

Interregional Networks and Contacts: The Silk Road

Inquiry Questions:

(Be prepared to answer these as the lesson proceeds)

1. What was the role of nomads in world trade? How does this role contrast with notions of “barbarian” invaders?
2. What are the key geographic features of the Silk Roads? What are the key termini?
3. What role did technology play in making the Silk Roads viable?
4. What do “syncretism” and “diffusion” mean, and how do they apply to the Silk Roads?

Introductory Question

- Answer the following question on a sheet of paper in paragraph form:

What comes to mind when you hear the word “barbarian”? What comes to mind when you hear the word “nomad”?



Nomads vs. Barbarians

Nomadic peoples aren't just invaders of
“civilizations”

The term “Civilized” has positive meanings for
people – those outside of civilization are
sometimes considered to be “barabarians”

Nomadic invasions have been a destabilizing
factor since the beginning of civilization, e.g. the
Semitic peoples of the Zagros mts. Invaded
Sumer

Nomadic Pastoralism

- Nomadic peoples tend to keep domesticated animals as their primary means for subsistence
- Pastoralism is an economic system centering around keeping domesticated animals
- Because of their close relationship with the animals of central asia, nomads became proficient on horseback and later camelback

Nomads play a role in trade

- Nomadic peoples are often “go-betweens” who guide caravans over long distances.
- They sometimes allow people who officially are hostile toward each other to keep trading, e.g. the Sassanids and the Byzantines with the Bedouins as go-betweens

