

CHAPTER 12

CROSS-CULTURAL EXCHANGES ON THE SILK ROADS

INTRODUCTION

The classical era witnessed the growth and consolidation of vast empires such as Rome, China, and Parthia. 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.

OUTLINE

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 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) First present in oasis towns of central Asia along silk roads
 - b) Further spread to steppe lands
 - c) Foreign merchants as Buddhists in China, first century B.C.E.
 - d) Popularity of monasteries and missionaries, fifth century C.E.
 2. Buddhism and Hinduism in Southeast 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 third century C.E.
 2. Christianity in southwest Asia follows the trade routes
 - a) Sizable communities in Mesopotamia and Iran, second century C.E.
 - b) Sizable number of converts in southwest Asia until the seventh century C.E.
 - c) Their ascetic practices influenced Christian practices in the Roman empire
 - d) Nestorians emphasized human nature of Jesus, fifth century C.E.
 - e) Nestorian communities in central Asia, India, and China by seventh century C.E.
- 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 first in Mesopotamia and east Mediterranean region
 - b) Appeared in all large cities of Roman empire, third century C.E.
- 3. Persecuted by Sasanids 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 a quarter from the first to tenth century C.E.
 - c) China: population dropped by a quarter from the first to seventh century C.E.
 - 2. Effects of epidemic diseases
 - a) Both Chinese and Roman economies contracted
 - b) Small regional economies emerged
 - c) Epidemics weakened Han and Roman empires

III. China after the Han dynasty

- A. Internal decay of the Han state
 - 1. Problems of factions and land distribution led to rebellions
 - 2. Generals usurped political authority; the emperor became a puppet
 - a) By 220 C.E., generals abolished the Han and divided the empire into three kingdoms
 - b) Nomadic peoples came in; China became even more divided for 350 years
- B. Cultural change in post-Han China
 - 1. Gradual sinicization of nomadic peoples
 - 2. Withering of Confucianism in light of political instability
 - 3. Popularity of Buddhism; nomadic rulers embraced it

IV. The fall of the Roman empire

- A. Internal decay in the Roman empire
 - 1. The barracks emperors: series of generals seizing throne (235–284 C.E.)
 - 2. The emperor Diocletian (284–305 C.E.)
 - a) Divided the empire into two administrative districts
 - b) A co-emperor ruled each district with the aid of a powerful lieutenant
 - 3. The emperor Constantine and new capital, Constantinople

- B. Germanic invasions and the fall of the western Roman empire
1. Germanic migrations from northern Europe to eastern and northern part of Roman empire
 - a) Visigoths—settled agriculturalists; adopted Roman law and Christianity
 - b) Roman authorities kept Germanic peoples on the borders as a buffer
 2. The Huns under Attila attacked Europe mid-fifth century C.E.
 3. The collapse of the western Roman empire
 - a) Under the Huns' pressure, Germanic peoples streamed into the Roman Empire
 - b) Established settlements in Italy, Gaul, Spain, Britain, and North Africa
 - c) Germanic general Odovacer deposed the Roman emperor, 476 C.E.
 - d) Imperial authority survived in the eastern half of the empire
- C. Cultural change in the late Roman empire
1. Christianity most prominent survivor of the collapse of the empire
 - a) With Constantine's Edict of Milan, Christianity became a legitimate religion, 313 C.E.
 - b) Emperor Theodosius proclaimed Christianity the official religion, 380 C.E.
 - c) St. Augustine harmonized Christianity with Platonic thought
 2. The Church became increasingly institutionalized
 - a) Conflicting doctrines and practices among early Christians
 - b) Established standardized hierarchy of church officials
 - c) The bishop of Rome, known as the pope, became spiritual leader
 - d) As Roman empire collapsed, Christianity served as a cultural foundation

IDENTIFICATION: PEOPLE

What is the contribution of each of the following individuals to world history? Identification should include answers to the questions *who, what, where, when, how, and why is this person important?*

Zhang Qian

Han Wudi

Gregory the Wonderworker

Mani

Diocletian

Constantine

Attila

Odoacer

St. Augustine

IDENTIFICATION: TERMS/CONCEPTS

State in your own words what each of the following terms means and why it is significant to a study of world history. (Terms with an asterisk are defined in the glossary.)

Silk roads*

Monsoon system

Rhapta

Buddhism*

Hinduism*

Christianity

Nestorians*

Manichaeism*

Epidemic

Yellow Turban

Barracks emperors

Visigoths

Huns

Edict of Milan

Council of Nicaea

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What developments in the classical era helped reduce the risks inherent in long-distance trade?
2. How did the trade networks of the Hellenistic era help set the stage for the silk roads?

3. In general, what goods from what regions were traded along the silk roads?
4. How did Buddhism become the most popular faith in all of east Asia?
5. How did the silk roads facilitate the spread of Hinduism and Christianity?
6. Why is the rise of Manichaeism such a good example of the relationship between long-distance trade and the spread of religion?
7. What were the long-term effects of the spread of disease along the silk roads?
8. How did China's culture change after the decline of the Han dynasty?
9. What were some of the main causes of the decay and fall of the western Roman empire?
10. How did Europe's culture change during the late Roman empire?

