

Unit 9

Connections Across Land

Section 1

Unit Materials

Questions To Consider

Question 1.

How did trade contribute to the integration of the world's regions?

Question 2.

In what ways were trade and the spread of cultural traditions related?

Question 3.

How did the rise and fall of empires and states affect the expansion and contraction of major trading networks such as the Silk Roads, the Gold Roads, and the Turquoise Roads?

Question 4.

In addition to commodities, what else was transmitted across land trading routes?

The Big Picture

How is this topic related to Increasing Integration?

Trade drew different peoples and cultures together. For instance, trade helped integrate distant economies as people became dependent on goods acquired through long-distance trade. It also led to the spread of religious traditions across distant regions, which helped integrate diverse populations.

How is this topic related to Proliferating Difference?

The contacts trade created caused people to become more aware of cultural differences — and to sharpen distinctions between “us” and “them.”

Unit Purpose

- For thousands of years, trade has facilitated cultural contacts and communication among distant peoples and societies.
- Trade provided opportunities for the spread of religion beyond cultural frontiers.
- Trade also had unintended consequences, including the spread of disease and the transfer of technologies.

- Although the desire for trade transcended political boundaries, political stability tended to improve the conditions and opportunities for trade.

Unit Content Overview

Trading networks existed wherever people had the desire and means to import or export technological, material, cultural, or even human resources. The richness and complexity of these past networks makes today's accelerating globalization seem simply like a modern expression of ancient patterns. Indeed, humans seem to have always had an interest in distant peoples and their material cultures. We have no way of knowing whether this urge grew from a practical desire to obtain useful objects, from restless curiosity, or simply from a desire to acquire souvenirs from afar. Even in prehistoric burials, archaeologists often find items – metals, shells, or stone artifacts – that came from far away.

Although historians rarely know the origins of the trading routes that connected peoples in the distant past, they are often able to reconstruct the routes themselves by following the flow of material goods and ideas. This unit explores three such routes – the Eurasian Silk Roads, the Mesoamerican Turquoise Roads, and the Trans-Saharan Gold Roads – and provides a rich example of ancient connections and the intense determination of the humans who forged them. All three of these trading routes provided important linkages between diverse ecological zones, and facilitated contacts with other societies that had access to otherwise unavailable resources.

Messages of devotion, kinship, and hope traveled with merchants on the commercial trade routes. Innovations such as advanced scientific and medical knowledge, improved grains and foodstuffs, or new manufacturing and agricultural technology also spread from place to place along the roads. These new ideas and innovations brought about substantial change, but the pace of change quickened as old networks merged into connections with expanding sea routes. Indeed, the pace of change reached unprecedented levels when these new networks finally linked the peoples of the Turquoise Roads with those of the Gold Roads and the Silk Roads.

Unit References

Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-Cultural Contacts and Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Timothy F. Garrard, *Akan Weights and the Gold Trade* (London: Longman, 1980).

Garman Harbottle and Phil C. Weigand, "The Role of Turquoises in the Ancient Mesoamerican Trade Structure," in *The American Southwest and Mesoamerica: Systems of Prehistoric Exchange*, ed. Jonathon E. Ericson and Timothy G. Baugh (New York: Plenum Press, 1993).

Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Interactions in Eurasia: Essays on Global and Comparative History* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 1998).

Kevin Rafferty, "The Virgin Anasazi and the Pan-Southwestern Trade System, A.D. 900–1150," *Kiva* 56, no. 1 (1990).

Susan Whitfield, *Life Along the Silk Road* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Global Historical Context

- Time Period: 200 BCE–1000 CE

- World history is all about connections between peoples, places, and ideas. In the pre-modern world, few things connected the world more than trade routes. In Eurasia, the Silk Roads served as a conduit between the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean and the Han Empire in China. In Africa, the Gold Roads connected the Kingdom of Ghana and the Mali Empire with North Africa and the rest of Afro-Eurasia. In the Americas, the Turquoise Roads linked Mesoamerican peoples like the Toltec, Maya, and Aztec with the Anasazi culture 1000 miles to the north. All of these trade routes carried more than just physical goods — they also carried ideas, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions. Moreover, these land-based trade routes existed in tandem with water-based trade routes in both Afro-Eurasia and in the Americas.

AP Themes

- Examines interactions in economies and politics by exploring trade between peoples in Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas.
- Explores change and continuity because the nature and extent of trading routes changed over time, while the existence of trade networks remained a constant feature of world history in this period.
- Discusses cultural and intellectual developments. Interactions spurred by trade between peoples led to the diffusion of cultural, religious, and intellectual traditions across vast distances.

Related Units

- Unit 3. Human Migrations: How did the many paths of human migration people the planet? From their origins on the African continent, humans have spread across the globe. This unit explores how and why early humans moved across Africa, Eurasia, and the Americas, based on recent studies in archaeology and linguistics. It is related to Unit 9 because it also documents movement of peoples across long distances.
- Unit 7. The Spread of Religions: How do religions interact, adopt new ideas, and adapt to diverse cultures? As the missionaries, pilgrims, and converts of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam moved around the world, the religions created change and were themselves changed. This unit is related to Unit 9 because it also explores the effects of the movement of peoples along trade routes.
- Unit 10. Connections Across Water: How were water routes used as conduits of expansion and trade? The traders of the Indian Ocean, the early Mississippians, and the Norsemen carried death and disease, skills and technologies, and philosophies and religion down rivers and across oceans. This unit is related to Unit 9 because it also focuses on the transmission of culture and commerce, but by water — rather than land — routes.
- Unit 15. Early Global Commodities: What is globalization and when did it begin? Before the sixteenth century, the world's four main monetary substances were silver, gold, copper, and shells. It was China's demand for silver and Spain's newly discovered mines in the Americas that finally created an all-encompassing network of global trade. This unit is related to Unit 9 because it looks specifically at the silver trade and the ways it affected regions around the world.

