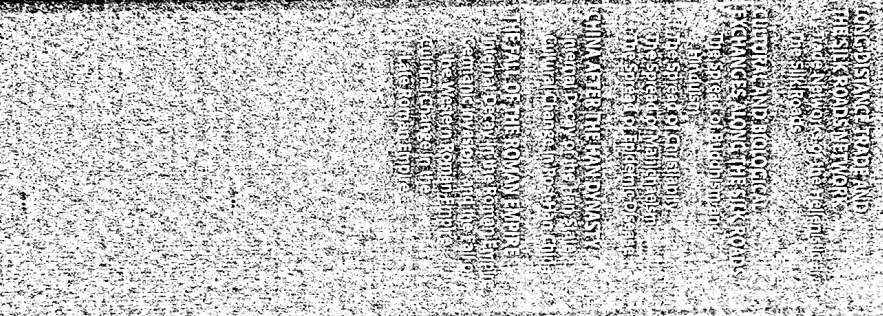


Class Set

CHAPTER 9

Cross-Cultural Exchanges on the Silk Roads

In the year 139 B.C.E., the Chinese emperor Han Wudi sent an envoy named Zhang Qian on a mission to lands west of China. The emperor's purpose was to find allies who could help combat the nomadic Xiongnu, who menaced the northern and western borders of the Han empire. From captives he had learned that other nomadic peoples in far western lands bore grudges against the Xiongnu, and he reasoned that they might ally with Han forces to pressure their common enemy. The problem for Zhang Qian was that to communicate with potential allies against the Xiongnu, he had to pass directly through lands they controlled. Soon after Zhang Qian left Han territory, Xiongnu forces captured him. For ten years the Xiongnu held him in comfortable captivity: they allowed him to keep his personal servant, and they provided him with a Xiongnu wife, with whom he had a son. When suspicions about him subsided, however, Zhang Qian escaped with his family and servant. He even had the presence of mind to keep with him the yak tail that Han Wudi had given him as a sign of his ambassadorial status. He fled to the west and traveled as far as Bactria, but he did not succeed in lining up allies against the Xiongnu. While returning to China, Zhang Qian again fell into Xiongnu hands but managed to escape after one year's detention when the death of the Xiongnu leader led to a period of turmoil. In 126 B.C.E. Zhang Qian and his party returned to China and a warm welcome from Han Wudi.



OPPOSITE PAGE: Tomb figure of a camel and a foreign rider. The majority of the Silk Road trade was handled by the nomadic peoples of central and western Asia.

and military intelligence about western lands and their peoples, Zhang Qian also brought back information of immense commercial value. While in Bactria about 128 B.C.E., he noticed Chinese goods—textiles and bamboo articles—offered for sale in local markets. Upon inquiry he learned that they had come from southwest China by way of Bengal. From that information he deduced the possibility of establishing trade relations between China and Bactria through India. Han Wudi responded enthusiastically to this idea and dreamed of trading with peoples inhabiting lands west of China. From 102 to 98 B.C.E., he mounted an ambitious campaign that broke the power of the Xiongnu and pacified central Asia. His conquests simplified trade relations, since it became unnecessary to route commerce through India. The intelligence that Zhang Qian gathered during his travels thus contributed to the opening of the silk roads—the network of trade routes that linked lands as distant as China and the Roman empire—and more generally to the establishment of relations between China and lands to the west.

China and other classical societies imposed political and military control over vast territories. They promoted trade and communication within their own empires, bringing regions that had previously been self-sufficient into a larger economy and society. They also fostered the spread of cultural, religious, and political traditions to distant regions, and they encouraged the construction of institutional frameworks that promoted the long-term survival of those traditions. The classical societies established a broad zone of communication and exchange throughout much of the earth's eastern hemisphere. Trade networks crossed the deserts of central Asia and the depths of the Indian Ocean. Long-distance trade passed through much of Eurasia and north Africa, from China to the Mediterranean basin, and to parts of sub-Saharan Africa as well. That long-distance trade profoundly influenced the experiences of peoples and the development of societies throughout the eastern hemisphere. It brought wealth and access to foreign products, and it facilitated the spread of religious traditions beyond their original homelands. It also facilitated the transmission of disease. Indeed, the transmission of disease over the silk roads helped bring an end to the classical societies, since infectious and contagious diseases sparked devastating epidemics that caused political, social, and economic havoc. Long-distance trade thus had deep political, social, and cultural as well as economic and commercial implications for classical societies.

