

2.3 Silk Roads and Trade



Maps and
Graphs



Digital
Library

Main Idea Goods were traded and ideas spread on the Silk Roads, which connected China with much of the world.

You have learned that the Silk Roads were a series of trade routes that began during the Han Dynasty. The routes connected China with Europe, India, Central Asia, and North Africa. The Silk Roads got their name from the trade of silk cloth, which was made only in China at that time.

Trade Routes

The main overland route began in the city of Chang'an, the capital of ancient China. The route split in two to go around the Taklimakan Desert. It divided again to avoid the highest peaks of the Hindu Kush. Trade routes stretched west to Central Asia and Africa and south to India. Most of the overland traders traveled with **caravans**, or groups, with camels—which were well suited to the difficult terrain and dry climate.

The Silk Roads also included **maritime**, or sea, routes. From Nanjing, traders carrying Chinese goods traveled to Japan. From the ancient cities of Antioch and Tyre, trade continued to Rome.

Goods and Ideas

The overland roads covered about 4,000 miles, but few traders traveled the routes from end to end. Most Chinese traders were forbidden to go beyond their country's borders. As a result, they mainly exchanged their silk, jade, and spices with Central Asian nomads and traders from India. These, in turn, traded with merchants from the Mediterranean. Market towns sprang up along the routes, and some became major cities.



Critical Viewing Camels can travel for long periods without water. Why do you think that ability might



Traders carried a variety of goods. Indian traders sold gems and sweet-smelling woods such as cedar. European goods included glass, pearls, and wool. Since there was not a single currency used by all the traders, they **bartered**, or exchanged goods without using money. For example, in exchange for their silk, Chinese traders might have received purple dyes from Mediterranean traders.

Government officials and missionaries also traveled on the routes. Their ideas spread along with the traders' goods. For instance, the Silk Roads helped spread Buddhism from India, where it began, to China and eventually to Korea and Japan.

Before You Move On

Monitor Comprehension How did the Silk Roads promote the exchange of goods and ideas?

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

MAP LAB



- Movement** Based on the map, what route might traders have taken from Dunhuang, China, to Delhi, India?
- Make Inferences** Study the map. Explain why Kashgar developed into a thriving city.
- Create Thematic Maps** Use the map and the information in the text to draw a thematic map showing the activity on the Silk Roads. Use symbols to represent different goods and ideas.