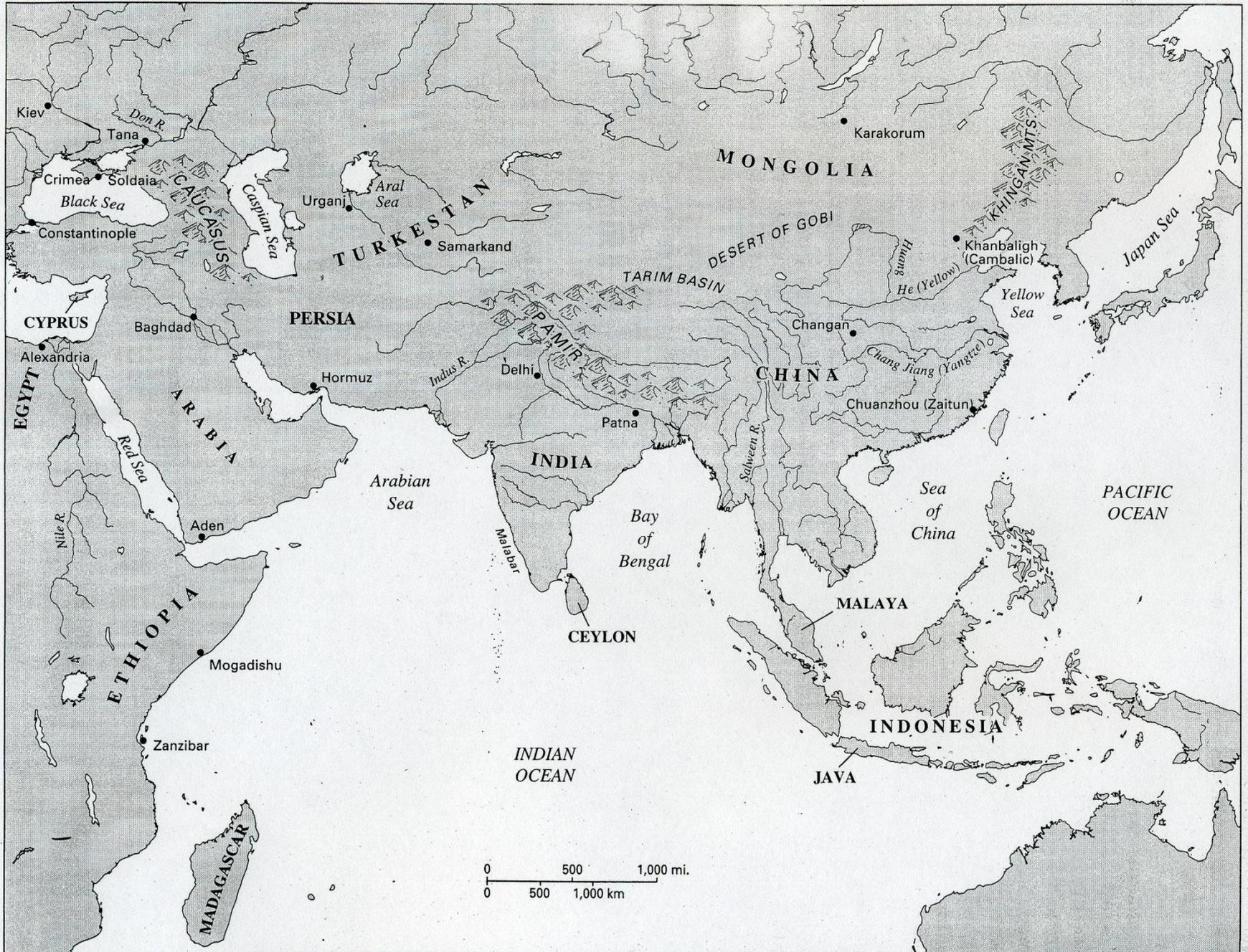
Ethnocentric Bias

- Beware of attempts by individuals or cultures to label those who are unlike them sub-human, barbarous, savage, primitive, etc.
- This is a very common example of BIAS