Ever since the earliest days of history, human communities have traded with one another, sometimes over long distances. Before classical times, however, long-distance trade was a risky venture. Ancient societies often policed their own realms effectively, but extensive regions lay beyond their control. Trade passing between societies was therefore liable to interception by bandits or pirates. That risk increased the costs of long-distance transactions in ancient times.

During the classical era, two developments reduced the risks associated with travel and stimulated long-distance trade. First, rulers invested heavily in the construction of roads and bridges. They undertook these expensive projects primarily for military and administrative reasons, but roads also had the effect of encouraging trade within individual societies and facilitating exchanges between different societies. Second, classical societies pacified large stretches of Eurasia and north Africa. As a result, merchants did not face such great risk as in previous eras, the costs of long-distance trade dropped, and its volume rose dramatically.

The tempo of long-distance trade increased noticeably during the Hellenistic era, partly because of the many colonies established by Alexander of Macedon and the Seleucid rulers in Persia and Bactria. Though originally populated by military forces and administrators, these settlements soon attracted Greek merchants and bankers who linked the recently conquered lands to the Mediterranean basin. The Seleucid rulers controlled land routes linking Bactria, which offered access to Indian markets, to Mediterranean ports in Syria and Palestine.

Like the Seleucids, the Ptolemies maintained land routes—in their case, routes going south from Egypt to the kingdom of Nubia and Meroë in east Africa—but they also paid close attention to sea lanes and maritime trade. They ousted pirates from sea lanes linking the Red Sea to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. They also built several new ports, the most important being Berenice on the Red Sea, while Alexandria served as their principal window on the Mediterranean. Even more important, perhaps, mariners from Ptolemaic Egypt learned from Arab and Indian sea-

men about the monsoon winds that governed sailing and shipping in the Indian Ocean. During the summer the winds blow regularly from the southwest, whereas in the winter they come from the northeast. Knowledge of these winds enabled mariners to sail safely and reliably to all parts of the Indian Ocean basin.

**The Monsoon System**  
Establishment and maintenance of these trade routes was an expensive affair calling for substantial investment in military forces, construction, and bureaucracies to administer the commerce that passed over the routes. But the investment paid handsome dividends. Long-distance trade stimulated economic development within the Hellenistic realms themselves, bringing benefits to local economies throughout the empires. Moreover, Hellenistic rulers closely supervised foreign trade and levied taxes on it, thereby deriving income even from foreign products. Thus with official encouragement, a substantial trade developed throughout the Hellenistic world, from Bactria and India in the east to the Mediterranean basin in the west.

Indeed, maritime trade networks through the Indian Ocean linked not only the large classical societies of Eurasia and North Africa but also smaller societies in east Africa. During the late centuries B.C.E., the port of Rhapta (located near Dar es Salaam in Tanzania) emerged as the principal commercial center on the east African coast. With increasing trade, groups of professional merchants and entrepreneurs emerged at Rhapta, and coins came into general use on the east African coast. Merchants of Rhapta imported iron goods such as spears, axes, and knives from southern Arabia and the eastern Mediterranean region in exchange for ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoise shell, and slaves obtained from interior regions.

## The Silk Roads

The establishment of classical empires greatly expanded the scope of long-distance trade, as much of Eurasia and north Africa fell under the sway of one classical society or another. The Han empire maintained order in China and pacified much of central Asia, including a sizable corridor of access to Bactria and western markets. The Parthian empire displaced the Seleucids in Persia and

