



Long Distance Trade and the Silk Roads Network

Theme: The spread of economic activity, religion, and disease through trade

Globalization



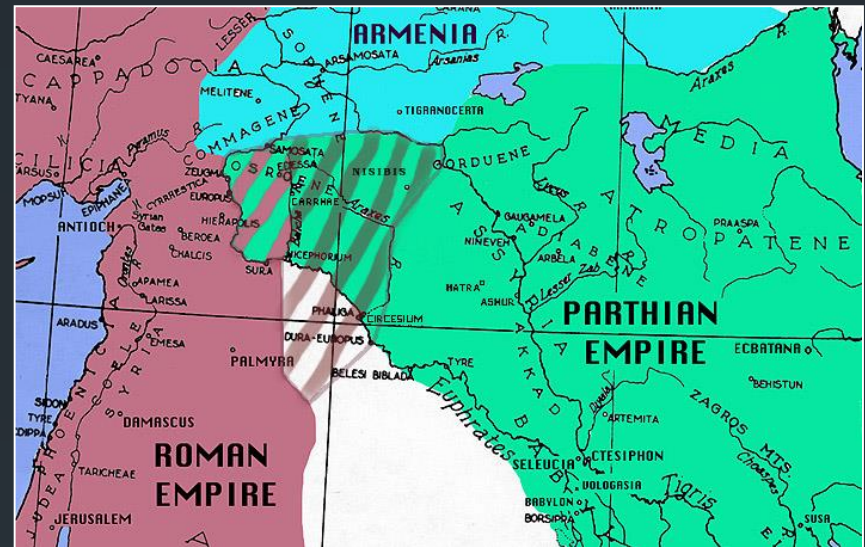
- The breaking down of traditional boundaries in the face of increasingly global and financial trends.
- One phenomenon that has made globalization a reality is long-distance trade
- The “Silk Roads” which linked much of Eurasia and north Africa represent a major advance in long-distance trade

Consequences of Long-distance Trade

- Brought **wealth and access** to foreign products and enabled people to concentrate their efforts on **economic activities** best suited to their regions
- Facilitated the **spread of religious traditions** beyond their original homelands
- Facilitated the **transmission of disease**

Contributions of Classical Empires

- Classical empires such as the Han, Kushan, Parthian, and Roman brought **order and stability** to large territories
- They undertook **massive construction projects** to improve transportation infrastructure
- The expanding size of the empires brought them within close proximity to or even bordering on each other



Only small buffer states separated the Roman and Parthian empires

Silk Roads

- As classical empires reduced the costs of long-distance trade, merchants began establishing an extensive network of trade routes that linked much of Eurasia and northern Africa
- Collectively, these routes are known as the “Silk Roads” because high-quality silk from China was one of the principal commodities exchanged over the roads

THE SILK ROUTES

MAP 3



Route of the Overland Silk Road



- **Linked China and the Roman Empire**
 - The two extreme ends of Eurasia
- Started in the Han capital of Chang'an and went west to the Taklamakan Desert
 - There the **road split into two main branches** that skirted the desert to the north and south

Taklamakan Desert: “The Desert of Death”



The Silk Roads avoided the Taklamakan Desert and passed through the oasis towns on its outskirts

