

The Silk Road in the 1st Century CE

A Brief History

The exchange of goods between the eastern Mediterranean and east Asia dates back several thousand years. The demand for silk was so high in the Mediterranean world that the trade route became known as the Silk Road. Originally, trade was conducted by the overland route from Antioch to Xiana.

The Romans learned of the monsoon winds from the Egyptians during the reign of Augustus at the beginning of the Common Era (CE). After that, most of the trade shifted away from the Silk Road to the less dangerous and quicker maritime routes.

The Silk Secret

The east asian monopoly on silk production drove trade along the Silk Road. Silk production did not reach the Mediterranean until 522 CE when two monks smuggled silkworms out of China and presented them to the Byzantine emperor Justinian.

There and Back Again

A trip along the Silk Road from Antioch to Xiana and back could take as long as two years. However, merchants did not travel the entire length of the route. Instead, goods were exchanged at caravan stations and continued on the route.

The Incense Route

Frankincense, myrrh and perfume manufactured throughout the Arabian Peninsula were exchanged for luxury goods from the East via the Silk Road and maritime routes.

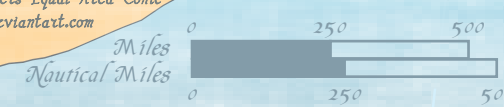
Winds of Trade

Merchant vessels sailed eastward with the monsoon winds in July - September and returned to the Middle East in December - February. The largest vessels discovered that date to this period measure 180 feet long and could have carried up to 1,000 tons of cargo.

Silk in Egypt

A piece of silk fabric was discovered with an Egyptian mummy that dates to 1070 BCE. This is the earliest evidence for the existence of the silk trade between the Mediterranean and east Asia.

Land is mostly hand from projectincnetwork.org; Rivers from naturalearthdata.org
 Central Meridian 75.0°; Standard Parallel 1: 17.0°; Standard Parallel 2: 39.0°
 Silk Road info from nabataca.net, silkroadfoundation.org, silkroadproject.org
 "Old brown vintage parchment texture" from www.myficttextures.com
 Scale 1:23,000,000; Projection: Asia North Albers Equal Area Conic
 Terrain brush is "Sketch Cartography" from deviantart.com
 Author: Alex Zarley



- Silk Road
- Maritime Route
- - - Other Route