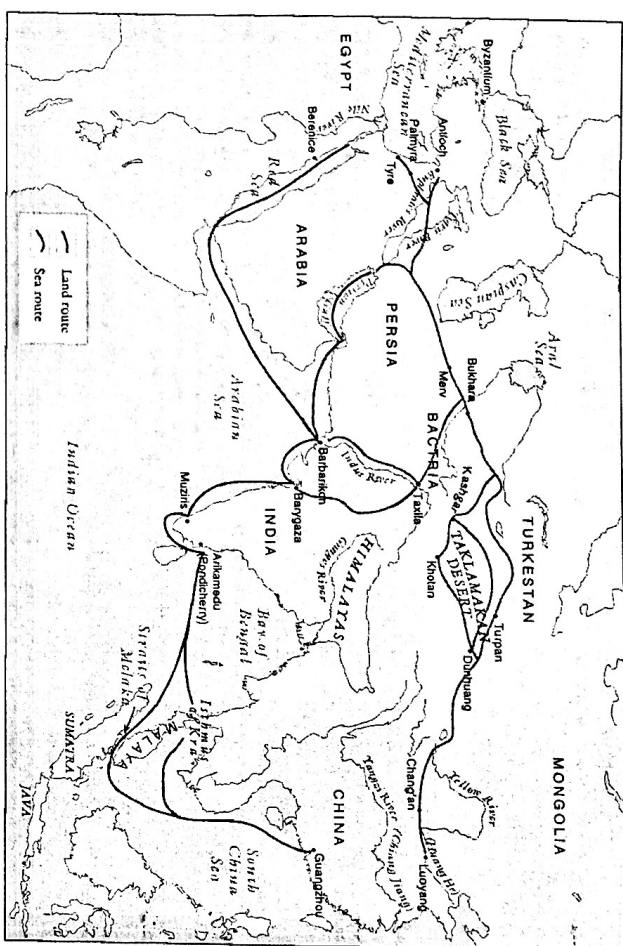
extended its authority to Mesopotamia. The Roman empire brought order to the Mediterranean basin. With the decline of the Mauryan dynasty, India lacked a strong imperial state, but the Kushan empire and other regional states provided stability and security, particularly in northern India, which favored long-distance trade.

As the classical empires expanded, merchants and travelers created an extensive network of trade routes that linked much of Eurasia and north Africa. Historians refer to these routes collectively as the silk roads, since high-quality silk from China was one of the principal commodities exchanged over the roads. The overland silk roads took caravan trade from China to the Roman empire, thus linking the extreme ends of the Eurasian landmass. From the Han capital of Chang'an, the main silk road went west until it arrived at the Takla-makan desert, also known as the Tarim Basin. The silk road then split into two main branches that skirted the desert proper and passed through oasis towns that ringed it to the north and south. The branches came together at Kashgar (now known as Kashi, located in the westernmost corner of modern China). From there the reunited road went west to Bactria, where a branch forked off to offer access to Taxila and northern India, while the principal route continued across northern Iran. There it joined with roads to ports on the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf and proceeded to Palmyra (in modern Syria), where it met roads coming from Arabia and ports on the Red Sea. Continuing west, it terminated at the Mediterranean ports of Antioch (in modern Turkey) and Tyre (in modern Lebanon).

The silk roads also included a network of sea lanes that sustained maritime commerce throughout much of the eastern hemisphere. From

Guangzhou in southern China, sea lanes through the South China Sea linked the east Asian seaboard to the mainland and the islands of southeast Asia. Routes linking southeast Asia with Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka) and India were especially busy during classical times. From India, sea lanes passed through the Arabian Sea to Persia and Arabia, and through the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea they offered access to land routes and the Mediterranean basin, which already possessed a well-developed network of trade routes.

A wide variety of manufactured products and agricultural commodities traveled over the silk roads. Silk and spices traveled west from producers in southeast



Map 9.1 The silk roads from about 200 B.C.E. to 300 C.E. Note the extent of both the land and the sea routes across Eurasia. What conditions would have made successful travel across these routes possible?

Asia, China, and India to consumers in central Asia, Iran, Arabia, and the Roman empire. Silk came mostly from southeast Asia. Ginger came from China, cinnamon from China and southeast Asia, pepper from India, and sesame oil from India, Arabia, and southwest Asia. Spices were extremely important commodities in classical times because they had many more uses than they do in the modern world. They served not only as condiments and flavoring agents but also as drugs, anesthetics, aphrodisiacs, perfumes, aromatics, and magical potions. For the silk and spices they imported, western lands exchanged a variety of manufactured goods and other commodities, including horses and jade from central Asia and glassware, jewelry, textiles, and pottery from the Roman empire.