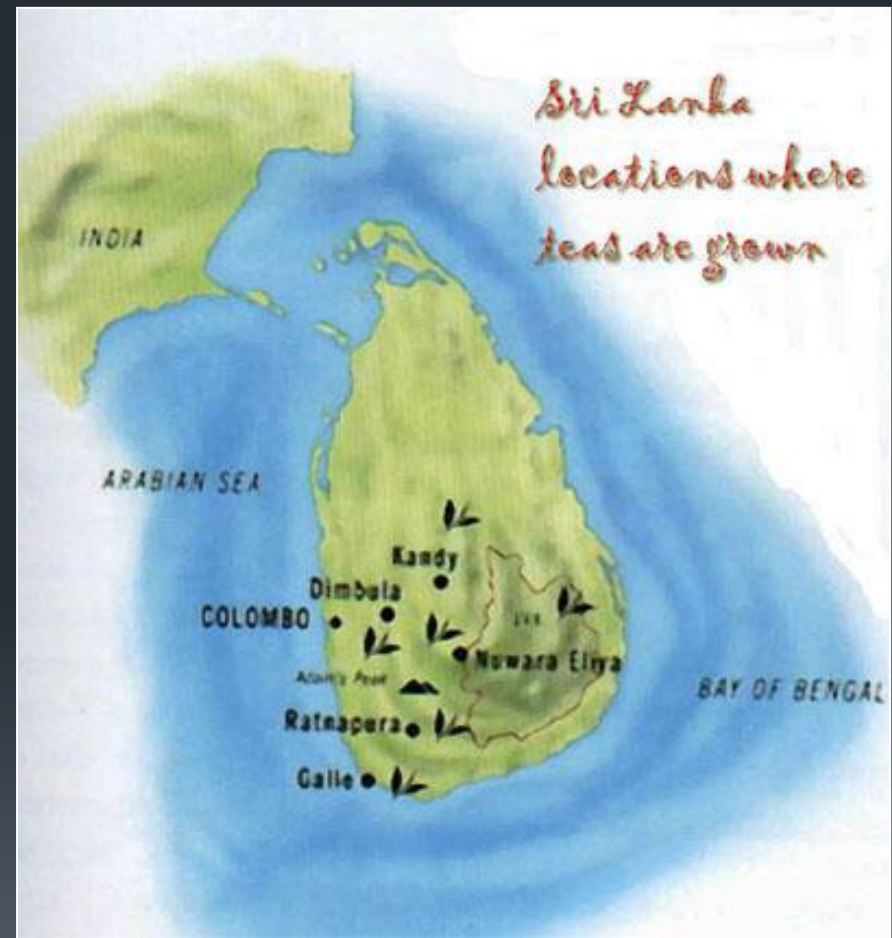
Silk Road



It continued west and stopped at the Mediterranean ports of Antioch (in modern Turkey) and Tyre (in modern Lebanon)

Sea Lanes

- The Silk Roads also provided **access at ports** like Guangzhou in southern China **that led to maritime routes to India and Ceylon** (modern-day Sri Lanka)



Organization of Long-distance Trade



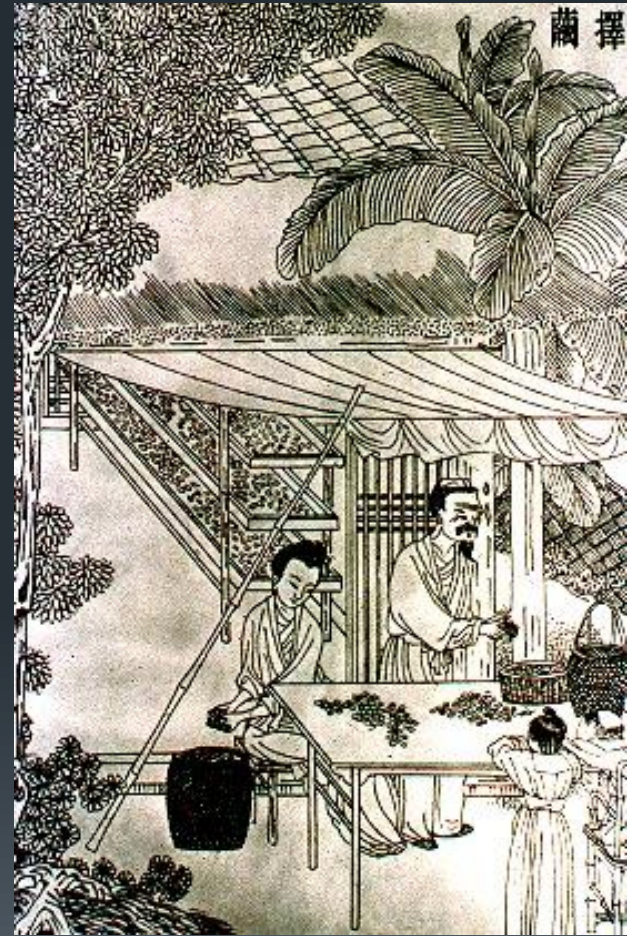
- Individual merchants usually did not travel from one end of Eurasia to the other
- Instead they handled long-distance trade in stages
- Chinese, Parthians, Persians, Indians, Romans, and others would dominate the caravan or maritime trade routes within their empire or territory of influence



