Chapter 7: Networks of Communication and Exchange

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Chapter 1

Importance of The Silk Road

100 BCE onwards demonstrated heavy reliance on the Silk Road. It allowed trade, particularly long distance, to take place from China to the Middle East. It also crossed Mesopotamia, Iran, and Central Asia.

The Silk Road was created by a variety of people in numerous years. The first was believed to be in 247 BCE by the Parthians, whose location in Central Asia helped the Silk Road grow. Then, in 128 CE, overland trade began with Zhang Jian, a Chinese general. This trade was brought to the west by the Ferghane. This demand for western goods, which were first exported by the Ferghane, along with pastoral nomads, helped the Silk Road expand. The nomads were vital because of the fact that they supplied animals as well as herders and protection. An example of this was the Arab pastoralists who supplied camels, which eventually led to the creation of the camel saddles (Hofstra, 2014).

Diffusion of religion along the Silk Road started after the founding of the Sasanid Empire in 224. This process was also aided by the Byzantines. The Sasanids practiced Zoroastrianism and the Byzantines practiced Christianity. The influence of new religions was a main aspect of life in the empires. A form of Christians, called the Nestorians, utilized the Silk Road as a route to spread their missionary activities. Zoroastrian beliefs also survived in a new religion known as Manichaeism. The Nestorians and the Manichaens, although competitive, were some of the many forms of Christianity and Zoroastrianism that were spread along the Silk Road. Another religion that made use of the Silk Road was Buddhism, which was popular among nomads. These religions helped define identity in the different communities and political alignments.

Other objects that were traded along the Silk Road were mostly crops. These crops, usually associated with the Chinese, were among alfalfa, wine grapes, spinach, and oak galls. Also, technology made use of the Silk Road. Different inventions, like chariot warfare and mounted bowmen used the Silk Road to expand their use. Also, stirrups, an invention used to secure a horseman’s feet, used the Silk Road to aid mounted bowmen, or other people with the same need (Waugh, n.d.)

The Silk Road was a trade route that was heavily relied on from the start of 100 BCE. It allowed trade, particularly long distance, to take place from China to the Middle East. It also crossed Mesopotamia, Iran, and Central Asia (Bulliet, 2011).
Trade Across The Indian Ocean Maritime System

The Indian Ocean Maritime System was a network of seaports, trade routes, and maritime culture linking countries on the rim of the Indian Ocean from Africa to Indonesia. This trade network was established by an amazingly diverse society of seafarers.

Trade took place in three regions:
1) the South China Sea
2) the east coast of India to the islands of Southeast Asia
3) the west coast of India to the Persian Gulf and the east coast of Africa

Since the Maritime System covered so large an area, the trade was overseen by seafarers of many ethnicities. Those who were involved included Chinese, Malays, Indians, Persians, Arabs, and occasionally a Greek.

The demand for products from different lands spurred on trade. It also inspired many sailors and merchants to take part in long ocean voyages. Some of the goods that were commonly traded included exotic animals, wood, and ivory from Africa, frankincense and myrrh from Arabia, and manufactured goods and spices from India (Miran, 2013).

The demand allowed for the formation of technology that helped sailors on their journeys. Indian Ocean sailors knew how to take advantage of and ride the monsoon winds. Indian Ocean ships were also superior to their Mediterranean counterparts.

Women rarely accompanied men on long ocean voyages. As a result, men involved with sea trade often married women native to the ports that they visited during their travels. The families that were founded were multicultural (Bulliet, 2011).
Trans-Saharan Caravan Trade

The establishment and use of trans-Saharan trade routes, which connected North Africa with sub-Saharan Africa, were originally due to the desperate circumstances. The Sahara (which translates to desert in Arabic) was drying out and slowly a water shortage began to develop. It was at this time that people began utilizing the trans-Saharan trade routes frequently. These virtually inhabitable lands ended up becoming a significant source for present knowledge of life in the Sahara at around 300 B.C.
The rock paintings above are actual artifacts recovered from cave drawings of the Saharan nomads. They show the immense importance placed on chariot-like forms of transportation. The animals in the drawings, specifically the camel, played an extremely significant role in the spread of trans-Saharan trade routes. When they reached the desert from Arabia in approximately the first millennium, camels greatly eased travel. The people depicted in this rock art seem to resemble West Africans. These paintings also show similar cultural practices as those in modern day South Africa. These primary sources provided by pastoral nomads and caravan traders help to trace present day civilizations back, thousands of years (Austin, 2010).