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did the network of trade routes called the silk roads make life during the classical era significantly different from life in the preclassical world? Consider all the different effects and the various cultures involved.
 2. The textbook states, "Christianity was perhaps the most prominent survivor of the western Roman empire." What does this statement mean? How did Christianity manage to survive and thrive after the collapse of the empire?
 3. How did the nomadic peoples of Eurasia impede and/or contribute to the development of the silk roads?
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MATCHING

Match these people and places with their contribution to the trade network.

- | | |
|-------------------|------------|
| A. China | E. Parthia |
| B. Southeast Asia | F. Rhapta |
| C. India | G. Jews |
| D. Central Asia | H. Rome |

1. ___ Took goods from Palmyra to the Mediterranean basin.
2. ___ Contributed pepper, cotton, and exotic items like pearls.
3. ___ Contributed spices and mariners active in sea trade.

4. ___ Controlled sea trade in the Persian Gulf and overland trade within the empire.
5. ___ Contributed manufactured goods like glass, art, olive oil, and wine and dominated the Mediterranean.
6. ___ Contributed fine silk and spices and was the easternmost extent of the trade route.
7. ___ Contributed horses and jade and dominated overland trade routes.
8. ___ Contributed ivory, tortoise shell, and slaves and dominated east African trade.

SEQUENCING

Place the following clusters of events in chronological order. Consider carefully how one event leads to another, and try to determine the internal logic of each sequence.

A.

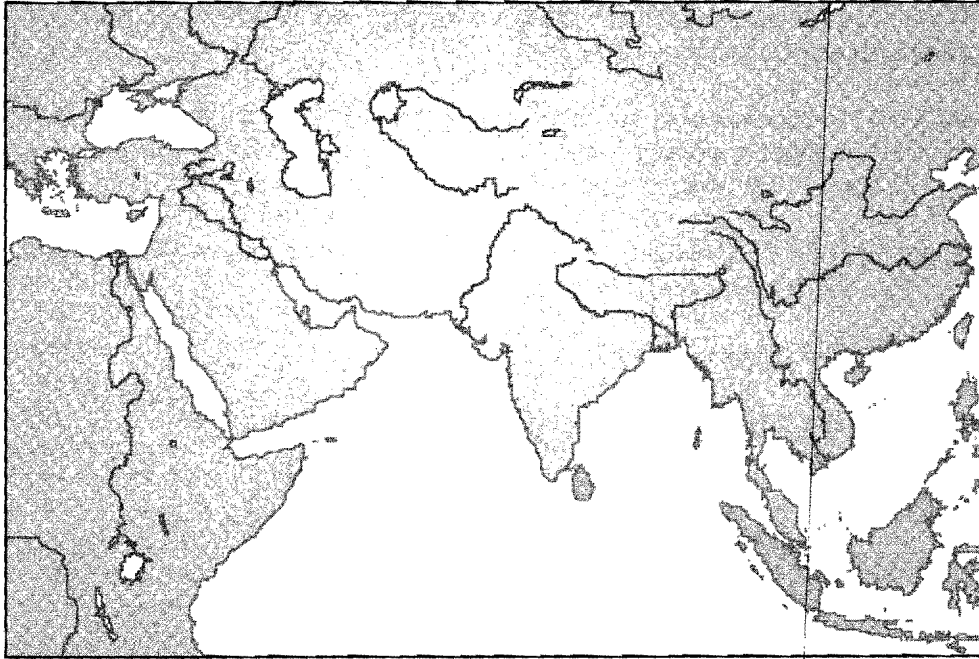
- ___ Han generals divide the empire into three large kingdoms.
- ___ Han Wudi wages major campaign to subdue nomadic Xiongnu people of central Asia.
- ___ Buddhism spreads to China.
- ___ Zhang Qian and his party return to China.
- ___ Epidemics sweep through Han China.

B.

- ___ Devastating epidemic breaks out in the Mediterranean basin.
- ___ The Ptolemies deduce the patterns of the monsoon system in the Indian Ocean.
- ___ Odovacer deposes the western Roman emperor.
- ___ Diocletian divides the Roman empire into two administrative units.
- ___ Constantine converts to Christianity.
- ___ Christianity spreads throughout the Roman empire and becomes the most popular religion of salvation there.

MAP EXERCISES

1. Add the following information to the map of the silk roads below: the general boundaries of the territories to be traversed (you will need to look at earlier maps in the text for that), the most important trade goods (written in at their places of origin), the people most responsible for carrying the trade goods in each region.



2. Using the map of the Germanic invasions, think about the significance to the Germanic people and the Romans of the invasions of the Huns in the fifth century C.E.

CONNECTIONS

In fifty words or less, explain the relationship between each of the following pairs. How does one lead to or foster the other? Be specific in your response. (May be done individually or in small groups.)

- Zhang Qian and the silk roads
- Manichaeism and trade
- Smallpox and the Roman empire
- Silk and glass
- Rhapta and Guangzhou