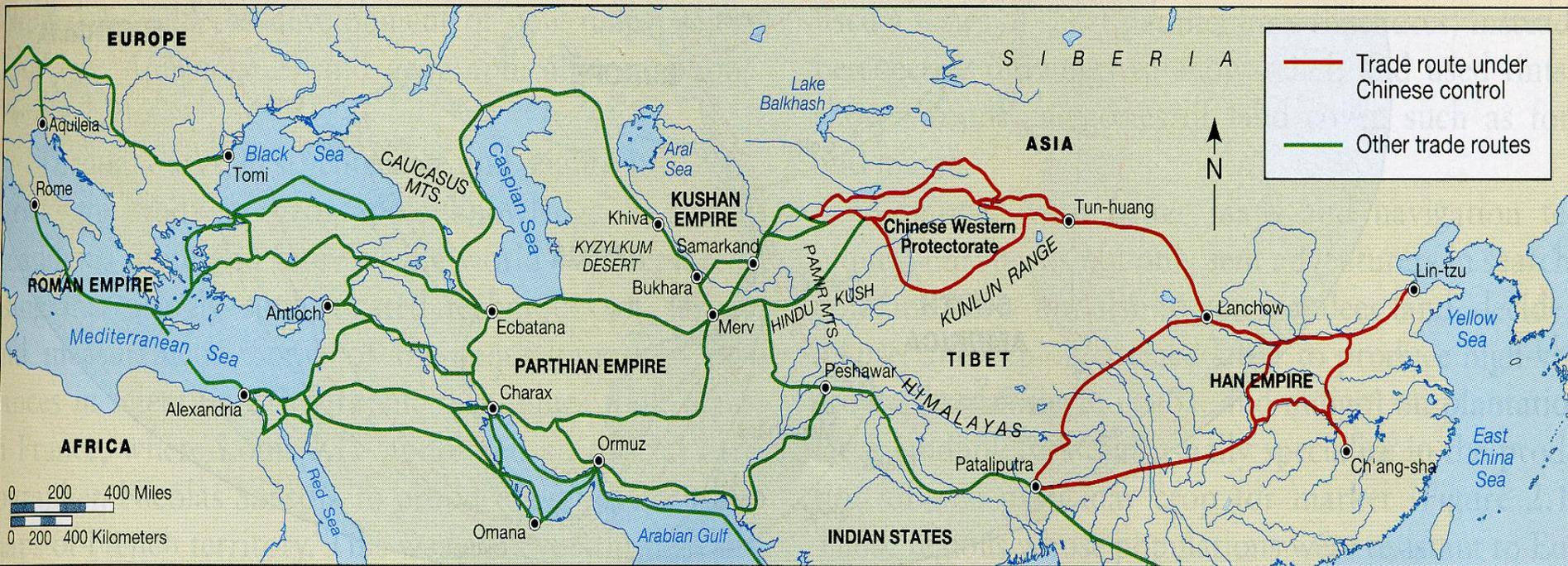
The Silk Roads

- One of two “trunk” routes connection Eurasia (the other is the Indian Ocean network)
- Cover vast span – over 3,000 miles
- Travel through multiple climates
- Have end points (termini) on either side of continent
- Gave rise to cities along the way where goods were stored or exchanged (entrepots)