Alliances between north and south Sahara were established progressively over time. Southerners contributed salt, available in vast quantities in their homeland. Those living in heavily forested areas provided edible palm oil and kola nuts, native to the region. Other remaining necessities were provided by the fertile Sahel (coastal) region, highlighted on a map of Africa shown below (Bulliet, 2011).
Rise of Trade in Sub-Saharan Africa

Before becoming the most significant network of African cultural exchange, the Sub-Saharan African trade route had to overcome many geographical barriers. Most river networks were inefficient for trade and transport since most emptied out into nearby oceans and contained many rapids. Taking up so much land resulted in Africa having a low population density; the natural geographical barriers aided Africans in stopping invaders, but also prevented the acquisition of stable trade contacts.

Sub-Saharan conditions varied from regions to region. The northern Sahel region was ideal for nomads in its rare rainfall, coarse soil, and stretched plains that helped improve military and animal domestication. Tropical savannas were regions of grassy plains and forests which took up most of Sub-Saharan Africa. Located in lower Niger and the Zaire basin were the tropical rain forests, areas between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of Cancer with great amounts of rainfall and many trees.

As African culture became more distinguished, different types of traditions developed. "Great traditions" were elaborate traditions written down by the elite class and shared across many regions. Some aspects of "great traditions" included a native dialect, justice system, or moral code. In contrast, "small traditions" were the orally spread beliefs of a single society. Local beliefs about social hierarchy, farming, and music were all examples of "small traditions."

Surprisingly, it was the "small traditions" that had the greatest impact on Africa’s unification of culture. Nearly every African society evolved into having the same kingship systems. The king would be isolated from his people and worshiped with rituals. A social hierarchy was developed based on a number of categories (age, wealth, gender, occupation, etc.).

In 1000 CE, there were thousands of African languages and ways of making a living ranged from nomadic pastoralists to agriculture in the grasslands of the savannas. As mentioned before, the land was isolated from a great majority of the world due to natural barriers. However, this changed by 2000 CE, the time at which archaeologists believe agriculture became widespread.

The many languages of Africa eventually blended together as a group called the Bantu around the first millennium CE. Iron smelting began, most likely due to relations with Egypt, in the northern region of Sub-Saharan Africa about a thousand years earlier and gradually moved south. Multiple languages based on Bantu developed and their areas are shown in the map. Speakers of the original Bantu language broke off into the "proto-Bantu" group, and formed their own society. Proto-Bantu lived near modern-day Nigeria and were advanced in agriculture, domestication of animals, and the arts (Bulliet, 2011).
Diffusion of Culture Through Trade

Multiple ideas spread across the world through the use of trade routes. Three main ideas were domestication of pigs, use of coinage in trade, and religion. These ideas spread and became popular when they were picked up on trade routes as the routes were frequently used. Both written and material sources have been used as evidence for the dispersal of ideas along trade routes.

Pigs were utilized in different ways in various places. Pig bones show the domesticating or eating of the animals. Also, modern customs that have evolved from the cultures in places such as ancient Egypt show that people were prohibited from eating pigs because they were associated with the evil god Set. In Iran, artifacts such as pig figurines have shown that pigs were religious offerings or also associated with gods. The idea of the domestication of pigs is thought to have started in Southeast Asia and spread with the use of the Indian Ocean maritime routes.