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Zhang Qian was only one of many individuals who made very long journeys during classical times. Indeed, records indicate that merchants and diplomats from central Asia, China, India, southeast Asia, and the Roman empire traveled long distances in pursuit of trade and diplomacy. On a few occasions individuals even traveled across much or all of the eastern hemisphere between China and the Roman empire. A Chinese ambassador named Gang Ying embarked on a mission to distant western lands in 97 C.E. and proceeded as far as Mesopotamia before reports of the long and dangerous journey ahead persuaded him to return home. And Chinese sources reported the arrival in 166 C.E. of a delegation claiming to represent the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Individual merchants did not usually travel from one end of Eurasia to the other, either by land or by sea. Instead, they handled long-distance trade in stages. On the caravan routes between China and Bactria, for example, Chinese and central Asian nomadic peoples



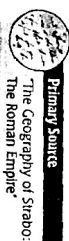
The Silk Roads

Proleptic (TAVL-ob-may-lyk)

dominated trade. Farther west, however, the Parthians took advantage of their power and geographic position to control overland trade within their boundaries. Once merchandise reached Palmyra, it passed mostly into the hands of Roman subjects such as Greeks, Jews, and Armenians, who were especially active in the commercial life of the Mediterranean basin.

### The Organization of Long-Distance Trade

On the seas, the situation was similar: Malay and Indian mariners dominated trade in southeast Asian and south Chinese water, Persians and subjects of the Roman empire dominated the Arabian Sea, Parthians controlled the Persian Gulf, and the Roman empire dominated the Red Sea. Indeed, after Roman emperors absorbed Egypt in the first century C.E., their subjects carried on an especially brisk trade between India and the Mediterranean. The Greek geographer Strabo reported in the early first century C.E. that as many as 120 ships departed annually from the Red Sea for India. Meanwhile, since the mid-first century C.E., the Romans also had dominated both the eastern and the western regions of *mare nostrum*, the Mediterranean.



Primary Source  
The Geography of Strabo:  
The Roman Empire

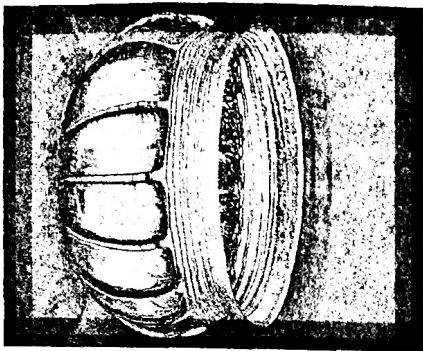
As it happened, long-distance trade more likely stimulated rather than threatened local economies. Yet long-distance trade did not occur in a vacuum. Commercial exchanges encouraged cultural and biological exchanges, some of which had large implications for classical societies.

## CULTURAL AND BIOLOGICAL EXCHANGES ALONG THE SILK ROADS

The silk roads served as magnificent highways for merchants and their commodities, but others also took advantage of the opportunities they offered to travel in relative safety over long distances. Merchants, missionaries, and other travelers carried their beliefs, values, and religious convictions to distant lands: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity all traveled the silk roads

It is impossible to determine the quantity or the value of trade that passed over the silk roads in classical times, but it clearly made a deep impression on contemporaries. By the first century C.E., pepper, cinnamon, and other spices graced the tables of the wealthy classes in the Roman empire, where silk garments had become items of high fashion. Some Romans fretted that see-through silk attire would lead to moral decay, and others worried that hefty expenditures for luxury items would ruin the imperial economy. In both cases their anxieties testified to the powerful attraction of imported silks and spices for Roman consumers.

As it happened, long-distance trade more likely stimulated rather than threatened local economies. Yet long-distance trade did not occur in a vacuum. Commercial exchanges encouraged cultural and biological exchanges, some of which had large implications for classical societies.



During the first century B.C.E. Romans developed advanced glass-blowing techniques that enabled them to produce wares like this jar that were popular with wealthy consumers.



A Roman coin dated 189 C.E. depicts a merchant ship near the lighthouse at Alexandria. Ships like this one regularly picked up pepper and cinnamon from India along with other cargoes.

and attracted converts far from their original homelands. Meanwhile, invisible travelers such as disease pathogens also crossed the silk roads and touched off devastating epidemics when they found fresh populations to infect. Toward the end of the classical era, epidemic disease that was spread over the silk roads caused dramatic demographic decline, especially in China and the Mediterranean basin and to a lesser extent in other parts of Eurasia as well.