Economics

Silk Road Trade to the West

- Silk and spices traveled west from southeast Asia, China, and India
- China was the only country in classical times where cultivators and weavers had developed techniques for producing high-quality silk fabrics
- Spices served not just to season food but also as drugs, anesthetics, aphrodisiacs, perfumes, aromatics, and magical potions



Chinese silk making

Silk Road Trade to the East

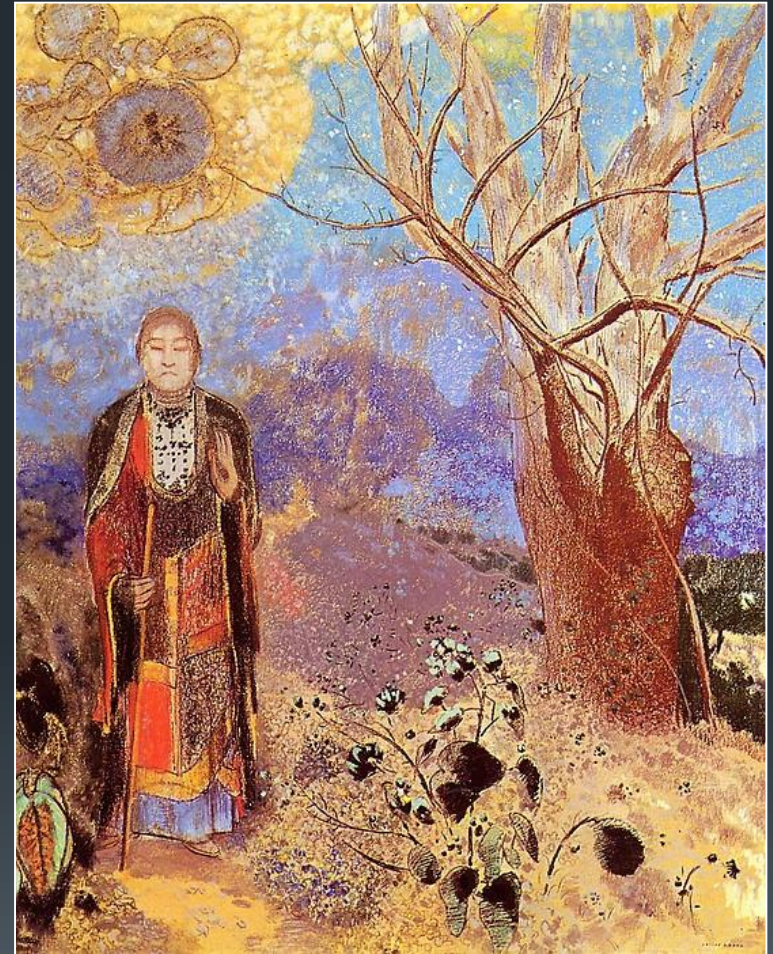
- Central Asia produced large, strong horses and jade that was highly prized by Chinese stone carvers
- The Roman Empire traded glassware, jewelry, works of art, decorative items, perfumes, bronze goods, wool and linen textiles, pottery, iron tools, olive oil, wine, and gold and silver bullion



Religion

Buddhism in India

- Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) first announced his doctrine publicly in India in 528 B.C.
- By the 3rd Century B.C., Buddhism was well-established in northern India
- Buddhism was especially successful in attracting merchants as converts