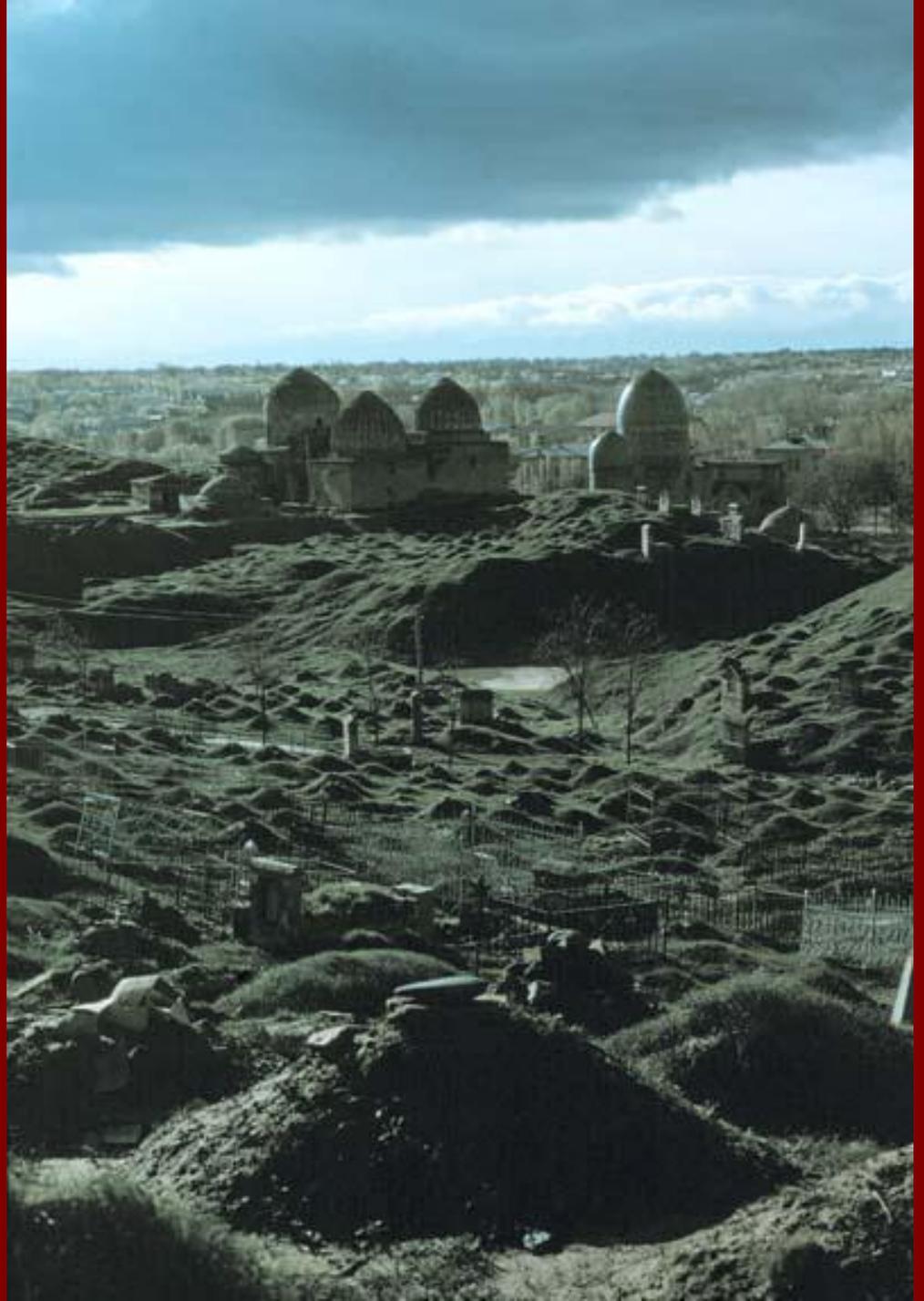
1. Thirteenth-Century Asia



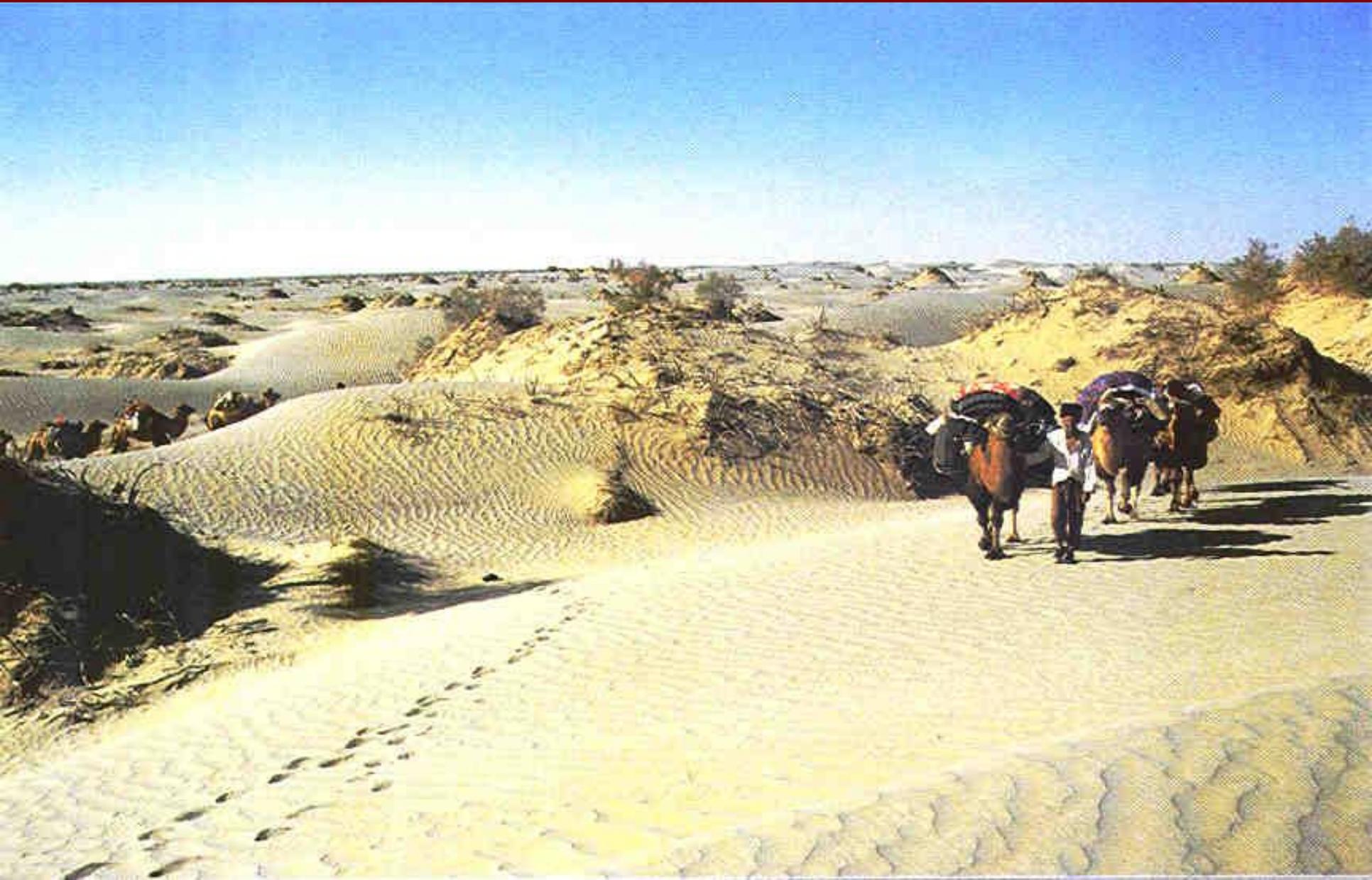
Silk Road Routes



Samarqand



Takla Makan Desert



Pamirs



Turkestan



Technology

What are some physical features of the camel pictured in the next slide?

Bactrian Camel



The Bactrian Camel Technology

- The Bactrian camel was a hybrid of the Arabian and Central Asian camel.
- Its long hair allowed it to withstand the cold of the central Asian plains
- Its stout build allowed it to carry more cargo.
- The EFFECT of this technology was to allow trade along the silk road to INCREASE

Key Vocabulary: Syncretism

Definition: The combination or reconciliation of differing beliefs or practices in religion, philosophy, etc., or an attempt to affect such compromise.

Syncretism

Application: Usually applied to ideas, including technologies, artistic styles, religious systems, languages, etc.