## The Spread of Buddhism and Hinduism

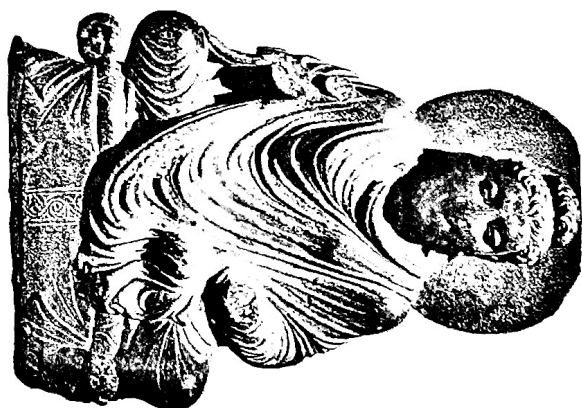
By the third century B.C.E., Buddhism had become well established in northern India, and with the sponsorship of the emperor Ashoka the faith spread to Bactria and Ceylon. Buddhism was particularly successful in attracting merchants as converts. When they traveled, Buddhist merchants observed their faith among themselves and explained it to others. Gradually, Buddhism made its way along the silk roads to Iran, central Asia, China, and southeast Asia.

Buddhism first established a presence in the oasis towns along the silk roads where merchants and their caravans found food, rest, lodging, and markets. The oases depended heavily on trade for their prosperity, and they allowed merchants to build monasteries and invite monks and scribes into their communities. Because they hosted travelers who came from different lands, spoke different languages, and observed different religious practices, the oasis towns became cosmopolitan centers. As early as the second century B.C.E., many residents of the oases themselves adopted Buddhism, which was the most prominent faith of silk roads merchants for almost a millennium, from about 200 B.C.E. to 700 C.E.

From the oasis communities Buddhism spread to the steppe lands of central Asia and to China via the nomadic peoples who visited the oases to trade. In the early centuries C.E., they increasingly responded to the appeal of Buddhism, and by the fourth century C.E., they had sponsored the spread of Buddhism throughout much of central Asia. Foreign merchants also brought their faith to China in about the first century B.C.E. Although the religion remained unpopular among native Chinese for several centuries, the presence of

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Buddhism (BOO-ahz-m)



Early Buddhist sculpture in Bactria reflected the influence of Mediterranean and Greek artistic styles. This seated Buddha from the first or second century C.E. bears Caucasian features and wears Mediterranean-style draps.

Buddhist monasteries and missionaries in China's major cities did attract some converts. Then, in about the fifth century C.E., the Chinese began to respond enthusiastically to Buddhism. Indeed, during the post-classical era Buddhism became the most popular religious faith throughout all of east Asia, including Japan and Korea as well as China.

As Buddhism spread north from India into central Asia and China, both Buddhism and Hinduism also began to attract a following in south-central Asia. Once again, merchants traveling the silk roads—in this case the sea lanes through the Indian Ocean—played prominent roles in spreading these faiths. By the first century C.E., clear signs of Indian cultural influence had appeared in many parts of southeast Asia. Many rulers converted to Buddhism, and others promoted

