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**Ways of the World: A Brief Global
History with Sources**
Second Edition

Chapter 7
Commerce and Culture, 500–1500

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Travels on the Silk Road
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1. Where is this statue from, and what does it show?

This Chinese ceramic figure from the Tang Dynasty (618–907 c.e.) features a camel with a group of men sitting on top. One is standing and seems to be looking into the distance over the camel's head. A bearded man with a mandolin or a similar stringed instrument is sitting up front. His hairstyle—a forward tilted bun—is the same as that of the man standing behind him in a dark green coat. Three additional figures on the other side of the camel and to its back seem to have short hair, and their facial structure suggests that they are Chinese. One of the three who is turned toward the viewer has his hands positioned as if he were playing the flute. This is a group of musicians—two from central Asia, three from China—traveling on a camel.

2. What does this figure tell us about the cultural significance of the Silk Road?

The Silk Road was a crucial axis in the rapidly expanding commercial network that linked China with Eurasia across the Central Asian region. The people and cultures adjacent to the Silk Road exchanged not only goods but cultural artifacts and music as well. This depiction of different ethnicities joined by music and traveling on the same camel's back is a powerful expression of a predominantly harmonious cultural exchange.

I. Silk Roads: Exchange across Eurasia

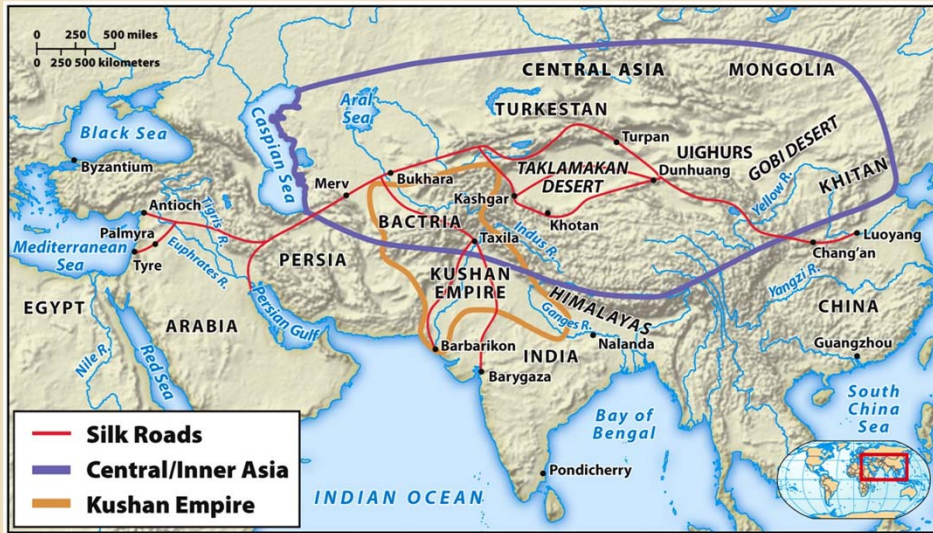
A. The Growth of the Silk Roads

1. Inner and Outer Eurasia
2. Pastoral people in motion
3. Indirect connections between empires

I. Silk Roads: Exchange across Eurasia

A. The Growth of the Silk Roads

1. Inner and Outer Eurasia: The Eurasia land mass, home to the majority of the world's population and many of its most economically productive areas, is divided by geography and historical development. In India, China, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean, there were a series of economically vibrant urban centers, states, and empires. These civilizations were on the periphery of the continent, "outer" Eurasia. Between them lay the colder plains and steppes of "inner" Eurasia. These lands were home to nomadic pastoral groups with herd animals.
2. Pastoral people in motion: These nomadic pastoralists raised animals and traded animal products with the people of the outer zone. They also began to carry products from one area to another.
3. Indirect connections between empires: These pastoralists served as an indirect method of communication between the empires of the outer zone.



