

SILK ROAD & OCEAN TRADERS

Connecting China and the Middle East

ca. AD 600–1700

The Silk Road was the means by which trade moved overland between the Middle East and China. The trade began during the 100s BC (and probably earlier). Ships also sailed directly from the Arabian Peninsula across the Indian Ocean thanks to the pattern of the annual “trade winds”. Overland and sea commerce grew after the Islamic conquest of the Middle East and Central Asia from the 600s AD. Individuals of diverse backgrounds and religions took part in the trade between the Middle East and China. These included Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Middle East who traded in China and India.

Ceramics are the most tangible products of the trade to the Middle East, since textiles, spices, and other luxury items rarely survive archaeologically. Other goods and technologies that came from China include papermaking, gunpowder, compasses, and silk. Religious ideas also traveled. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism came to China from the Middle East via these routes.

