

Networks of Communication & Exchange

REORGANIZING HUMAN SOCIETIES (600 B.C.E. – 600 C.E.)



- **Silk Roads, Silk Roads, Silk Roads!**
- It will become the dominant feature of the next unit (along with Islam).
- Also, an Indian Ocean trade and a Saharan route will develop affecting cultural diffusion.



- The Silk Roads were a network of routes that connected the Mediterranean with China by the way of Mesopotamia, Iran, and Central Asia.



- The roads were fostered by the Parthians (think Iran) (people originally from east of the Caspian Sea, who established an independent kingdom in Northeast Iran after Alexander the Great's empire began to crumble) who began to share customs with steppe nomads farther east.



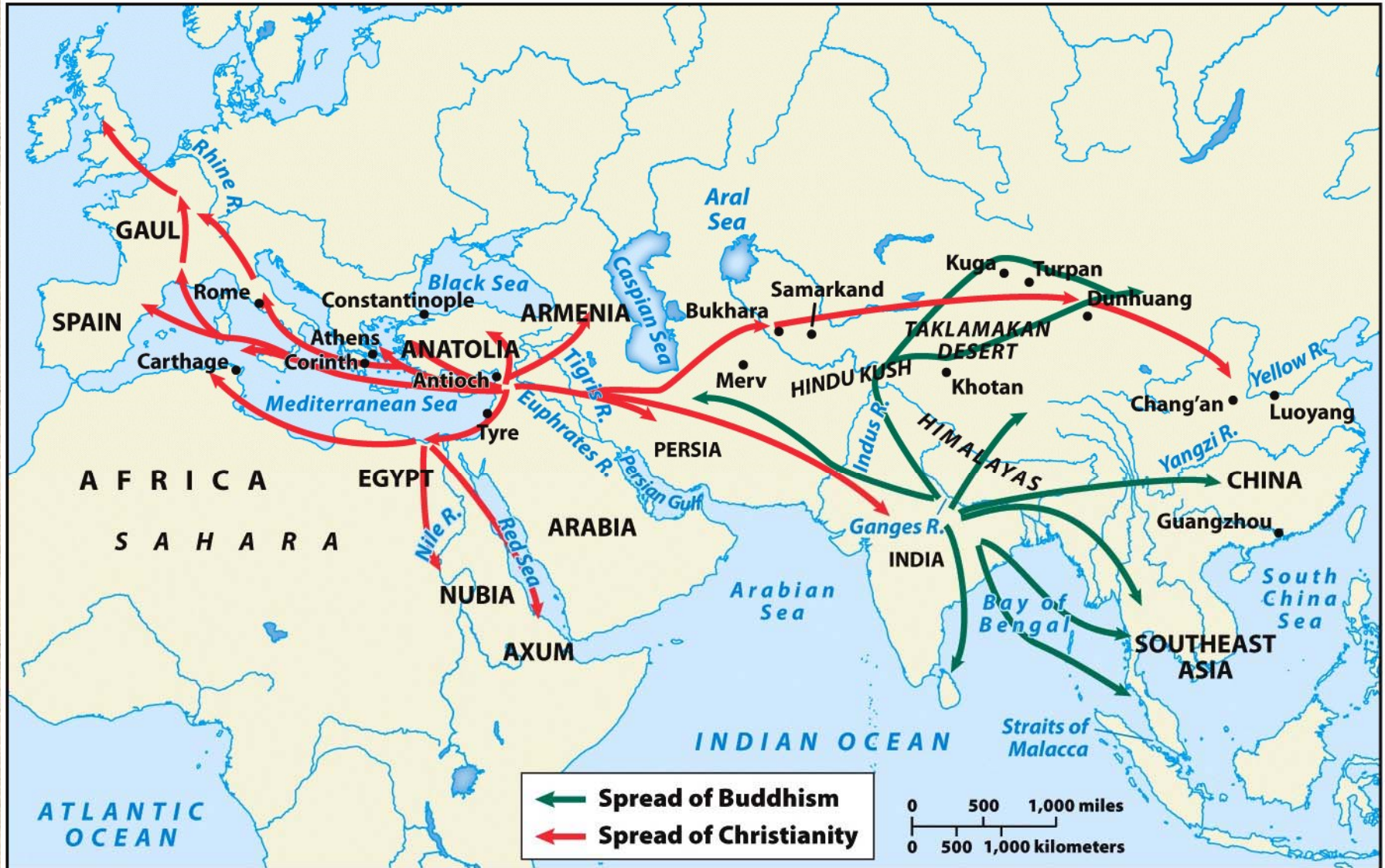


- During the Han Dynasty (128 B.C.E.) Chinese general Zhang Jian (in China surnames come first) led 18 expeditions west.
- He is credited for introducing to China better horses, plants (alfalfa, wine grapes, sesame, walnuts).

- Within a few decades Greeks were buying silk from Parthian traders in Mesopotamia.