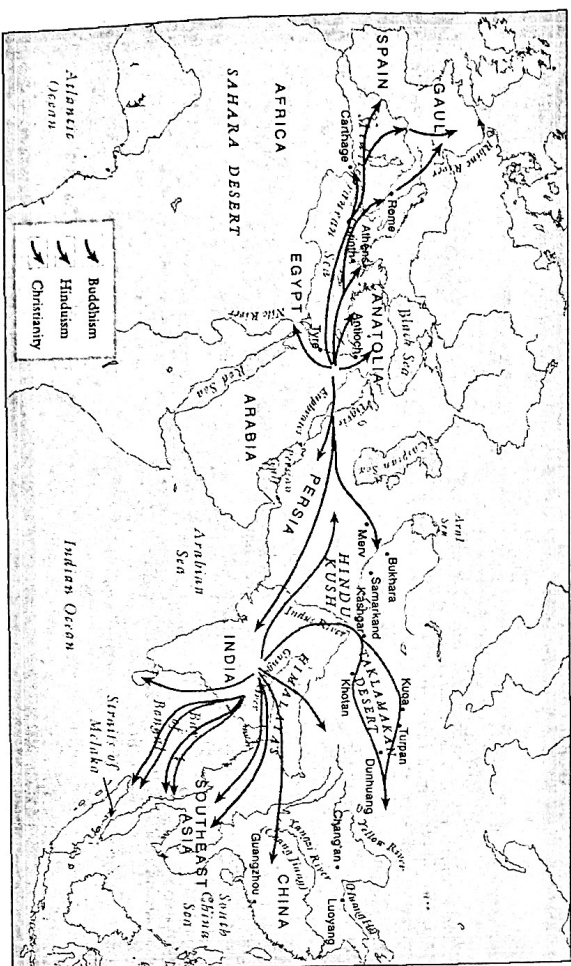
Image  
The Diamond Sutra

the Hindu cults of Shiva and Vishnu. They built walled cities around lavish temples constructed in the Indian style; they adopted Sanskrit as a means of written communication, and they appointed Buddhist or Hindu advisors.

## The Spread of Christianity

Early Christians faced intermittent persecution from Roman officials. During the early centuries C.E., Roman authorities launched a series of campaigns to stamp out Christianity, because most Christians refused to observe the state cults that honored emperors as divine beings. Imperial officials also considered Christianity a menace to society because zealous missionaries attacked other religions and generated sometimes violent conflict. Nevertheless, Christian missionaries took full advantage of the Romans' magnificent network of roads and sea lanes, which enabled them to carry their message throughout the Roman empire and the Mediterranean basin.

During the second and third centuries C.E., countless missionaries worked zealously to attract converts.



**Map 9.2** Major routes through which Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity spread between 200 B.C.E. and 400 C.E. Compare this map with Map 9.1. What similarities do you notice between the silk roads and the spread of religion?

One of the more famous was Gregory the Wonderworker, a tireless missionary with a reputation for performing miracles, who popularized Christianity in central Anatolia during the mid-third century C.E. Contemporary reports reported that Gregory not only preached Christian doctrine but also had access to impressive supernatural powers.

Gregory and his fellow missionaries helped to make Christianity an enormously popular religion of salvation in the Roman empire. By the late third century C.E., in spite of continuing imperial opposition, devout Christian communities flourished throughout the Mediterranean basin in Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and north Africa as well as in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Gaul.

The young faith also traveled the trade routes and found followers beyond the Mediterranean basin. By the second century C.E., sizable Christian communities flourished throughout Mesopotamia and Iran, and a few Christians also attracted large numbers of converts in

southwest Asia and came to constitute—along with Jews and Zoroastrians—one of the major religious communities in the region.

Christian communities in Mesopotamia and Iran deeply influenced Christian practices in the Roman empire. To demonstrate utter loyalty to their faith, Christians in southwest Asia often followed strict ascetic regimes and sometimes even withdrew from family life and society. By the third century C.E., some Mediterranean Christians were so impressed by these practices that they began to live as hermits in isolated locations, or to live exclusively among like-minded individuals who devoted their efforts to prayer and praise of God. Thus ascetic practices of Christians living in lands east of the Roman empire helped to inspire the formation of Christian monastic communities in the Mediterranean basin.

After the fifth century C.E., Christian communities in southwest Asia and the Mediterranean basin increasingly went separate ways. Most of the faithful in southwest Asia became Nestorians—followers of the Greek theologian Nestorius, who lived during the early fifth century and emphasized the human as opposed to the divine nature of Jesus. Mediterranean church authorities rejected Nestorius's views, and many of his disciples departed for Mesopotamia and Iran. Although they had limited dealings with Mediterranean Christians, the Nestorians spread their faith east across the silk roads, and by the early seventh century they had established communities in central Asia, India, and China.

## The Spread of Manichaeism

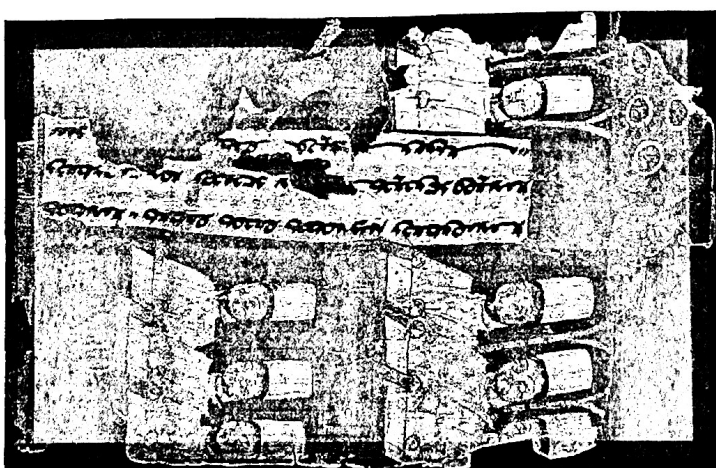
The explosive spread of Manichaeism dramatically illustrated how missionary religions made effective use of the silk roads trading network. Manichaeism was the faith derived from the prophet Mani (216–272 C.E.), a devout Zoroastrian from Babylon in Mesopotamia who also drew deep inspiration from Christianity and Buddhism. Because of the intense interaction between peoples of different societies, Mani promoted a syncretic blend of Zoroastrian, Christian, and Buddhist

