the Mediterranean Sea they would become sea routes again.

There was of course Vasco Da Gama and the Portuguese, who discovered the sea route around Africa in 1497-1499. The Portuguese wanted to avoid the Mediterranean Sea and the taxes charged by the Ottomans, and when they defeated the Ottomans at the sea-fight of Diu (India) in 1509, they managed to keep a small portion of the trade around Africa. But Da Gama's new trade route was not a replacement for the traditional Silk Roads, which are the most efficient connection between Europe and Asia. Inhospitable and costlier Siberia could not be a substitute for the Silk Roads either.

Map 3 The New Trade Route Opened by Vasco Da Gama in 1499

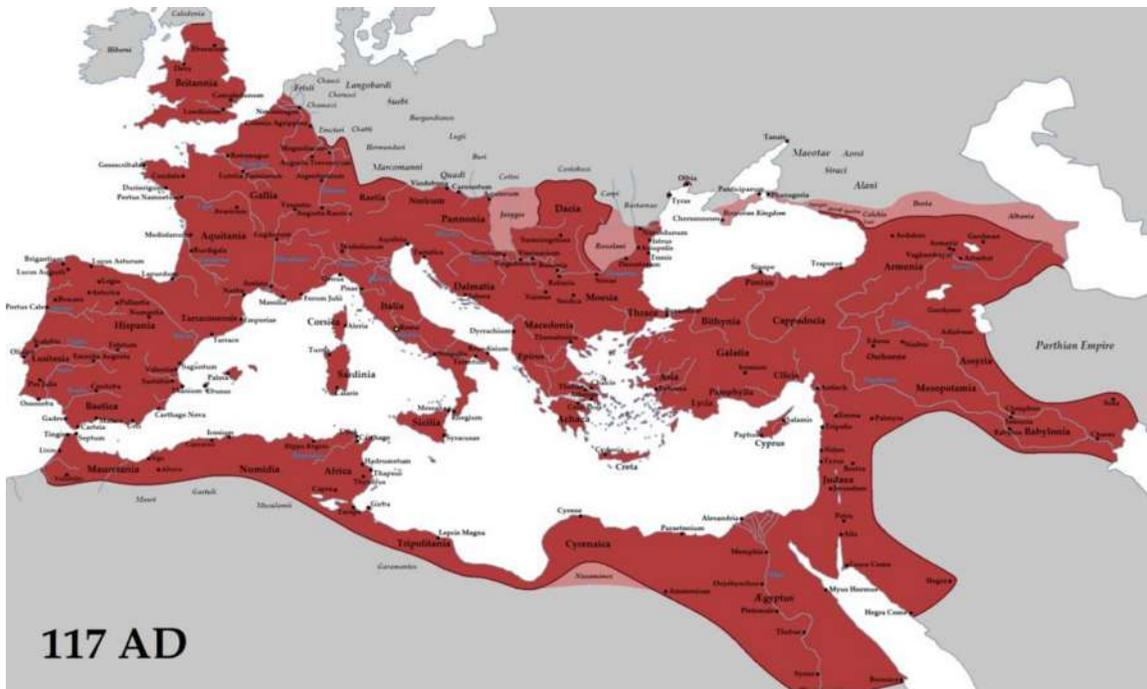


See also Vasco Da Gama and the Silk Roads

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/09/06/vasco-da-gama-and-the-silk-roads/>

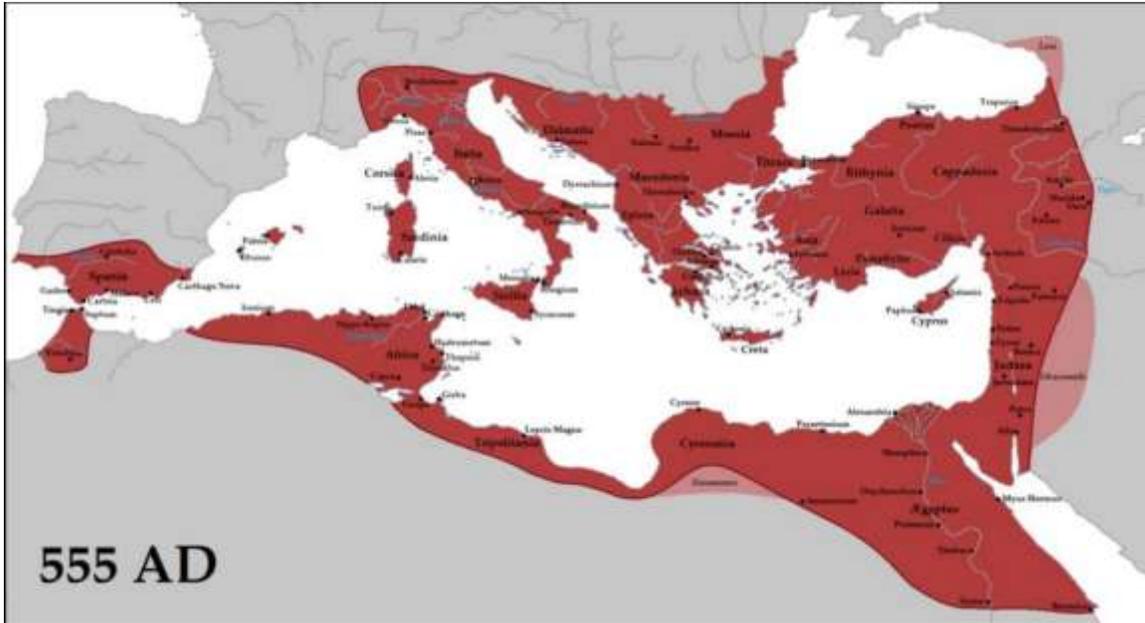
You can see on the map how important Egypt, Turkey and East Mediterranean Sea (Israel+Lebanon+Syria) are for the Silk Roads. That's the reason the Greek King Alexander the Great was among those who conquered these lands. Many other did the same, with the Romans, the Byzantines and the Ottomans among them.

