

The Silk Road in the 1st Century CE

A Brief History

The exchange of goods between the eastern Mediterranean and east Asia dates back several thousand years. The demand for silk was so high in the Mediterranean world that the trade route became known as the Silk Road. Originally, trade was conducted by the overland route from Antioch to Xiana.

The Romans learned of the monsoon winds from the Egyptians during the reign of Augustus at the beginning of the Common Era (CE). After that, most of the trade shifted away from the Silk Road to the less dangerous and quicker maritime routes.

The Silk Secret

The east Asian monopoly on silk production drove trade along the Silk Road. Silk production did not reach the Mediterranean until 522 CE when two monks smuggled silkworms out of China and presented them to the Byzantine emperor Justinian.