elements as a religious faith that would serve the needs of a cosmopolitan world.

Mani was a dualist: he viewed the world as the site of a cosmic struggle between the forces of light and darkness, good and evil. He urged his followers to reject worldly pleasures and to observe high ethical standards. Devout Manichaeans, known as “the elect,” abstained from marriage, sexual relations, and personal comforts, dedicating themselves instead to prayer, fasting, and ritual observances. Less zealous Manichaeans, known as “hearers,” led more conventional lives, but they followed a strict moral code and provided food and gifts to sustain the elect. Mani's doctrine had strong appeal because it offered a rational explanation



Image  
Nestorian stele



A cave painting from about the seventh century C.E. depicts a group of devout Manichaean faithful, whose austere regimen called for them to dress in plain white garments and keep their hair uncut and untanned.

Zoroastrian (zoh-roh-ASS-ree-ahn)  
Nestorian (neh-STOHR-ee-ahn)  
Manichaeism (man-ih-KEE-zee-m)

for the presence of good and evil in the world while also providing a means for individuals to achieve personal salvation.

Mani was a fervent missionary and traveled widely to promote his faith. He also created a Manichaean church with its own services, rituals, hymns, and liturgies. His doctrine attracted converts first in Mesopotamia, and before Mani's death it had spread throughout the Sasanid empire and into the eastern Mediterranean region. In spite of its asceticism, Manichaeism appealed especially strongly to merchants, who adopted the faith as hearers and supported the Manichaean church. By the end of the third century C.E., Manichaean communities had appeared in all the large cities and trading centers of the Roman empire.

Manichaeism soon came under tremendous pressure in both the Zoroastrian Sasanid state and the Roman empire. Mani himself died in chains as a prisoner of the Sasanid emperor, who saw Manichaeism as a threat to the public order. Authorities in the Roman empire also persecuted Manichaeans and largely exterminated the faith in the Mediterranean basin over the course of the fifth and sixth centuries. Yet Manichaeism survived in central Asia, where it attracted converts among nomadic Turkish peoples who traded with merchants from China, India, and southwest Asia. Like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity, then, Manichaeism relied on the trade routes of classical times to extend its influence to new lands and peoples.

## The Spread of Epidemic Disease

Like religious faiths, infectious and contagious diseases also spread along the trade routes of the classical world. Aided by long-distance travelers, pathogens had opportunities to spread beyond their original environments and attack populations with no inherited or acquired immunities to the diseases they caused. The resulting epidemics took a ferocious toll in human lives.

During the second and third centuries C.E., the Han and Roman empires suffered large-scale outbreaks of epidemic disease. The most destructive of these diseases were probably smallpox and measles, and epidemics of bubonic plague may also have erupted. All three diseases are devastating when they break out in populations without resistance, immunities, or medicines to combat them. As disease ravaged the two empires, Chinese and Roman populations declined sharply.

During the reign of Augustus, the population of the Roman empire stood at about sixty million people. During the second century C.E., epidemics reduced Roman population to forty-five million. Most devastating was an outbreak of smallpox that spread throughout the Mediterranean basin during the years 165 to 180 C.E. In combination with war and invasions, by 400 C.E. continuing outbreaks caused the population to decline even further, to about forty million. Whereas population in the eastern Mediterranean probably stabilized by the sixth century C.E., western Mediterranean lands experienced demographic stagnation until the tenth century.