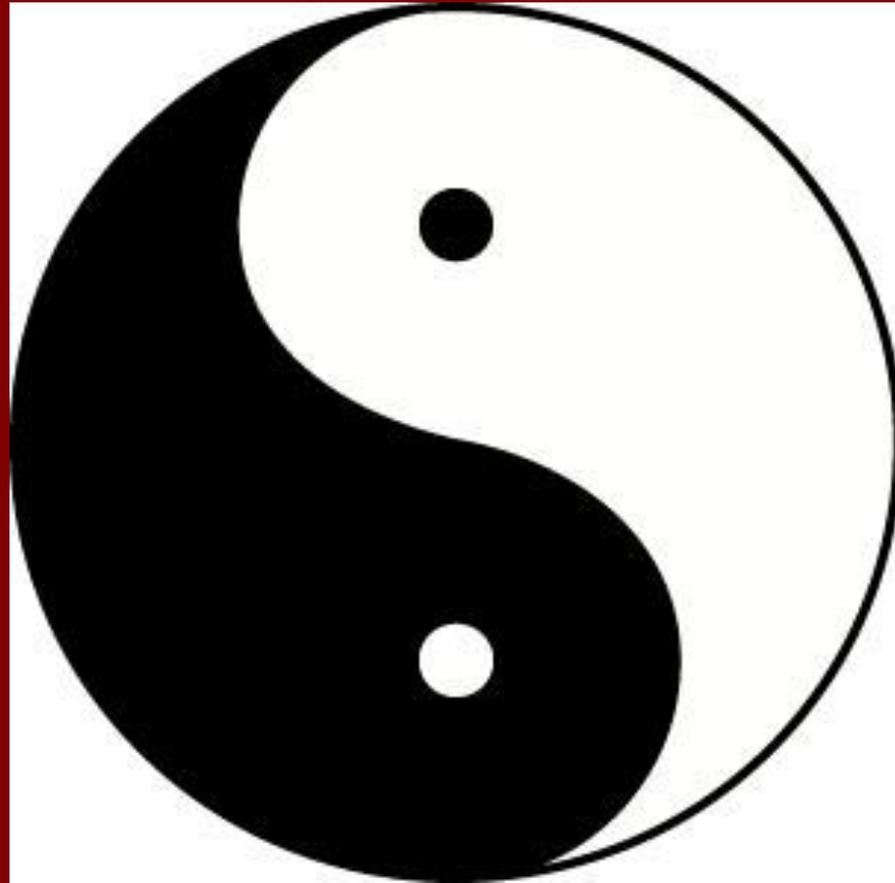
Syncretism

Opposite: **Fundamentalism**

Example of fundamentalism: Rejection of new forms of Islam (e.g. Sufism) by conservative clerics in Mecca

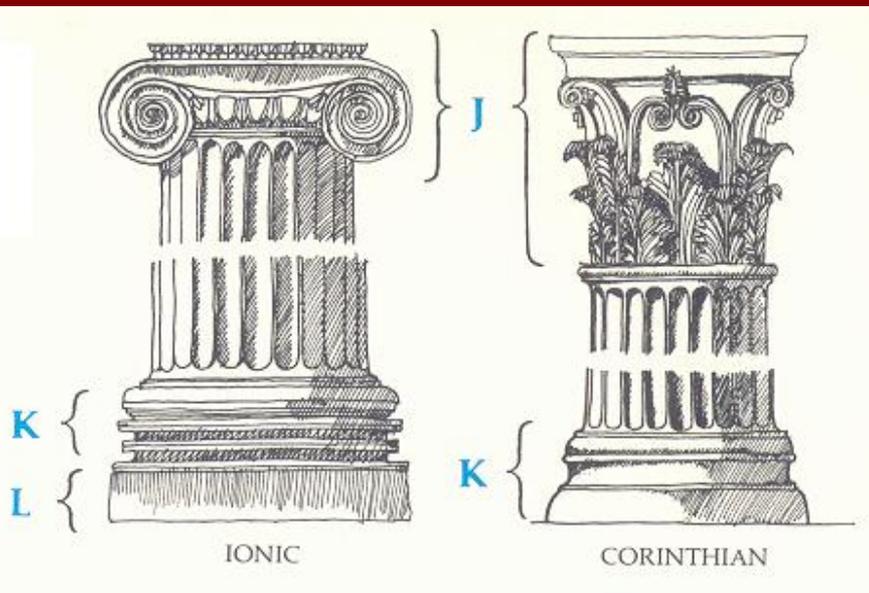
Syncretism

Qualifications: Syncretic has **identifiable elements** of two previously separate things to it.



Syncretism

Examples: Blend of Greek and Indian culture result from Hellenistic expansion into Pakistan & India