- Romans were receiving peaches and apricots from China (However, they labeled them "Persian Plums" perhaps not realizing the extent of the Silk Roads). They also received cinnamon, ginger, and other spices that could not be grown in the West.



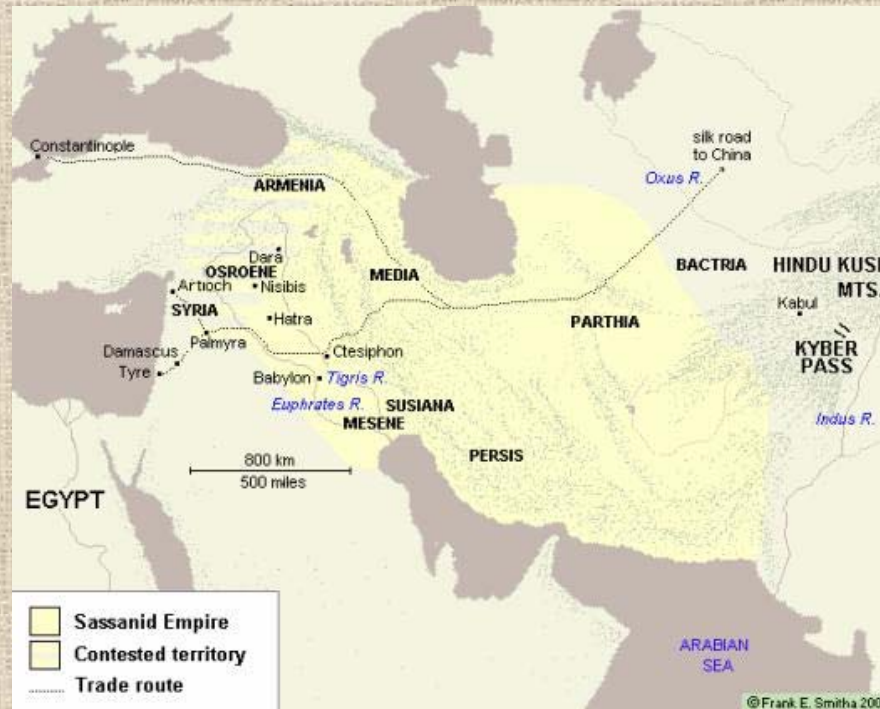
Both money and bartering took place. The use of coins began around 600 B.C.E. due to state-building and increased war, soldiers liked getting paid with money.



Map 5-1
 Ways of the World, First Edition
 © 2009 Bedford/St.Martin's

- Along the Silk Roads existed a variety of living conditions:
 - Prosperous cities and individuals with stately homes decorated with bright colored wall paintings
 - Pastoral groups living in yurts (portable round huts)





- In Iran rose the Sassanid Empire (224-600); similar to the Byzantine Empire in the West (with Christianity), the Sasanids established the Zoroastrian faith as the official state religion.

- Both empires used their faiths as a way of practicing intolerance.

- For example, in Iran persecutions of Christians, Jews and Buddhists took place. However, although Christian & Jewish communities remained.