New coins as a medium of trade also spread along the trade routes. Hammering a die onto a section of valuable metal created these coins. These coins, or medium of trade, was started in Anatolia in the Lydian Kingdom, but soon spread to places like India, North Africa, and Europe. This idea was an example of material evidence discovered by anthropologists.

The spread of religion, particularly in Buddhism, was shown through written documents. The documents acknowledged the migrations of pilgrims, monks, and missionaries to places outside of India to spread Buddhism. King Ashoka, who ruled India and Kanishka, promoted the practices of Buddhism. After he had promoted the language, many set off to preach it. One preacher, a pilgrim named Faxian, wrote down his travels to Central Asia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and China. Other, less dependable, accounts recorded travels to Burma, Thailand, Syria, and Egypt. The movement of Buddhism was recognized in different way, creating Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

Christianity, a second religion, was also spread to various places in the world. The spread was caused by multiple variables, one of them being the introduction of the Armenian alphabet. This allowed the importance and use of the Armenian Apostolic Church to grow. Secondly, a move made by Christian emperors that consisted of sending people to find coverts in Yemen and Ethiopia also expanded the use of Christianity. Roman Catholics soon had their own communities with the help of a Christian named Frumentius. Ethiopia then became a western power near trade routes and its influence helped spread Christianity.
The above picture shows the Pillar of Ashoka. King Ashoka was an advocate for the Buddhist religion and advertised his beliefs through inscriptions on this monumental stone pillar (Bulliet, 2011).
Self Assesment

1) Which people were vital to the growth of the Silk Road and why?
   A) Kings for their financial aid
   B) Soldiers because they fought to expand
   C) Nomads because they offered animals and protection
   D) Officials for their political power and security
   E) Men for their dominance and fortification in society

2) Why did travel on the trans-Saharan originally increase?
   A) People were relocating to avoid nomadic wars in the surrounding regions
   B) Missionaries were trying to spread the Buddhist message
   C) To avoid the dry and inhospitable Saharan conditions
   D) Citizens of North Africa were using it to escape tyrannical rulers in their homeland
   E) Travelers discovered gold and word of the riches spread

3) Which were some ideas that were spread across the trade routes?
   A) Pig domestication and Jainism
   B) Styles of clothing and coinage
   C) Pig domestication, coinage in trade, and religion
   D) Christianity and Jainism
   E) Treatment of women and coinage

4) What were the branches of the Indian Ocean Maritime System?
   A) north, south, east, west
   B) African, Arabian, Indian
   C) South China Sea, Southeast Asia, Persian Gulf
   D) land, sea
   E) South America and the Indochina Peninsula

5) Our primary source of knowledge of Saharan life comes from ______
   A) Religious documents left behind by ascetic Jains
   B) Rock paintings created by nomads
   C) The pillar of King Ashoka
   D) Trade accounts used by merchants
   E) Traditional oral accounts that have been passed down for centuries

6) In which religion did Zoroastrianism survive?
A) Christianity  
B) Jainism  
C) Theravada Buddhism  
D) Manichaeanism  
E) Judaism  

7) Which of the following is NOT an example of a "great tradition"?

A) Writing system  
B) Code of law  
C) Religious scripture  
D) Local oral traditions  
E) Complex of ethical codes

8) What caused the two new forms of Buddhism to be created?

A) Different ways of accepting and recognizing the new religion by different communities  
B) Various ways of worship promoted by preachers  
C) People favored reverence of many gods.  
D) Certain people favored Christianity and didn’t want to convert  
E) Rulers didn’t allow the conversion of their people

9) Which group of people wasn’t involved in the trade of the Indian Ocean Maritime System?

A) Chinese  
B) Persians  
C) Greeks  
D) Egyptians  
E) Malays

10) What prevented Africa’s homeland from being conquered for centuries?

A) Natural geographical barriers  
B) Highly advanced military technology  
C) The walls surrounding every kingdom  
D) No countries tried to  
D) The delayed impact of iron smelting

ANSWER KEY: C; C; C; B; D; A; D; A
References


