

Travels with Xuanzang

Spring 2024

OLLI-DC@AU

Delrie Hobbs

Handout # 1

SILK ROAD & OCEAN TRADERS

Connecting China and the Middle East

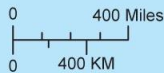
ca. AD 600–1700

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.

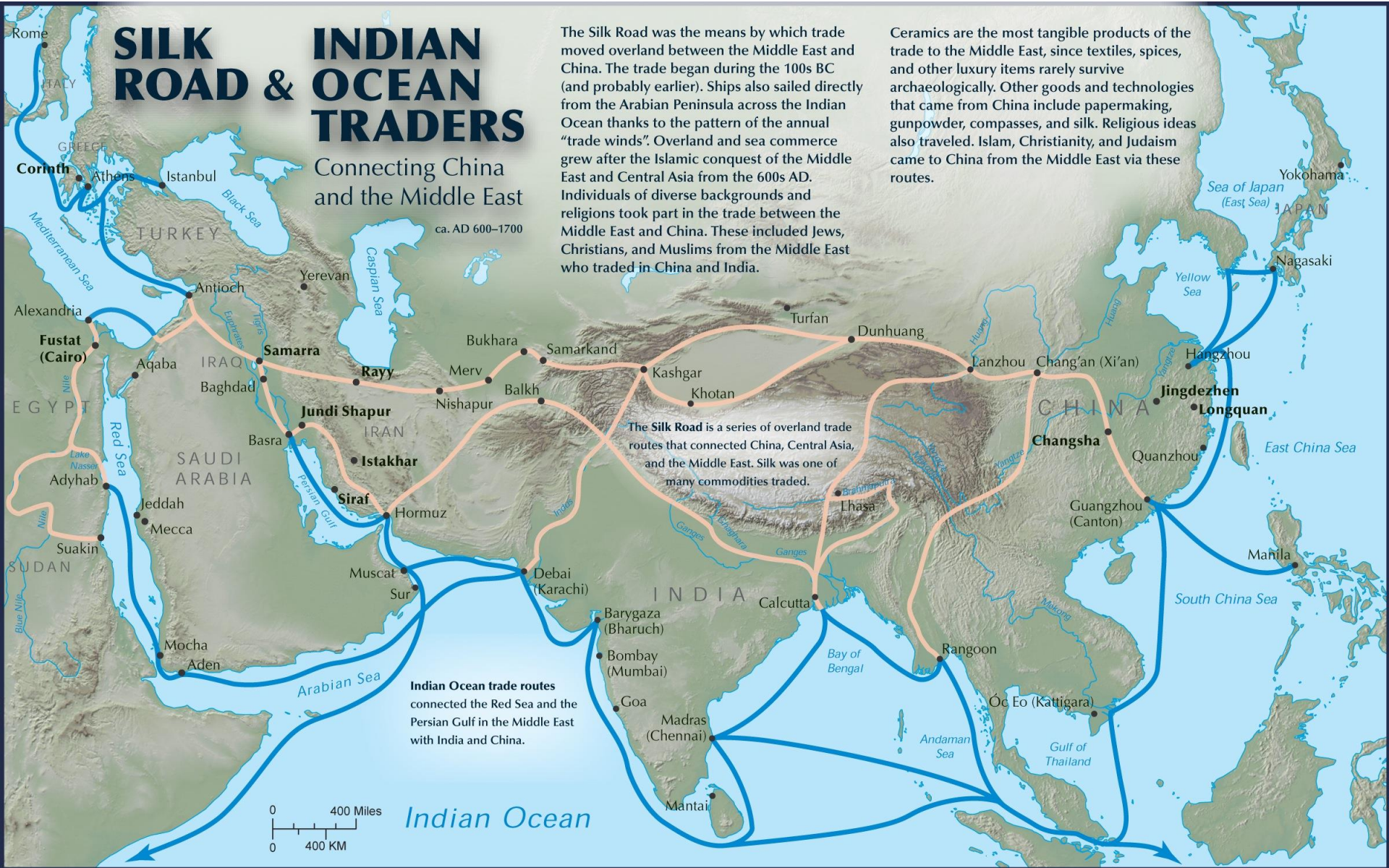
Ceramics are the most tangible products of the trade to the Middle East, since textiles, spices, and other luxury items rarely survive archaeologically. Other goods and technologies that came from China include papermaking, gunpowder, compasses, and silk. Religious ideas also traveled. Islam, Christianity,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

The Silk Road is a series of overland trade routes that connected China, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Silk was one of many commodities traded.

