

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.

## 1. 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

**What developments in the classical era helped reduce the risks inherent in long-distance trade?**

### 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

**How did the trade networks of the Hellenistic era help set the stage for the silk roads?**

### 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

**In general, what goods from what regions were traded along the silk roads?**

## 2. 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 B.CE
  - d. Popularity of monasteries and missionaries, 5<sup>th</sup> century CE
- 2) Buddhism and Hinduism in Southeast Asia

**How did Buddhism become the most popular faith in all of East 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

**How did the silk roads facilitate the spread of Hinduism and Christianity?**

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 Mesopt. & E Mediterranean region
  - b. Appeared in all large cities of Roman empire, 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE
- 3) Persecuted by Sasanids and Romans but survived in central Asia

**Why is the rise of Manichaeism such a good example of the relationship between long-distance trade and the spread of religion?**

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 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century CE
  - c. China: population dropped by a quarter 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

**What were the long-term effects of the spread of disease along the silk roads?**

### 3. 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 CE, 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

**How did China's culture change after the decline of the Han dynasty?**

## 4. The Fall of the Roman Empire

### A. Internal Decay in the Roman Empire

- 1) The barracks emperors: series of generals seizing throne (235-284 CE)
- 2) The emperor Diocletian (284-305 CE)
  - a. Divided the empire into two administrative districts
  - b. A co-emperor ruled each district with the aid of a powerful lieutenant (the “tetrarchs”)
- 3) The emperor Constantine and new capital Constantinople

**What were some of the main causes of the decay and fall of the western Roman empire?**

### 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-5<sup>th</sup> century CE
- 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, & N Africa
  - c. Germanic general Odovacer deposed the Roman emperor, 476 CE
  - 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 CE
  - b. Emperor Theodosius proclaimed Christianity the official religion, 380 CE
  - 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

**How did Europe’s culture change during the late Roman empire?**