The Buddha by Odilon Redon

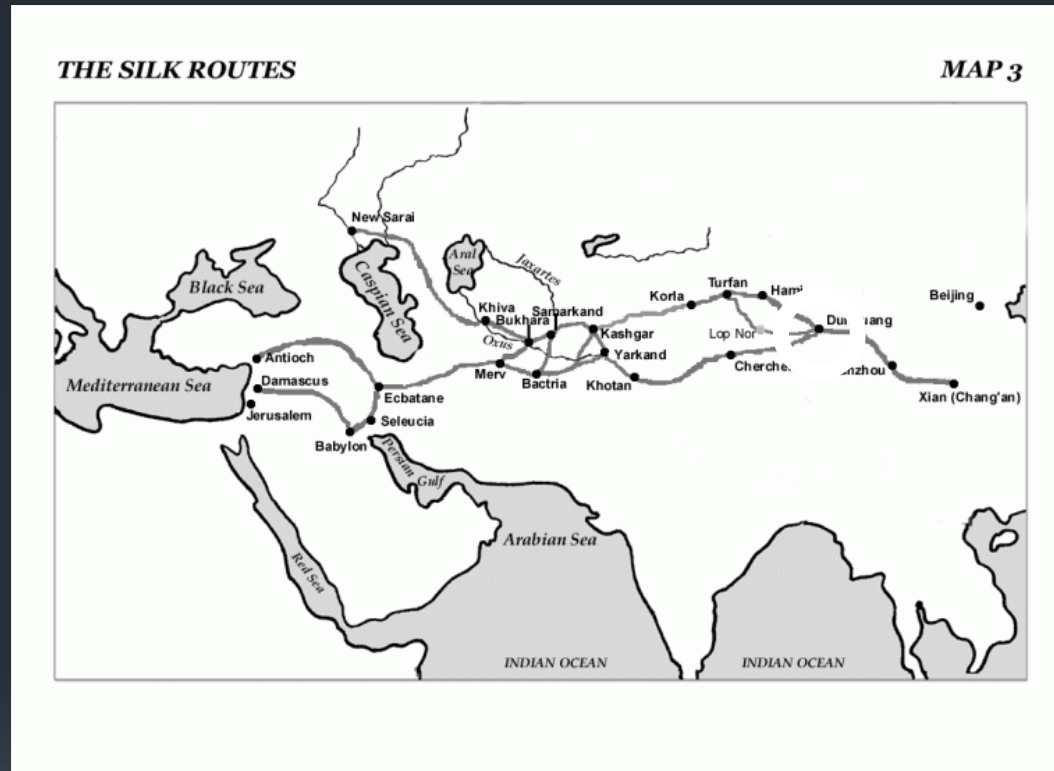
Spread of Buddhism

- Merchants carried Buddhism along the Silk Roads where it first established a presence in the oasis towns where merchants and their caravans stopped for food, rest, lodging, and markets
- Dunhuang was one such spot



In the same tradition, today there are a growing number of truck stop ministries

Spread of Buddhism




- At Dunhuang, the Silk Road divides into two branches
 - By the 4th Century A.D., a sizeable Buddhist community had emerged there

Buddhism at Dunhuang

- Between 600 and 1000 A.D., Buddhists built hundreds of cave temples around Dunhuang depicting scenes of Buddha
- Assembled libraries of religious literature
- Supported missionaries which spread Buddhism throughout China





Below are pictures taken inside
replica caves from Dunhuang.
The caves were reproduced by
artists, over the course of 5
years and displayed at the
Getty Museum in Los Angeles
in 2016

The statues seen in the pictures stand between 5 and 10 feet tall. Cave heights can reach over 20 feet in the air and are decorated from ceiling to floor with intricate drawings and paintings like the pictures that follow.

2

Dominating the cave temple, against the far wall, is an impressive sculpture of Maitreya Buddha of the future, flanked by two lions. The beaded jewelry, string-like folds in his garment, and textile pattern on the triangular backrest reflect contact with Central Asia.









Spread of Hinduism



- Hinduism also spread along the Silk Roads, primarily along the sea lanes
 - This for example is how Hinduism spread from India to Malaya

Spread of Christianity

- **Antioch**, the western terminus of the overland Silk Roads, **was an important center in early Christianity**
 - “Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” Acts 11: 25-26



St. Peter's cave church in Antioch

Spread of Christianity



- Paul began his missionary journeys at Antioch

Spread of Christianity

- Like other religions, Christianity followed the trade routes and expanded east throughout Mesopotamia, Iran, and as far away as India
- However, its greatest concentration was in the Mediterranean basin, where the Roman Roads, like the Silk Roads, provided ready transportation



Spread of Christianity

- A good example is Paul's visit to Thessalonica (Acts 17: 1)
- Thessalonica was the principle city and primary port of Macedonia (part of present day Greece)
- It was located at the intersection of two major Roman roads, one leading from Italy eastward (Via Egnatia) and the other from the Danube to the Aegean