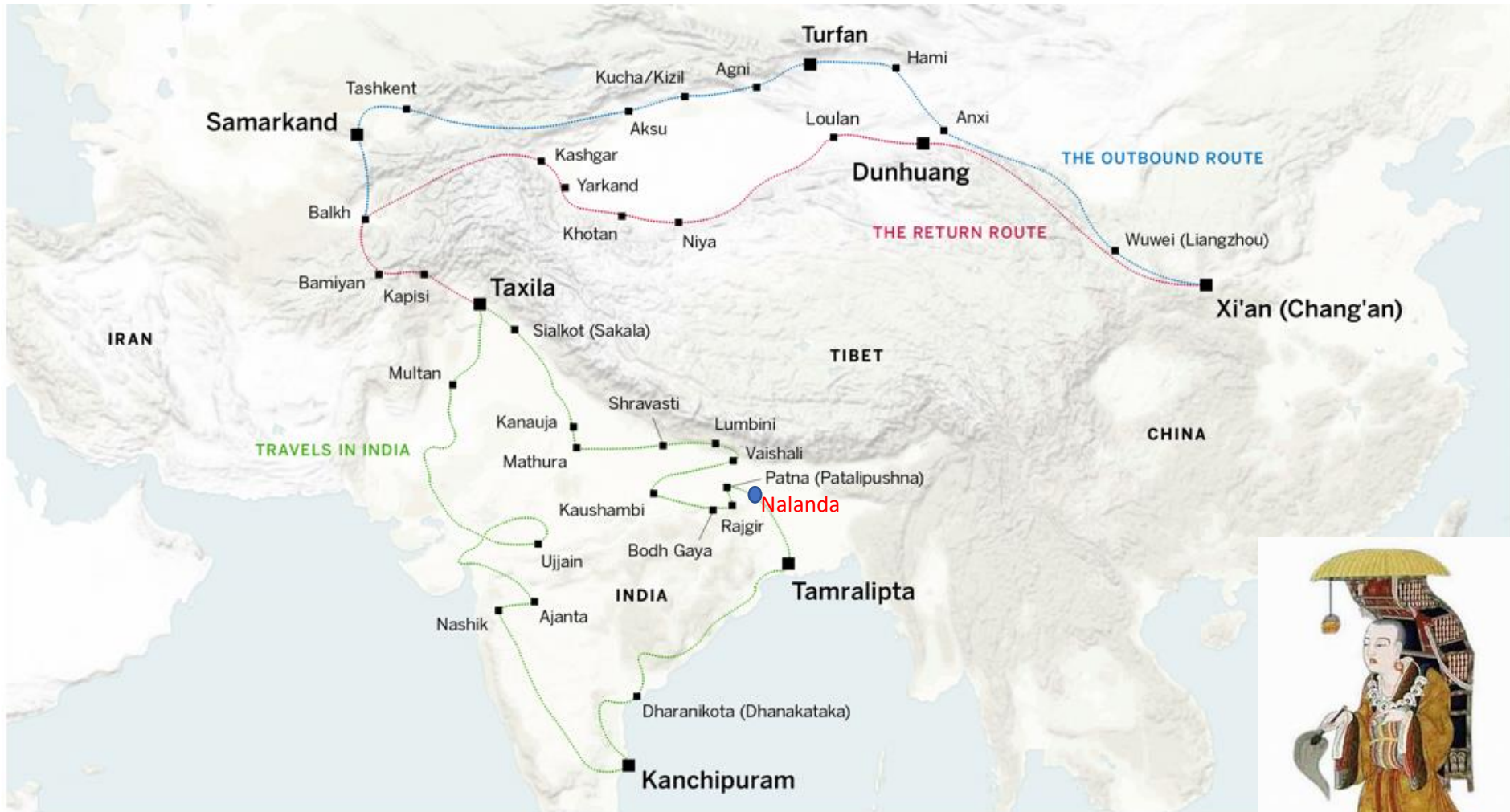
Indian Ocean trade routes connected the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf in the Middle East with India and China.



Indian Ocean



Xuanzang's Travels (629-645)





Xuanzang 602-664

玄奘

Buddhist monk, scholar, diplomat, adventurer

Travels: 629-645

10,000 miles from Chang'an, China through
Central Asia to India and back.

Authoritative transmission of Buddhist thought
and texts.

Important primary source of knowledge for
areas visited during his journey, esp. Buddhist
sites.

Still holds the imagination of people.



Born 602, Luoyang, China

Confucian training

Age 13 enters monastery

Age 20 fully ordained monk

622-629 studies with various Buddhist schools

Has a vision of Mount Meru

629 leaves China without permission -> India

Why undertakes the journey:

1. Buddhist pilgrimage
2. Learn about Buddhism at the source
3. Bring back original Buddhist texts

Resources

Xuanzang, *The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*
(written for the Tang Emperor Taizong)

Hwui Li, *The Life of Hiuen Tsiang*,
(Xuanzang's biographer. Translated by Samuel Beal)

Brasnose, Benjamin, *Xuanzang: China's Legendary Pilgrim and Translator*, 2021, Shambala Press

Wriggins, Sally Hovey, *The Silk Road Journey with Xuanzang*, 2004 edition

For fun: Xuanzang (2016 movie available on Amazon Prime Video)