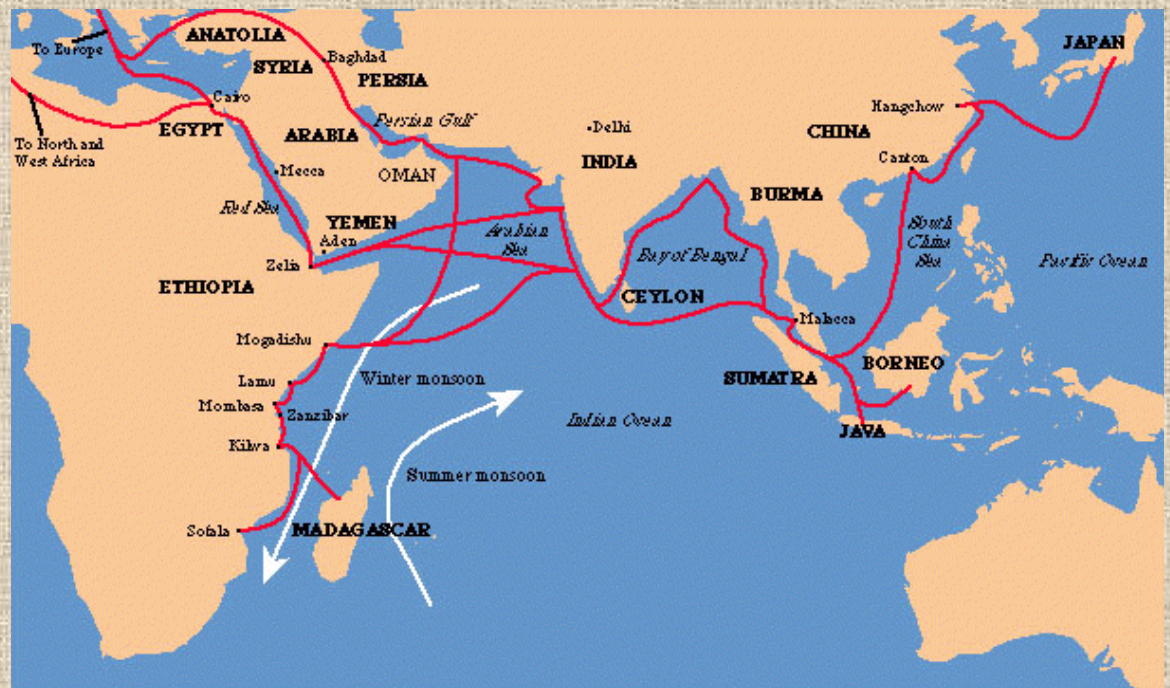


- Christians became pawns in the struggle for power between the two empires.

- For example, when Nestorian Christians (they emphasized the “humanness” of Jesus as opposed to him being of a “divine” birth) were considered “heretical” by Byzantine Bishops, the Sasanid Shah took them in and let them engage in missionary work.



- The sea counterpart to the land routes of the Silk Roads was the Indian Ocean Maritime System.
- Fostered by a multilingual and multiethnic society of seafarers a network of trade developed across the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.



- Due to the Sahara's vast sprawling sand dunes (and lack of water) trade across the desert was quite limited.
- The introduction of the camel from Arabia changed this.



- The Sahara routes were able to bring salt to sub-Saharan Africa and forest products northward out of the equatorial zone.
- However, as a whole the trade network did little to increase external contact with sub-Saharan Africa.
(Geography played a great role in this – desert, rainforests, rivers enter into the oceans or contain rapids).



- The lack of these contacts hindered the development of sub-Saharan Africa (ex: in the 19th century European imperialists noted the commonality in the region of natives using nothing more than a hoe and a digging stick as an aid in agriculture).
- However, West Africa's earliest known culture – the Nok (area of Nigeria 500 B.C.E. – 200 C.E.), was able to smelt iron without outside help.



I thought we were the only ones to figure out how to smelt iron! - *The Hittites*