Map 7.1 The Silk Roads
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I. Silk Roads: Exchange across Eurasia

B. Goods in transit

1. Luxury goods such as silk
2. Women as producers and consumers
3. China and other centers of silk production

I. Silk Roads: Exchange across Eurasia

B. Goods in transit

1. Luxury goods such as silk: Staples and other foodstuffs were too heavy to carry on the Silk Roads. Because of the cost of long-distance transportation, the trade network thus carried lightweight and expensive items, especially silk and spices.
2. Women as producers and consumers: For centuries, Chinese silk was produced by Chinese female peasants and consumed by elite Chinese women. Increasingly, elite men such as government officials and religious figures in China and elsewhere began to demand silk. Europeans used silk for clothes and wall hangings.
3. China and other centers of silk production: China enjoyed a monopoly on silk production for centuries, but by the sixth century, the knowledge of how to make silk spread to the Byzantine Empire and various sites in Asia. As supply increased, the various types of silk and various uses for it also increased.

I. Silk Roads: Exchange across Eurasia

C. Cultures in Transit

1. Buddhism on the road
2. New forms of Buddhism: Mahayana

I. Silk Roads: Exchange across Eurasia

C. Cultures in Transit

1. Buddhism on the road: Buddhism spread along the Silk Roads, gaining converts among pastoral peoples and in oasis towns. Many monasteries were established that became centers of wisdom and learning, as well as serving economic functions. Buddhism's universal message had a strong appeal to the cosmopolitan merchant world of Inner Eurasia.

2. New forms of Buddhism: Mahayana: As Buddhism left India, doctrine changed. The Mahayana branch became the most predominant. Mahayana Buddhism saw the Buddha as a god-like figure, encouraged the veneration of Bodhisattvas, and stressed various rituals. Wealthy monasteries began to get involved in political and economic affairs along the Silk Roads. In Bactria, Greek culture influenced Buddhist art and culture.

I. Silk Roads: Exchange across Eurasia

D. Disease in Transit

1. Smallpox and measles in Han and Rome
2. Bubonic plague in Byzantium and elsewhere
3. Mongols and the Black Death

I. Silk Roads: Exchange across Eurasia

D. Disease in Transit

1. Smallpox and measles in Han and Rome: These diseases caused various epidemic outbreaks in both empires on either end of Eurasia.
2. Bubonic plague in Byzantium and elsewhere: Between 534 and 750 C.E., bubonic plague broke out at various times in various places around the Mediterranean. Sometimes these outbreaks could kill thousands in a day as in a 40-day epidemic in Constantinople in 534.
3. Mongols and the Black Death: The most famous case of epidemic disease was the Black Death. Spread during the Mongol control of the Silk Roads, it moved from China to Europe and the Middle East. It killed one-third of the European population between 1346 and 1350.

II. Sea Roads: Exchange across the Indian Ocean

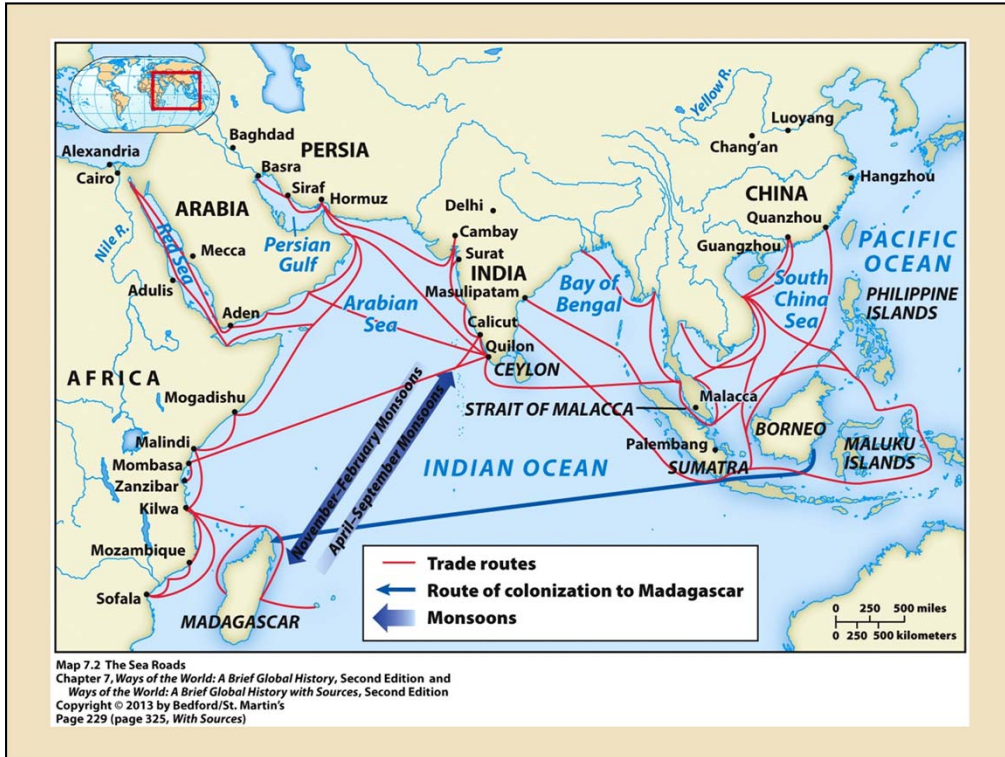
A. Weaving the Web of an Indian Ocean World