Section 2

Video-Related Materials

Video Segment 1: The Silk Roads

This segment explores the development of the Silk Roads — a vast network of trading routes that spanned much of Eurasia beginning in the fourth to first centuries BCE. At that time, several strong empires were on the rise: the Roman Empire in the Mediterranean basin, the Han Empire in China, and the Mauryan Empire in India. These empires encouraged trading activities in Eurasia because they were strong enough to offer security for traveling merchants within their realms. In addition, each empire generated and consumed a wealth of commodities, which meant that each developed trading networks that consistently expanded outward. Eventually, these networks overlapped and created routes that connected all three empires. As a result, even though these empires had little direct contact with one another, they came to serve as anchors for a thriving trade in silk, horses, glassware, coral, pearls, and textiles. In some cases, the possession of exotic goods — such as silk in the Roman Empire or horses in the Han Empire — came to serve as vital symbols of elite status. In addition to providing routes for the dispersal of commodities, the Silk Roads also became an avenue for the spread of diverse cultural traditions, including music, dance, and — especially — religion. Islam, Buddhism, Nestorian Christianity, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism all traveled along the Silk Roads with merchants, missionaries, and pilgrims. This diversity helped make the trading centers of the Silk Roads richly cosmopolitan. In some cases, the spread of religion along these routes also led to profound social change as societies adopted and adapted new religions as their own.

Video Segment 2: The Gold Roads

This segment explores a set of trade routes that came to link western and northern Africa through a thriving trade in gold. Eventually, these routes were connected through North Africa to the Silk Roads, uniting much of Afro-Eurasia in a vast system of trade. Although archaeological evidence suggests that people had already begun to cross the harsh Saharan desert to reach West Africa centuries before the Common Era, by 500 CE this difficult journey was greatly eased when camels became the primary means of desert transport. With the coming of Arab conquerors, merchants, and Islamic clerics to North Africa, the trans-Saharan trade increased dramatically. By the late eighth century CE, Islamic merchants had established highly structured trade relations with a variety of West African peoples. In return for gold, ivory, and — later — slaves, West Africans traded for horses, cloth, and manufactured goods from the north. Increased trade also encouraged the growth of well-placed states in West Africa, such as the ancient kingdom of Ghana. For several centuries, Ghana grew in wealth and military strength as a result of the trans-Saharan trade. The lucrative nature of trade, however, also led to conflicts in the region, and after the late eleventh century Ghana was replaced by competing states such as Mali and Songhay. As was the case with the Silk Roads, the expansion of trade across the Gold Roads was accompanied by the spread of religion. In this case, North African merchants brought Islam, as well as Islamic scholarship in the fields of mathematics, astronomy, and medicine.

Video Segment 3: The Turquoise Roads

This segment explores a lesser-known — but equally important — trading network that linked various peoples from Central America to what is now New Mexico. Archaeological and anthropological studies suggest that complex trading relationships developed in this area as early as 700 CE due to the demand for turquoise. As a result, these trading routes became known as the Turquoise Roads. The peoples of Mesoamerica valued turquoise for its beauty as well as its ritual significance, but it could only be obtained by the Anasazi peoples who lived 1000 miles to the north. In response to the demand by Mesoamerican peoples, the Anasazi devoted significant

energy to mining turquoise. Although the evidence is fragmentary, it seems that the Anasazi received exotic birds and feathers, as well as agricultural goods, in return for turquoise. These trade routes were so important that they survived changes in empires in the south and social organization in the north, and flourished until the time of European contact. It is also clear that commodities were not the only things that traveled along the Turquoise Roads. Indeed, physical evidence indicates that the Mexican belief in the god Quetzalcoatl spread north, as did many ceremonies, traditions, and architectural styles.

Perspectives on the Past: Unintended Consequences of Trade

In what ways could trade routes serve as the conduits for destructive forces? Historian Jerry H. Bentley argues that, in addition to their positive benefits, trade routes served as avenues for the transmission of disease. One devastating example was the bubonic plague, which spread quickly along the Silk Roads of Eurasia during the fourteenth century and killed nearly one-third of the Eurasian population.

Video Details

Who Is Interviewed

- Jerry H. Bentley
- Patrick Manning
- Peter Winn

Primary Source Materials Featured in the Video

- Al-Bakri, Arab chronicler
- Cassius Dio, Greek chronicler
- Florentine Codex, Aztec chronicle

Program Contents

Begins	Ends	Contents
00:00	01:43	Show tease, show opening credits
01:44	04:04	Program overview/introduction
04:05	10:26	Video Segment 1. <i>The Silk Roads</i>
10:27	16:49	Video Segment 2. <i>The Gold Roads</i>
16:50	25:12	Video Segment 3. <i>The Turquoise Roads</i>
25:13	26:26	Perspectives on the Past: <i>Unintended Consequences of Trade</i>
26:27	28:25	Show close and program credits