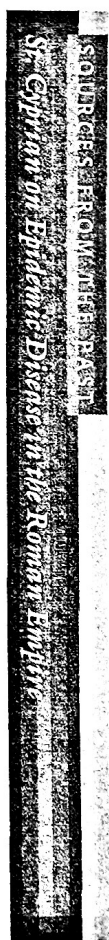
Epidemics appeared slightly later in China than in the Mediterranean region. From fifty million people at the beginning of the millennium, Chinese population rose to sixty million in 200 C.E. As diseases found their way east, however, Chinese numbers fell back to fifty million by 400 C.E. and to forty-five million by 600 C.E. Thus by 600 C.E. both Mediterranean and Chinese populations had fallen by a quarter to a third from their high points during classical times.

Demographic decline in turn brought economic and social change. Trade within the empires declined, and both the Chinese and the Roman economies contracted. Both regional self-sufficiency, whereas previously the Chinese and Roman states had integrated the various regions of their empires into a larger network of trade and exchange, after about 200 C.E. they increasingly embraced several smaller regional economies that concentrated on their own needs instead of the larger imperial market. Indeed, epidemic disease contributed to serious instability in China after the collapse of the Han dynasty, and in weakening Mediterranean society, it helped bring about the decline and fall of the western Roman empire.

Effects of Epidemic Diseases

## CHINA AFTER THE HAN DYNASTY

By the time epidemic diseases struck China, internal political problems had already begun to weaken the Han dynasty. By the late second century C.E., Han authorities had largely lost their ability to maintain order. Early in the third century C.E., the central



St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, was an outspoken proponent of Christianity during the early and middle decades of the third century C.E. When epidemic disease struck the Roman empire in 251 C.E., imperial authorities blamed the outbreak on Christians who refused to honor pagan gods. Cyprian refused this charge in his treatise *On Mortality*, which described the symptoms of epidemic disease and reflected on its significance for the Christian community.

It serves as validation of the [Christian] faith when the bowels loosen and drain the body's strength, when fever generated in bone marrow causes sores to break out in the throat, when continuous vomiting rolls the intestines, when blood-shot eyes burn, when the feet or other bodily parts are amputated because of infection by putrefying disease, when through weakness caused by injuries to the body either mobility is impeded, or hearing is impaired, or sight is obscured. It requires enormous greatness of heart to struggle with resolute mind against so many onslaughts of destruction and death. It requires great loftiness to stand firm amidst the ruins of the human race, not to concede defeat with those who have no hope in God, but rather to rejoice and embrace the gift of the times. With Christ as our judge, we should receive this gift as the reward of his faith, as we vigorously affirm our faith and, having suffered, advance toward Christ by Christ's narrow path. . . .

Many of us [Christians] are dying in this epidemic—that is, many of us are being liberated from the world. The epidemic is a pestilence for the Jews and the pagans and the enemies of Christ, but for the servants of God it is a welcome event. True, *To what extent do you think St. Cyprian was effective in his efforts to bring inhibited Christian teachings to bear on the unprecedented conditions he and his followers faced?*

SOURCE: Wilhelm von Hartel, ed., *S. Thasci Cypriani opera omnia in Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*, Vienna, 1868, vol. 3, pp. 305–6. (Translation by Jerry H. Benley.)

government dissolved, and a series of autonomous regional kingdoms took the place of the Han state. With the disappearance of the Han dynasty, China experienced significant cultural change, most notably an increasing interest in Buddhism.

without any discrimination, the just are dying alongside the unjust, but you should not imagine that the evil and the good face a common destruction. The just are called to refreshment, while the unjust are herded off to punishment: the faithful receive protection, while the faithless receive retribution. We are unseeing and ungrateful for divine favors, beloved brethren, and we do not recognize what is granted to us. . . .

How suitable and essential it is that this plague and pestilence, which seems so terrible and ferocious, probes the justice of every individual and examines the minds of the human race to determine whether the healthy care for the ill, whether relatives diligently love their kin, whether masters show mercy to their languishing slaves, whether physicians do not abandon those seeking their aid, whether the ferocious diminish their violence, whether the greedy in the fear of death extinguish the raging flames of their insatiable avarice, whether the proud bend their necks, whether the shameless mitigate their audacity, whether the rich will loosen their purse strings and give something to others as their loved ones perish all around them and as they are about to die without heirs.

## Internal Decay of the Han State

The Han dynasty collapsed largely because of internal problems that its rulers could not solve. One problem involved the development of factions within