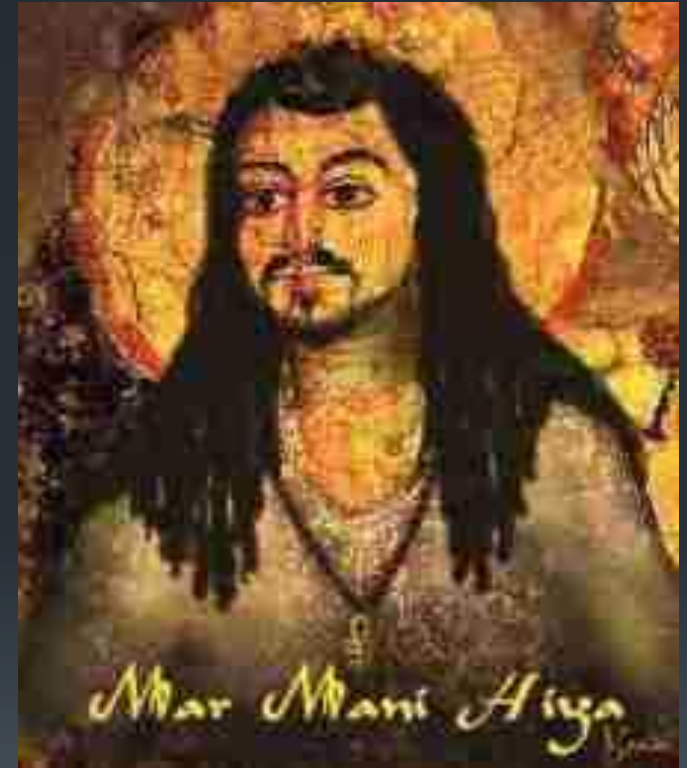
Spread of Manichaeism



- Manichaeism drew influence from Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Buddhism and viewed the world as the site of a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil
- The faith's prophet Mani urged his followers to reject worldly pleasures, which entangled the spirit in matter, and rise toward the light

Spread of Manichaeism

- Mani himself was a fervent missionary and he traveled widely to promote his faith
- He **dispatched disciples** to lands he could not visit himself
- Manichaeism was also very **popular with merchants** who spread its message
- By the 3rd Century A.D., Manichaean communities had **appeared in all the large cities and trading centers** of the Roman Empire



Manichaeism

- Manichaeism came under increasing persecution from the Roman Empire and Mani died as a prisoner
- However, Manichaeism survived in central Asia where it attracted converts among Turkish nomads who traded with merchants from China, India, and southwest Asia



The only surviving Manichaean temple is in Quanzhou on the southeast coast of China