Corinthian Column

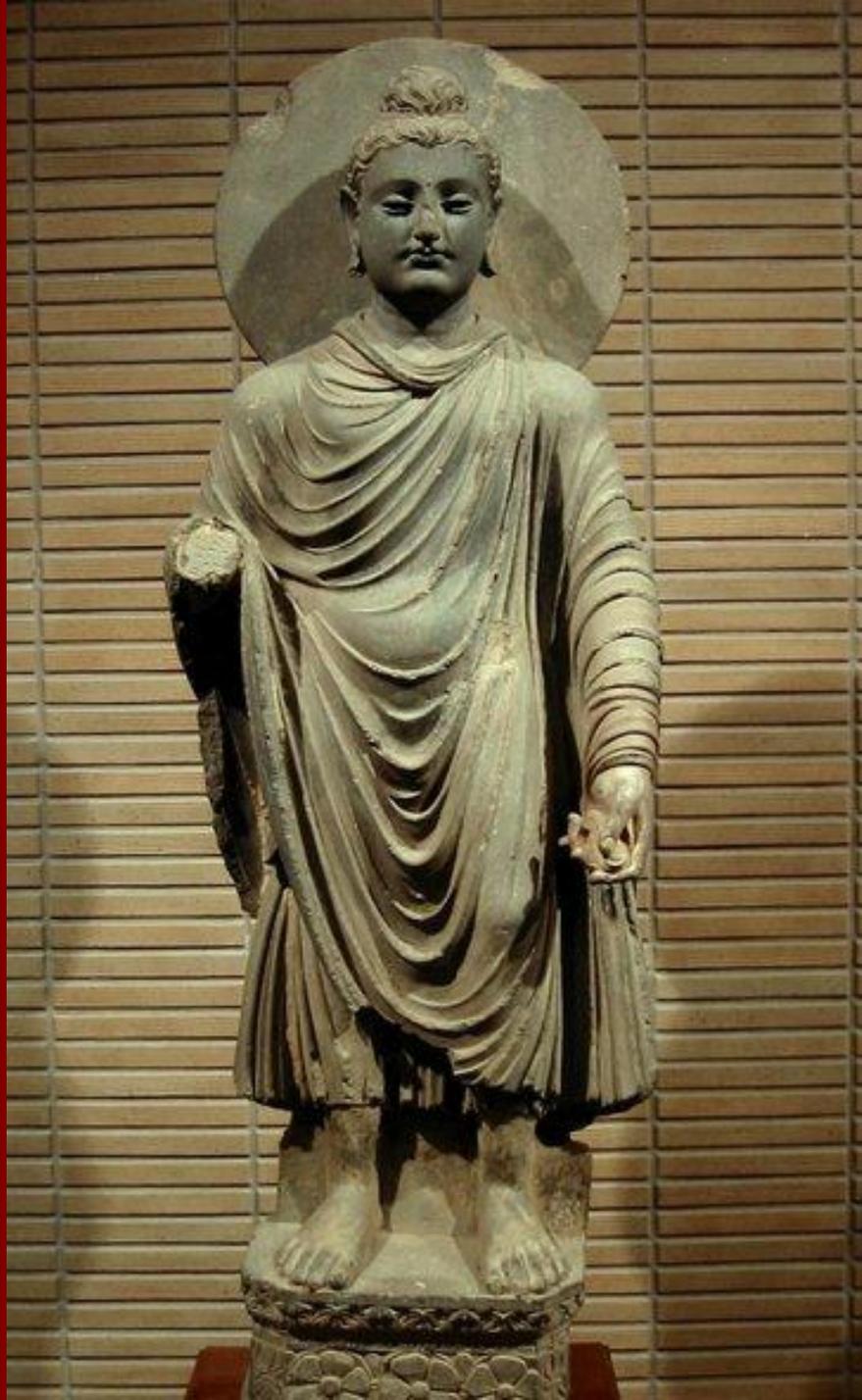


Greco-Bactrian
Column w/ Buddha
figure

Answer: Alexander the Great's!



Greco-
Bactrian
Buddha



Key Vocabulary: Diffusion

- Definition: the spreading out or dissemination of news, ideas, micro-parasites, peoples, and goods..

Diffusion

Application: Can be applied to almost anything, including molecules, ideas, peoples, etc.

Diffusion

Opposite: **Independent invention** – unique cultural adaptations that remain localized at point of origin.