1. Malay sailors in East Africa
2. New technologies
3. India as the fulcrum
4. Impact of China
5. Islam and trade

II. Sea Roads: Exchange across the Indian Ocean

A. Weaving the Web of an Indian Ocean World

1. Malay sailors in East Africa: The regular wind patterns of the monsoons in the Indian Ocean allowed for fairly easy and consistent travel. While there has been local maritime trade in the Indian Ocean for an unknown time, in the first millennium B.C.E., Malay sailors began to make long-distance travels across the ocean. They brought various crops such as bananas and coconuts as far as East Africa. There are still various cultural traces of these Malay voyagers in Africa.
2. New technologies: The development of new technologies for shipbuilding and navigation allowed sailors from various locations around the Indian Ocean to engage in sea-going trade. These technologies included ships known as *junks* with stern rudders, keels that gave more stability, the astrolabe, and the compass.
3. India as the fulcrum: Thanks to both its central geographic location and its vibrant economy, India naturally became the fulcrum of trade in the Indian Ocean basin.
4. Impact of China: The economic revival of the Tang and Song (618–1279) gave a huge economic boost to the Indian Ocean trade. China produced a variety of goods for export to the rest of the world, increasing the volume of trade on these sea routes. China also served as a market for a variety of Indian and Southeast Asian goods.
5. Islam and trade: The rise of Islam also had a positive impact on trade for several reasons. First of all, as the Prophet Muhammad had been a merchant, he served as a positive role model for other merchants (in contrast to China where merchants were deemed to be of dubious moral quality). Second, as the realm of Islam expanded rapidly, it created a single political system that incorporated a number of different economic centers. In the Indian Ocean, Islam created an international maritime culture.



II. Sea Roads: Exchange across the Indian Ocean

B. Sea Roads as a Catalyst for Change: Southeast Asia

1. Srivijaya, 670–1075
2. Khmer kingdom of Angkor, 800–1300
3. Borobudur and Angkor Wat
4. “Indianization”

II. Sea Roads: Exchange across the Indian Ocean

B. Sea Roads as a Catalyst for Change: Southeast Asia

1. Srivijaya, 670–1075: This Sumatra-based kingdom owed its power to the control over the flow of trade through the Straits of Malacca. With access to supplies of gold and spices and the taxes it collected from ships passing through this crucial choke point in trade between the Indian Ocean and East Asia, Srivijaya became a fabulously wealthy and cosmopolitan place.
2. Khmer kingdom of Angkor, 800–1300: Centered in what is now Cambodia, this state had a strong agricultural base but also traded forest products with Chinese and Indian merchants.
3. Borobudur and Angkor Wat: The first is a massive Buddhist monument in Java built by the Sailendra dynasty. The three miles of walkways tell the stories of the lives of the Buddha but are set in Java, not India. Angkor Wat is one of many Khmer monuments. It is a Hindu temple whose central tower symbolizes Mt. Meru, the cosmological center of the universe.
4. “Indianization”: Because of the strong economic, religious, and cultural influences from South Asia, many scholars once spoke of a process of the “Indianization” of Southeast Asia. While the impact of India is undeniable, we should not overstate this process as Southeast Asian cultures blended imports from India with their own ideas, traditions, and practices. For example, Southeast Asian women had many more opportunities than their sisters in South Asia.



