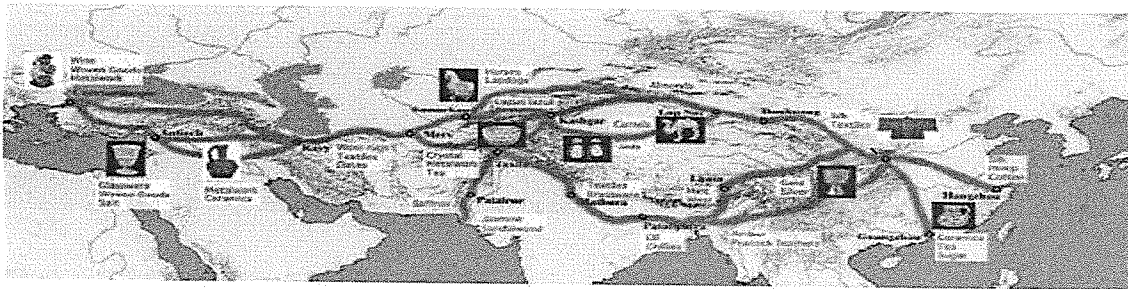


STUDENT HANDOUT #2
SILK ROADS
 ERA 3
 1000 BCE-500 CE



THE SILK ROADS: CONNECTING AFROEURASIA

The Silk Roads were an elaborate system of land and water routes that connected all different kinds of people from a variety of cultures, civilizations, and climates. Notice in the map to the right that this trade across central Asia was not only across land, but also across water, like the Indian Ocean.

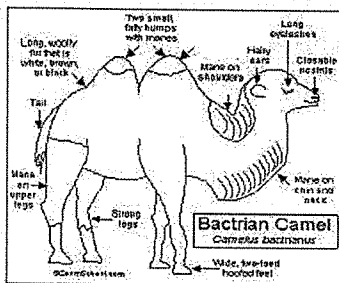
Along the Silk Roads people not only exchanged goods (like silk, for which the network is named), but also ended up trading cultural, religious and technological ideas like languages, Buddhism and iron-working techniques. It is important to remember that during Era 3 the only “instant” communication was one person communicating with another face to face. There were no telephones, of course, and while people could write letters, someone still had to carry the letters in person, and printed books didn’t even exist yet.

Even so, because the Silk Roads connected people all across Afroeurasia, it was now possible for ideas to travel faster and farther than ever before in history.

A variety of goods, technologies and ideas traveled from east to west and west to east along the Silk Roads. Some of the most popular goods desired from China included silk, ceramics, furs and ironware while the Chinese longed for olive oil, wine,

perfumes and animals from the West.

Exchanges did not just happen between civilizations, they also happened between pastoral nomads and empires. For example, pastoral nomads of the steppes interacted with settled agricultural people in China along these networks. These interactions were not always friendly. Just as in the previous era, sometimes the interactions were cooperative and sometimes they were full of conflict.



The Bactrian Camel: The Animal that Made Trade Along the Silk Roads Possible
 The Bactrian camel was critical in moving goods along the Silk Roads. These animals would carry up to 300 pounds of goods on their backs through mountains and desert regions.

Considering the difficult journey, what features of the Bactrian made it well adapted for the long treks across the Silk Roads?

SILK ROADS

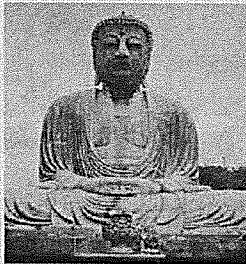
ERA 3: 1000 BCE-500 CE

CULTURE, IDEAS AND THE SILK ROADS

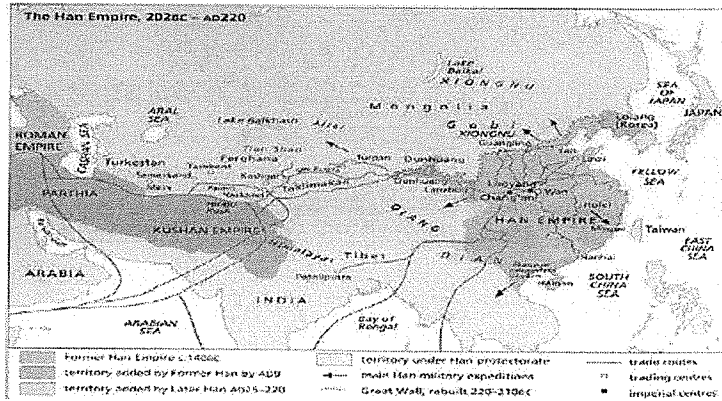
Almost more important than the goods that traveled along the Silk Road were the ideas and inventions that it carried from East to West and vice versa. It is believed that the Chinese were first introduced to grapes and wine, products of the Middle East, via the Silk Road.