Diffusion

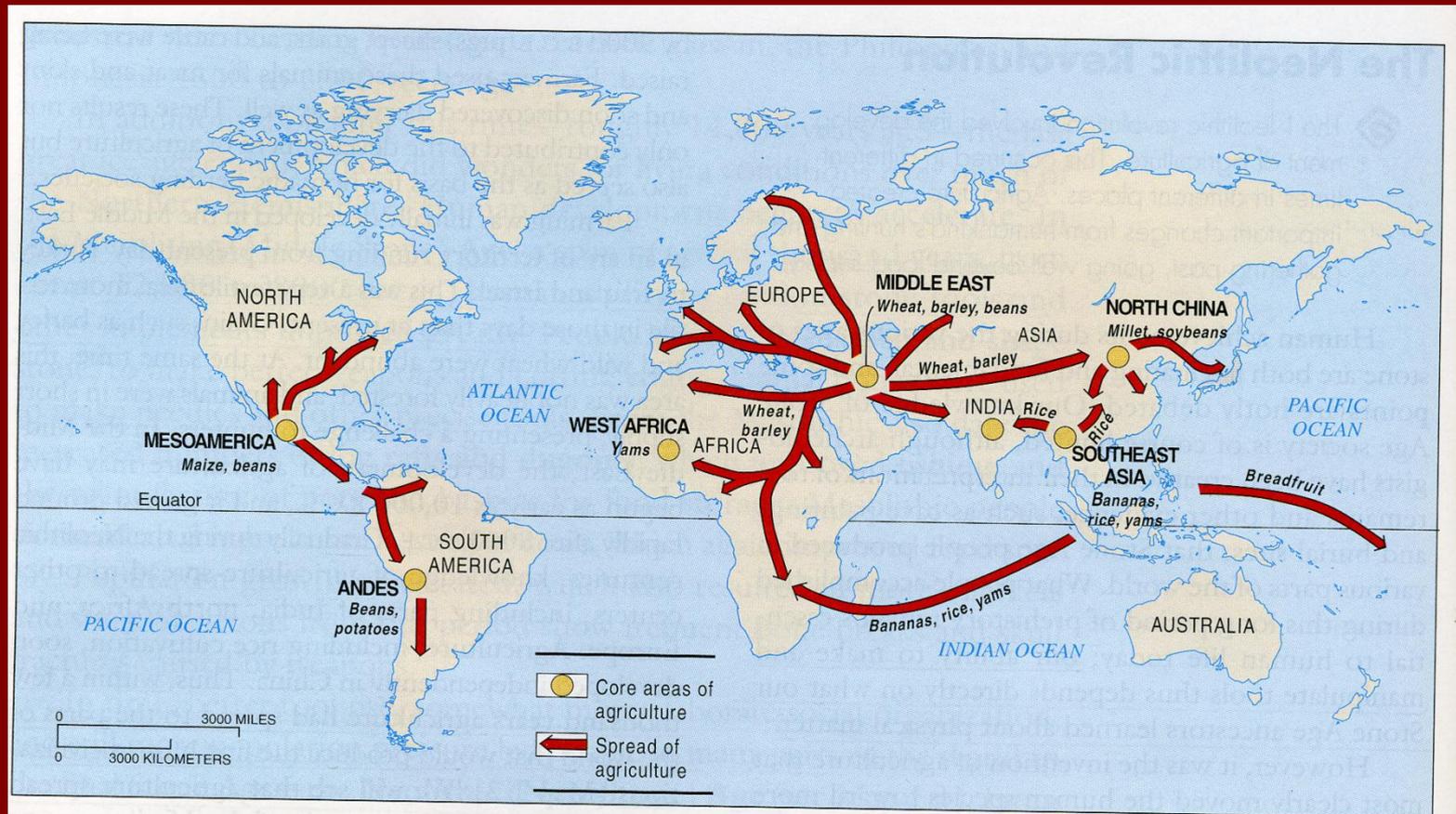
Qualifications: Dissemination is identified by tracing key qualities of the original from the source to its areas of spread.

Diffusion

Related idea: “Culture Circles”. Idea that cultural elements can be traced to an origin point (circle) from which it diffused.

Diffusion

Example: Spread of farming techniques during pre-historic period



Assessment

OBJECTIVE 1: How does the traditional view of “invading barbarians” contrast with the current view?

Assessment

OBJECTIVE 2: What were some of the geographic influences that shaped the route of the silk roads? What were some of the cultural or political influences?

Assessment

OBJECTIVE 3: What role did technology play in the Silk Road?

Assessment

OBJECTIVE 4: Define Syncretism. Define Diffusion. Explain how the two are related. How do these terms relate to the Silk Road? To nomadic peoples? To technology?