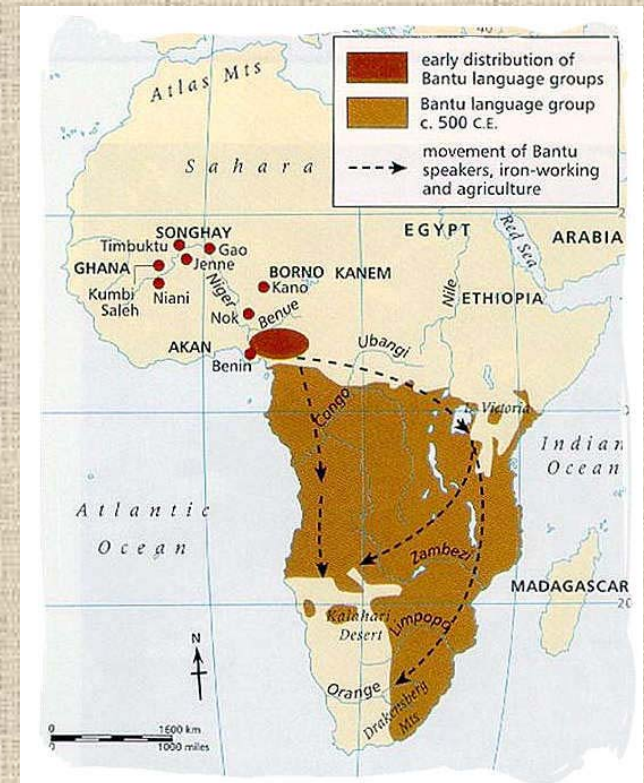


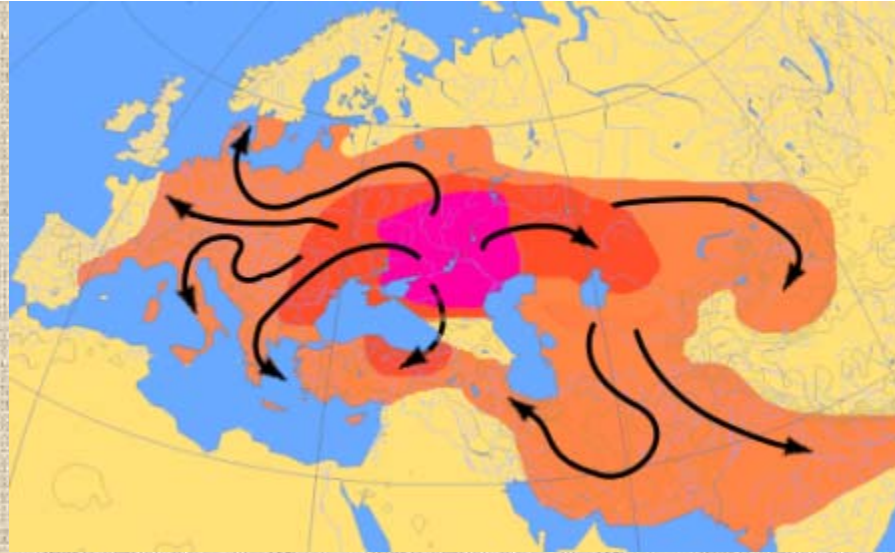
- Due to ecological barriers and the fact that no dominant empire (foreign or African) emerged to impose a unified “culture” numerous highly diverse cultures existed in sub-Saharan Africa. (i.e. There were more than one thousand spoken languages).



- The closest “unifying” force for sub-Saharan African culture were the Bantus.
- The **Bantu migrations** (starting as early as 500 B.C.E. through 1000 C.E.) brought the transfer of “Bantu” traditions (from West Africa) southward to mix with other preexisting cultures.

- In fact, many of the different languages that exist in the region can be traced back to the Bantus.
- The increased use of iron in the region is also likely due to the Bantus.