Music, songs, and stories traveled along the Silk Road, and were shared around the campfires where the camel caravans stopped. So did broad ideas that changed the course of human history. Buddhism first developed in India in the sixth century BCE, and the Silk Road helped carry the faith's teachings to China and elsewhere, until eventually it became the dominant religion of much of Asia.

—PETER STARK, "Hazards and Hospitality on an Ancient Trade"



Thinking Like a Historian:
 Historians today believe that the ideas exchanged along the Silk Roads were more important to world history than the actual goods that traveled the same network. Why might this be the case? What do you think is the evidence for this claim?



EMPIRES AND THE SILK ROADS

The trip from Rome to China is over 4000 miles, and during Era 3 it would have taken over a year for one person to travel that distance. It should be no surprise then that traders along the Silk Roads did not travel the entire distance. Instead, trade happened in segments like a relay, which allowed any one trader to only have to go a short distance, make a trade, and then return home. The next trader would then move the goods along the next segment and so on until the goods reached their destination. So while wealthy Romans wore Chinese silk and the elite Chinese ate exotic Mediterranean foods, the Romans and Chinese did not typically meet in this era.

Trade along the Silk Roads was dangerous—merchants faced mountains, deserts, brutal winds, poisonous snakes, bandits and pirates. Merchants needed all the help they could get to make trade successful, and empires did just that.

While trade certainly happened before empires emerged, large-scale exchanges became possible only after the small early agrarian civilizations of Afroeurasia became huge and powerful empires. By Era 3, just four ruling groups — those of the Roman,

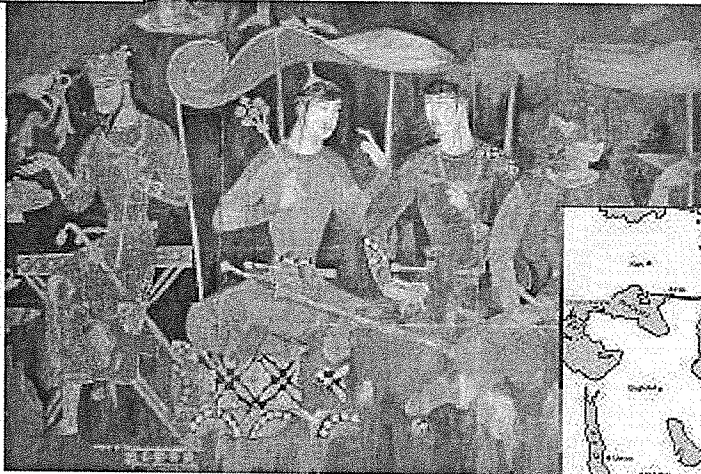
Parthian, Kushan, and Han empires — controlled much of the Afroeurasian landmass, from the China Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. These empires were able to establish some order and stability over Afroeurasia, which was home to a great diversity of people, cultures and civilizations. The empires were able to reduce the costs of long-distance trade to merchants, which encouraged even more trade and exchange.

One major way that empires facilitated long-distance trade was by constructing massive road networks, something that individuals or small villages could not do by themselves. Empires also invested in technology surrounding metallurgy, agriculture and transportation. Another way that empires contributed to making trade easier was by issuing standardized coinage (money) so that people would not have to rely on bartering for products.

While empires could not remove all the obstacles that made trade dangerous, they did what they could. For instance, to help protect merchants from bandits coming from the north, the Chinese constructed sections of a large wall, now known as the Great Wall of China.

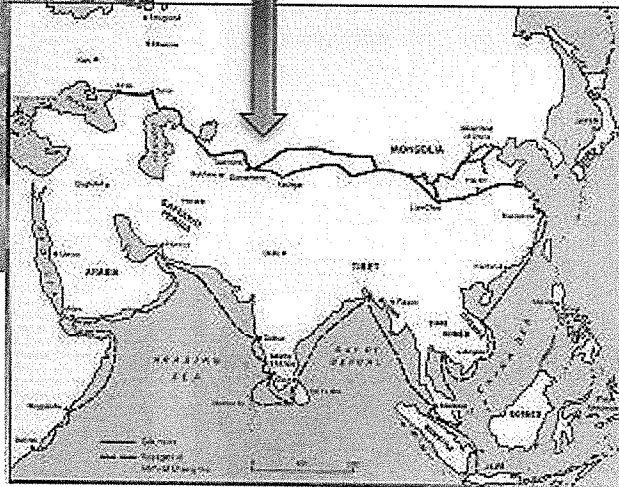
Student Handout #3: Sogdians & The Silk Roads