Map 7.3 Southeast Asia ca. 1200 C.E.
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Borobudur
Robert Harding World Imagery/Alamy
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1. Describe this building.

Borobudur is a vast Buddhist monument consisting of six square platforms topped by three circular platforms, giving it a height of easily more than 100 feet. It is decorated with various reliefs and what look like hundreds of Buddha statues.

2. Where is this monument located, and what does its location tell us about the accelerating connections between India and Southeast Asia in the first millennium C.E.?

Borobudur is located in central Java, one of the main islands of present-day Indonesia. Buddhist beliefs traveled southward from their original India through trade and commerce across the Indian Ocean. The monument was probably built in the ninth century and spoke to the interest of Sailendra rulers in Buddhist concepts like karma and their own self-perception as god kings.

II. Sea Roads: Exchange across the Indian Ocean

C. Sea Roads as a Catalyst for Change: East Africa

1. Swahili
2. Rise of Islamic trade
3. Lamu, Mombasa, Kilwa, and Sofala
4. Cultural fusions
5. Muslim Africans
6. Great Zimbabwe

II. Sea Roads: Exchange across the Indian Ocean

C. Sea Roads as a Catalyst for Change: East Africa

1. Swahili: This was the civilization of coastal East Africa. While they were of Bantu descent, they created a new identity thanks to their participation in the Indian Ocean trade networks.

2. Rise of Islamic trade: While the Swahili coast had traded with merchants from the north for centuries, the rise of Islam marked a dramatic turning point in the region's fortunes. Swahili merchants exported the goods and sometimes slaves of the African interior to the markets of India, Southeast Asia, and China. Conversely, they imported goods such as Indian gold art and Chinese porcelain.

3. Lamu, Mombasa, Kilwa, and Sofala: The Swahili culture was an urban culture composed of independent city-states of perhaps 20,000 people. Despite a common language and culture, there was no political unity. These societies had intense social stratification between elites and commoners.

4. Cultural fusions: The Swahili cities were home to a rich fusion of various cultures from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The Swahili language, for example, is of Bantu origin but uses Arabic script and has many Arabic loan words.

5. Muslim Africans: With the spread of Islam, the East Coast of Africa was home to a large population of Muslims who did not trace their roots back to the Arabian Peninsula but did see themselves as a part of the larger Islamic community. As Muslims, they saw fellow black Africans who did not practice Islam as outsiders. They thus felt they had more in common with Arabs and Persians than animist Africans.

6. Great Zimbabwe: The Swahili merchants forged links with peoples of the interior of the continent as well as further south. To the south and inland from the coast lay the

impressive kingdom of Great Zimbabwe with large stone buildings in its capital, indicating much wealth and social organization.



Spot Map The Swahili Coast of East Africa
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III. Sand Roads: Exchange across the Sahara

A. Commercial Beginnings in West Africa

1. Environmental variation around the Sahara
2. Sudanic West African trade and urban centers

III. Sand Roads: Exchange across the Sahara

A. Commercial Beginnings in West Africa

1. Environmental variation around the Sahara: There are diverse environments in and around the Sahara, each producing a different set of goods. To the north on the shores of the Mediterranean were communities that produced goods such as weapons, tools, books, clothes, and glassware. The Sahara had deposits of copper and salt as well as oases with date palms. To the immediate south in the savanna grasslands, there were millet and sorghum farmers; further south in the forests, root and tree crops such as yam and kola nuts grew.
2. Sudanic West African trade and urban centers: Arab travelers knew the lands south of the Sahara as the "Sudan" or "land of the blacks," but there were older trade networks amongst the people of West Africa. There were a number of urban centers along the Niger River that were key hubs of trade.