Map 4 Roman Empire 117 A.D.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/00/Roman_Empire_Trajan_117AD.png

Map 5 Byzantine Empire 555 A.D.



http://iakovosal.blogspot.gr/2015/12/blog-post_33.html

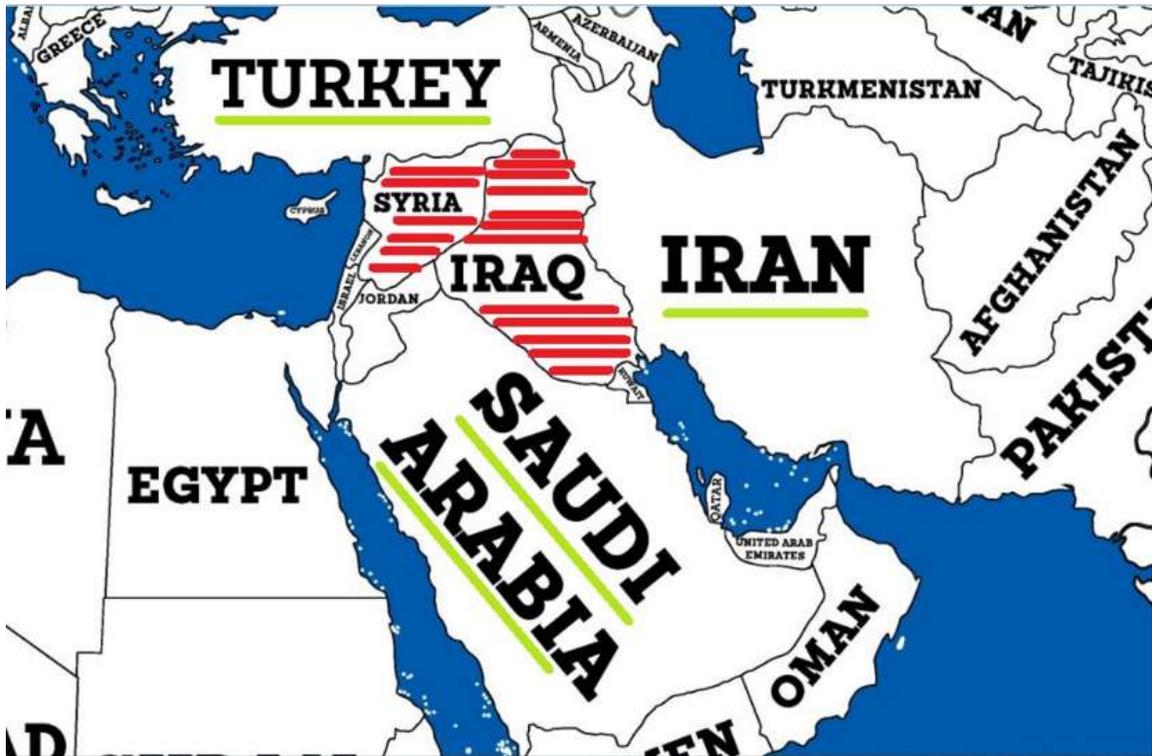
Map 6 Ottoman Empire 1683A.D. – 1699A.D.



<http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/83/89983-004-C90ACD71.gif>

What is very important is that things are still the same, with the main trading products being oil and natural gas, instead of silk and spice. There is still a war for the Silk Roads, with the Persians (Iranians) trying to reach the Mediterranean Sea (Iran-Syria pipeline), and the Turks and the Arabs trying to stop them (Qatar-Turkey pipeline). In the meantime the Turks and the Arabs are fighting each other for influence too. Actually there are Arabs that are today supporting the Persians i.e. the Alawites of Syria and the Shiites of Iraq.

Map 7 The War for the New Silk Roads in Syria and Iraq



Map 8 The Sunni VS the Shiite Pipelines

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