Disease

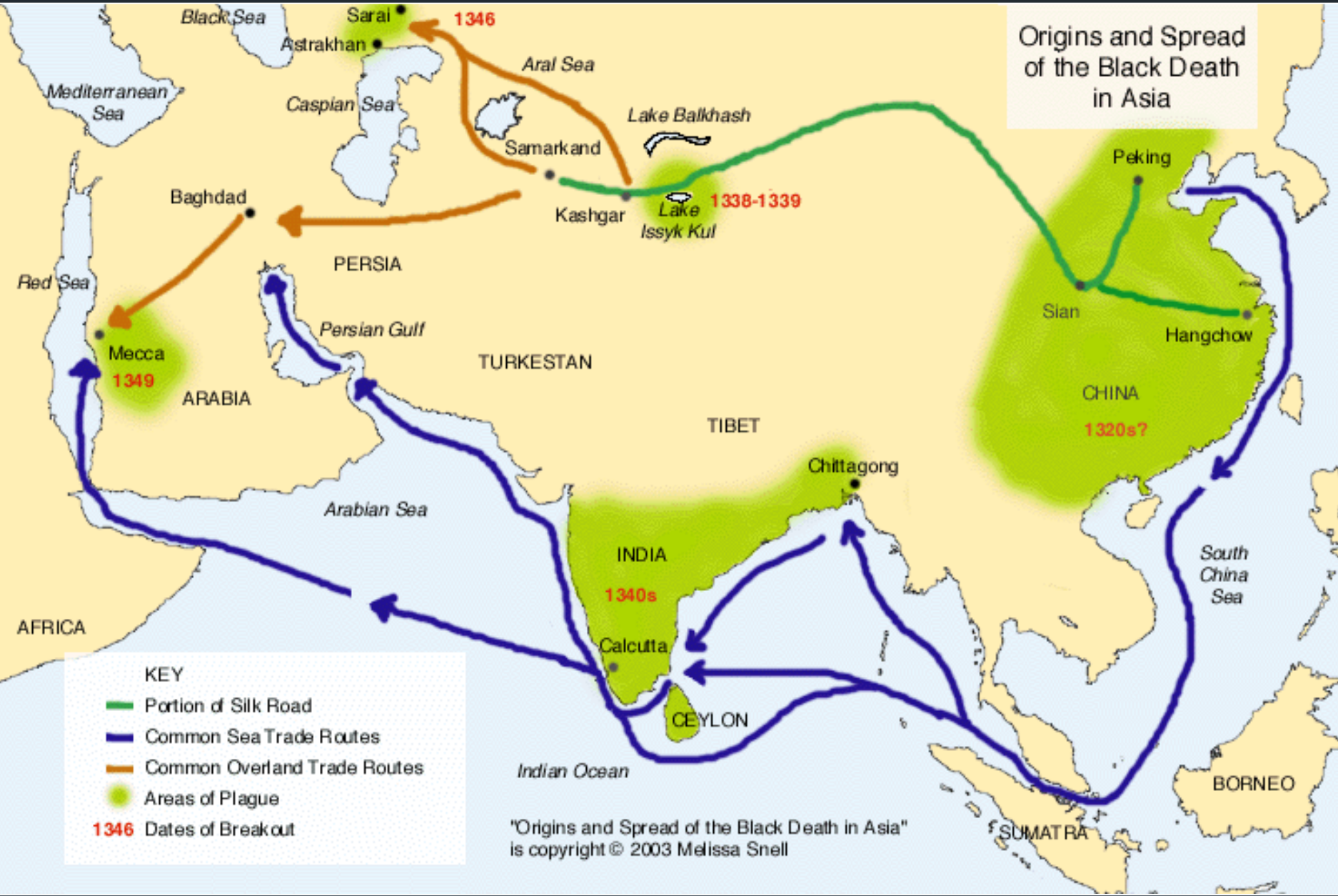
Spread of Disease

- The Antonine Plague (165-180 A. D.) was a plague of either smallpox or measles brought back to the Roman Empire by troops returning from campaigns in the Near East
 - Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus was among the victims
- The disease broke out again nine years later and the Roman historian Dio Cassius reported it caused up to 2,000 deaths a day at Rome
- Total deaths have been estimated at five million

Bubonic Plague

- During the 1330s plague erupted in southwestern China
- During the 1340s, Mongols, merchants, and other travelers helped to spread the disease along trade routes to points west of China
- It thrived in the trading cities of central Asia where domestic animals and rodents provided abundant breeding grounds for fleas and the plague bacillus
- By 1346 it had reached the Black Sea ports of Caffa and Tana

Origins and Spread of the Black Death in Asia



KEY

- Portion of Silk Road
- Common Sea Trade Routes
- Common Overland Trade Routes
- Areas of Plague
- 1346 Dates of Break out

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Bubonic Plague

- In 1347 Italian merchants fled the plague-infected Black Sea ports and unwittingly spread the disease to the Mediterranean Basin
- By 1348, following trade routes, plague had sparked epidemics in most of western Europe



Illustration of bubonic plague in the Gutenberg Bible (1411)

Transmission of the Black Death Along Trading Routes

<u>Major Trading Region</u>	<u>Year of First Arrival</u>
Central Asia	1338
Volga River	1345
Anatolia	1347
Lower Egypt	
Southern Italy	
Palestine	1348
Arabia	
Tunisia	
Northern Italy	
Iberia	
France	
England	1349
Northern Germany	

Alternatives to the Silk Roads



Collapse of the Mongol Empire after the death of Genghis Kahn

- The spread of the bubonic plague and the collapse of the Mongol Empire made overland travel on the Silk Roads more dangerous than before
- Muslim mariners began avoiding the overland route and bringing Asian goods to Cairo where Italian merchants purchased them for distribution in western Europe



Age of European Exploration

- Europeans wanted access to those Asian goods without having to go through the Muslim middlemen
- They began seeking maritime trade routes directly to Asia which would largely displace the Silk Roads