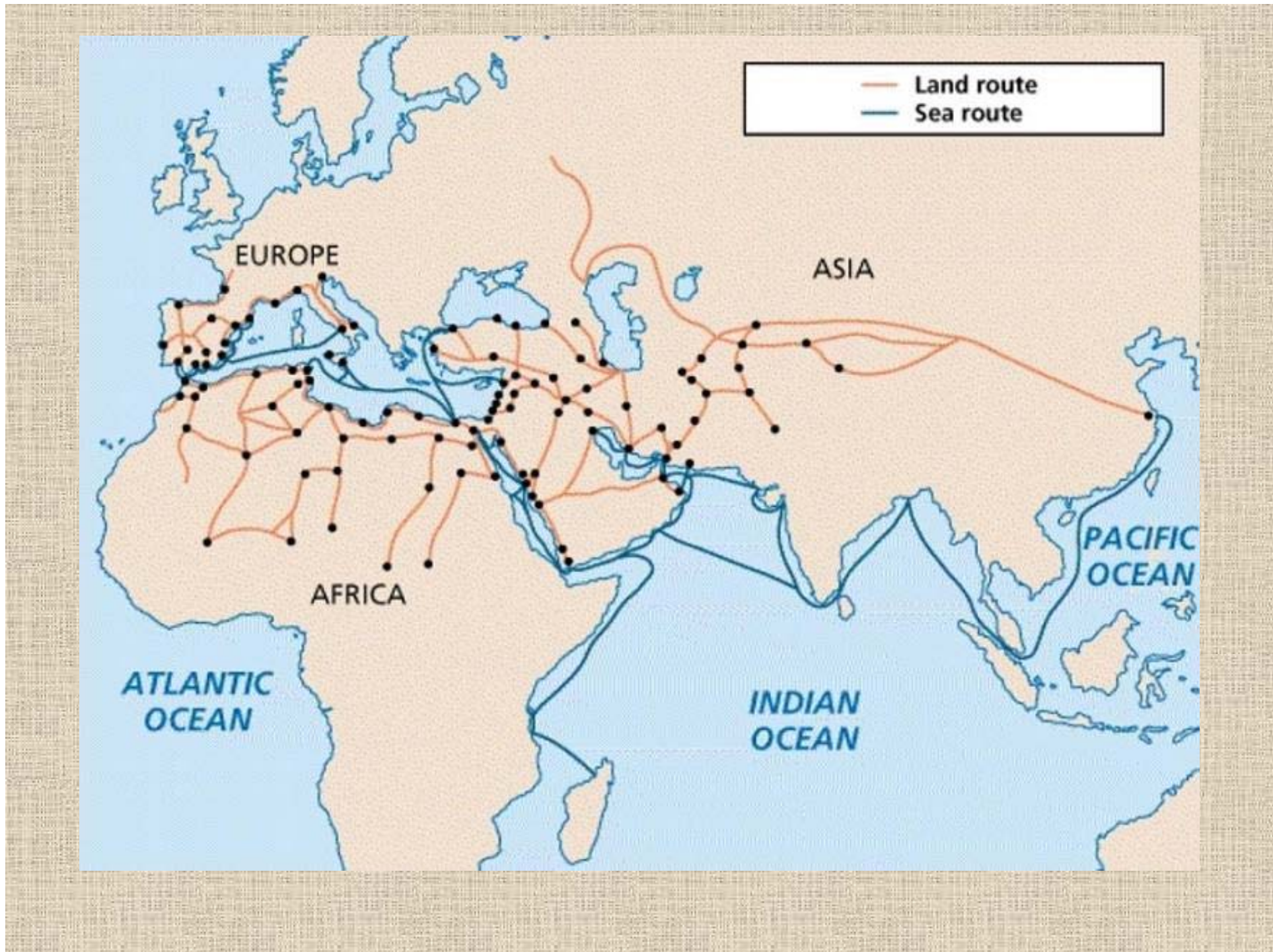


- The Bantu migrations might be comparable to the Indo-European migrations, except that the Indo-Europeans were more eclectic and the regions they migrated into were overrun with empires at this time.

- Although culture of the region was not uniform (see [great traditions vs. small traditions](#)) – there were certain cultural aspects that were consistent throughout the region: fixed social categories such as distinct gender roles, dancing, music ([drums](#)), and wearing masks.



- The Silk Roads and the other early trade routes will change societies in the East & West.
 - New spices in West
 - The stirrup (for horses) is introduced
 - Gunpowder
 - New foods
 - Buddhism finds a (*welcoming?*) home in Southeast Asia, Christianity spreads
 - The use of coinage becomes more commonplace
 - Societies begin and will forever be in contact with one another (China and Japan at one point will try to stop this, but its inevitable).



- WE ARE NOW FINISHED WITH UNIT 2. BUT WHY IS THIS A GOOD “BREAKING” POINT?
 - The Roman Empire has collapsed and Europe is about to enter a new phase of history
 - The Silk Roads and other trade routes are now going to “accelerate connections.”
 - Islam will dramatically change the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond.

To be continued ...