III. Sand Roads: Exchange across the Sahara

B. Gold, Salt, and Slaves: Trade and Empire in West Africa

1. Camel caravans carrying gold and salt
2. Wealthy empires based on trade
3. Women in the workforce
4. Slave trading
5. Cosmopolitan cities

III. Sand Roads: Exchange across the Sahara

B. Gold, Salt, and Slaves: Trade and Empire in West Africa

1. Camel caravans carrying gold and salt: The introduction of the camel changed the course of trade in Africa. Now massive caravans of hundreds of people and thousands of camels could bring salt and other goods from the north across the dangerous Sahara in exchange for gold and other goods from the south. Soon Arab merchants would bring the news of the Islamic revelations to West Africa.
2. Wealthy empires based on trade: Several empires such as Ghana, Mali, and Songhay developed into wealthy states thanks to their monopoly control over the Sahara trade routes and their access to plentiful gold deposits.
3. Women in the workforce: While men generally enjoyed positions of patriarchal power, women played important roles in court and in the workforce as agricultural laborers and the makers of craft goods such as pottery.
4. Slave trading: Like elsewhere in the world, there were various forms of slavery. Slaves were generally taken from stateless societies further to the south, but some wealthy men had women from the eastern Mediterranean as slaves. Slaves were also exported to the Islamic slave markets of the north.
5. Cosmopolitan cities: The wealth of the West African cities made them centers of trade and manufacturing but also culture, education, and religion.



Map 7.4 The Sand Roads
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IV. An American Network: Commerce and Connection in the Western Hemisphere

- A. Geographic barriers**
- B. Regional trade networks**
- C. Mayan and Aztec trade**
- D. Incan roads**

IV. An American Network: Commerce and Connection in the Western Hemisphere

A. Geographic barriers: Unlike Eurasia with its easy east-west trade axis, the Americas had serious obstacles to travel in the jungles of the narrow Isthmus of Panama.

B. Regional trade networks: The Americas did have a series of regional trade networks that could move goods and cultural practices over hundreds of miles.

C. Mayan and Aztec trade: The Mesoamerican states such as the Mayan and the Aztecs made themselves wealthy by controlling the trade routes through their territory. While much of the trade was in luxury goods, it often provided essential items from distant ecosystems. In the Aztec realm, there were professional merchants called *pochteca* who acted for the state or on their own.

D. Incan roads: The Inca used their 20,000-mile road system to run a state-controlled trade network of various commodities from the diverse lands they controlled.



Map 7.5 The American Web
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V. Reflections: Economic Globalization— Ancient and Modern

- A. Luxury goods of the ancient world**
- B. Mass consumption in the modern world**
- C. Multi-polar ancient economy**
- D. Western dominance in the modern economy**

V. Reflections: Economic Globalization—Ancient and Modern

A. Luxury goods of the ancient world: Because of transportation costs, relatively light luxury goods dominated the ancient economic networks.

B. Mass consumption in the modern world: In the industrialized modern world, humans could ship commodities for mass consumption.

C. Multi-polar ancient economy: The ancient world had a relatively balanced system with no dominant center.

D. Western dominance in the modern economy: In the modern era, Western Europe came to dominate the global system.



Visual Source 7.1 Silk Road Merchants Encounter Bandits
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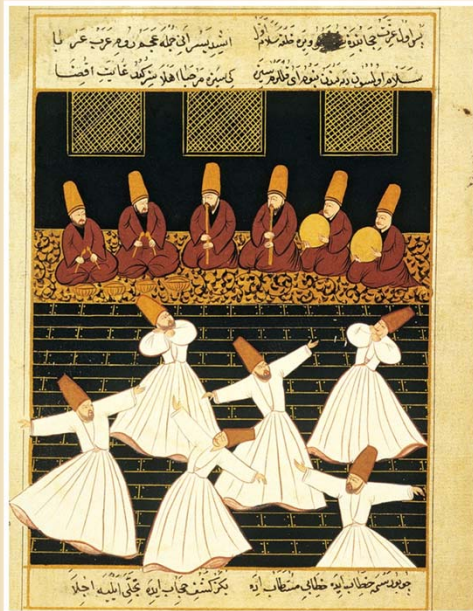
Visual Source 7.2 A Stop at a Caravanserai
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Visual Source 7.3 A Buddhist Monk on the Silk Road
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Visual Source 7.4 Greek Culture, Buddhism, and the Kushans
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Visual Source 7.5 Islam, Shamanism, and the Turks
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