

## SILK ROAD OUTLINE (Bentley, brief edition, Ch 9)

The relative political stability, economic prosperity, and close proximity of their borders encouraged an unprecedented growth in long-distance trade. Regular land and sea trading routes, collectively known as the silk roads, became established thoroughfares for the spread of goods from the coast of China to Western Europe.

This extensive trading network had several consequences, both intended and unintended.

- Regions began to specialize in certain products that were particularly valuable as trade goods.
- Merchants, traders, mariners, and bankers became much more wealthy and influential than they had ever been before.
- Merchants, travelers, and missionaries carried popular religious beliefs to distant lands via the silk roads. Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Mithraism in particular became much more widespread.
- Disease pathogens were carried to populations that had no immunities to them, causing widespread epidemics throughout Eurasia. Inadvertently these epidemics contributed to the downfall of the Han and Roman Empires.

### I. Long-Distance Trade and the Silk Roads Network

#### A. Zhang Qian's Mission to the West

- 1) Held by Xiongnu for years
- 2) Told Han Wudi of possibility of establishing trade relations to Bactria
- 3) Han Wudi subdued Xiongnu, opening up region to safe trade routes

#### B. Trade Networks of the Hellenistic Era

- 1) Important developments of the classical era that reduced risks
  - a. Rulers invested in constructing roads and bridges
  - b. Large empires expanded until borders were closer
- 2) Trade networks of the Hellenistic world
  - a. Exchanges between India/Bactria in east and Mediterranean basin in the west
  - b. Ptolemies learned about the monsoon system in Indian Ocean
  - c. Maritime trade included East Africa--Rhapta

#### C. The Silk Roads

- 1) Trade routes
  - a. Overland trade routes linked China to Roman Empire
  - b. Sea lanes joined Asia, Africa, and Mediterranean basin into one network
- 2) **Trade goods**
  - a. **Silk and spices traveled west**
  - b. **Central Asia produced large horses and jade, sold in China**
  - c. **Roman empire provided glassware, jewelry, artworks, perfumes, textiles**
- 3) The organization of long-distance trade
  - a. Merchants of different regions handled long-distance trade in stages
  - b. On the seas, long-distance trade was dominated by different empires

## II. Cultural and Biological Exchanges along the Silk Roads

### A. The Spread of Buddhism and Hinduism

#### 1) Buddhism in central Asia and China

- a. 1<sup>st</sup> present in oasis towns of central Asia along silk roads
- b. Further spread to steppe lands
- c. Foreign merchants as Buddhists in China, 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE
- d. Popularity of monasteries and missionaries, 5<sup>th</sup> century CE

#### 2) Buddhism and Hinduism in SE Asia

### B. The Spread of Christianity

#### 1) Christianity in the Mediterranean basin

- a. Missionaries, like Gregory the Wonderworker, attracted converts
- b. Christian communities flourished in Mediterranean basin by late 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE

#### 2) Christianity in Southwest Asia followed the trade routes

- a. Sizable communities in Mesopotamia and Iran, 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE
- b. Sizable number of converts in SW Asia until the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE
- c. Their ascetic practices influenced Christian practices in the Roman Empire
- d. Nestorians emphasized human nature of Jesus, 5<sup>th</sup> century CE
- e. Nestorian communities in central Asia, India, and China by 7<sup>th</sup> century CE

### C. The Spread of Manichaeism; Best Example of Religion Spread on Silk Roads

#### 1) Mani and Manichaeism

- a. Prophet Mani, a Zoroastrian, drew influence from Christianity and Buddhism
- b. Dualism: perceived a cosmic struggle between light and darkness, good and evil
- c. Offered means to achieve personal salvation
- d. Ascetic lifestyle and high ethical standards
- e. Differentiation between the “elect” and the “hearers”

#### 2) Spread of Manichaeism; appealed to merchants

- a. Attracted converts 1<sup>st</sup> in Mesopotamia & E Mediterranean region
- b. Appeared in all large cities of Roman Empire, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE

#### 3) Persecuted by Sassanids and Romans but survived in central Asia

### D. The Spread of Epidemic Disease

#### 1) Epidemic diseases

- a. Common epidemics in Rome and China: smallpox, measles, bubonic plague
- b. Roman Empire: population dropped by 25% from the 1<sup>st</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> century CE
- c. China: population dropped by 25% from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century CE

#### 2) Effects of epidemic diseases

- a. Both Chinese and Roman economies contracted
- b. Small regional economies emerged
- c. Epidemics weakened Han and Roman empires

## QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT:

How did Classical era trade networks compare to Ancient era networks?

What forces contributed to the changes between the two eras?

What was commonly traded along these trade networks?

Besides physical goods, what intangibles *also* traveled along trade networks?

How and where did Buddhism spread by 600 CE?

How did religions spread along trade networks, and how did the trade networks affect the religions?

What effects did diseases have on Classical empires?