Partner 1



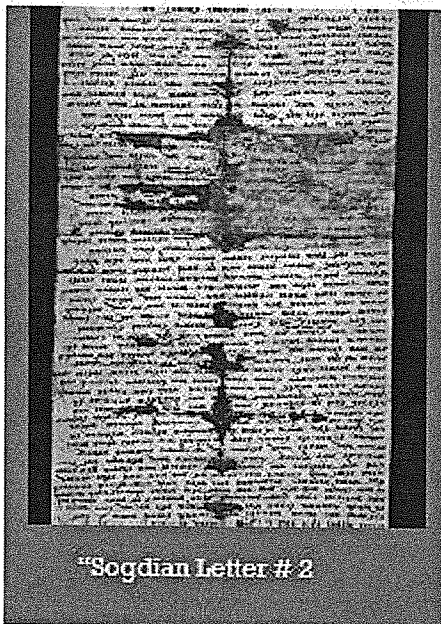
Left: Sogdian merchants

Below: Map of the Silk Roads, the Sogdians were from the region near Samarkand



Partner 2

Sogdians: Silk Road Middlemen



The Sogdian people played an important role on the Silk Road. These ancient Iranians who were part of the Achaemenid Empire traveled across Eurasia and acted as middle-men (or go-betweens) on the Silk Roads. Basically, they set up a system in which they were the link between the Chinese traders and traders of Central Asia. Remember, most merchants did not travel the entire length of the Silk Roads, so it was necessary to have a reliable system of middle men. The fact that the Sogdian language became the dominant language of the Silk Roads is evidence of their central role in Silk Roads trading.

more on 2

Partner 1

Sogdian Ancient Letter No. 2 – Edited excerpts:

To the noble lord Varzakke: 1,000 and 10,000 times blessing... May you be happy and free from illness; and, sirs, news of your good health has been heard by me, I consider myself immortal!

...sirs, the last emperor, so they say, fled from Luoyang because of the famine, and fire was set to his palace and to the city, and the palace was burnt and the city

destroyed. Luoyang is no more... ..

And, sirs, if I were to write to you everything about how China has fared, it would be beyond grief: there is no profit for you to gain therefrom. And, sirs, it is eight years since I sent Saghrak and Farn-aghah 'inside' and it is three years since I received a reply from there. They were well . . . but now, since the last evil occurred, I do

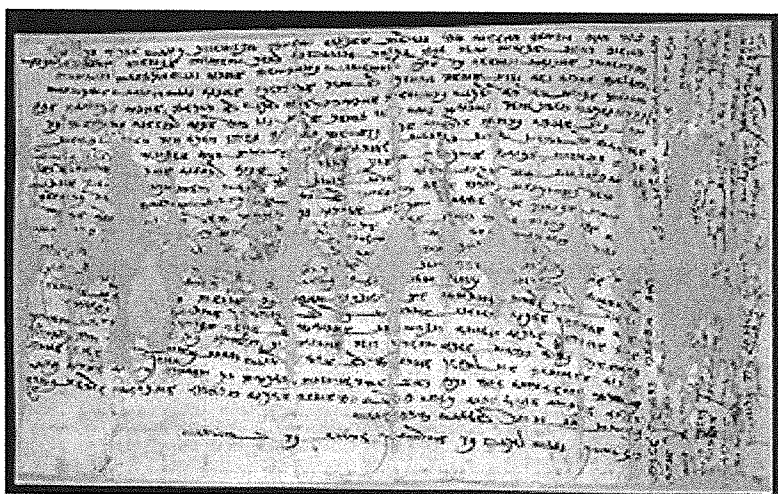
not receive a reply from there about how they have fared. Moreover, four years ago I sent another man named Artakshu-vandak. When the caravan departed from Guzang, Wakhush was there, and when they reached Luoyang, both the Indians and the Sogdians there had all died of starvation.

Partner 2

Sogdian Ancient Letter #4

Letter to her husband: "I obeyed your command and came to Dunhuang and did not observe my mother's bidding nor that of my brothers. Surely the gods were angry with me on the day when I did your bidding! I would rather be a dog's or a pig's wife than yours!"

Letter to her mother: "I am very anxious to see you, but I have no luck. I petitioned the consular Sagharak, but the consular says: Here there is no other relative closer to Nanaidhat than Artivan. And I petitioned Artivan, but he says Farnkhund ... And Farnkhund says: If your husband's relative does not consent that you should go back to your mother, how should I take you? Wait until ... comes; perhaps Nanaidhat will come. I live wretchedly, without clothing, without money. I ask for a loan, but no-one consents to give me one."



Fragment of a 4th century letter written by an abandoned Sogdian wife.

Stop and Jot:

Based on the letters, what were some of the problems faced by merchants and their family members along the Silk Roads? Provide evidence for your answer!