

## The Han Golden Age Museum Walk



Categorize



Contextualize



Connect Cause  
and Effect



A lot of the artifacts that appear in museums come from the golden ages of civilizations.

In this activity, you will visit exhibits on the Han Golden Age. **As you learn about the Han Empire, fill out the appropriate row in the [Golden Ages of Classical Civilizations Graphic Organizer](#).**

## Exhibit A: Civil Service Exam



[Image](#) is courtesy of Wikimedia and is in the public domain

The **civil service examination system** was a method of recruiting civil officials to work and maintain a **stable government**. These exams were **based on merit and skill** rather than family or political connections. Passing the rigorous exams, which were based on classical literature and philosophy, offered a highly sought-after status. Any male adult in China, regardless of his wealth or social status, could become a high-ranking government official by passing the examination. They were **tested on their knowledge of the Confucian classics**, their ability to write, and the "Five Studies:" military strategy, civil law, revenue and taxation, agriculture, and geography.

Civil service exams still exist today and are one way that government jobs are filled in the state of New York.

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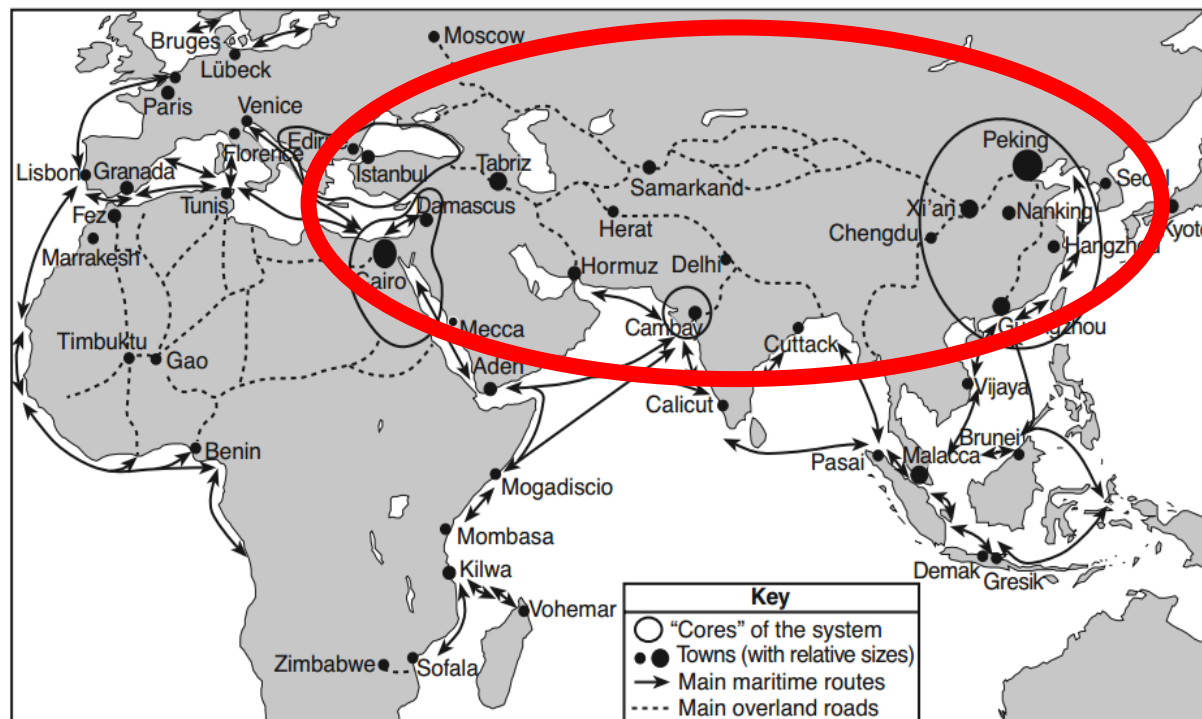
## Exhibit B: Silk Roads



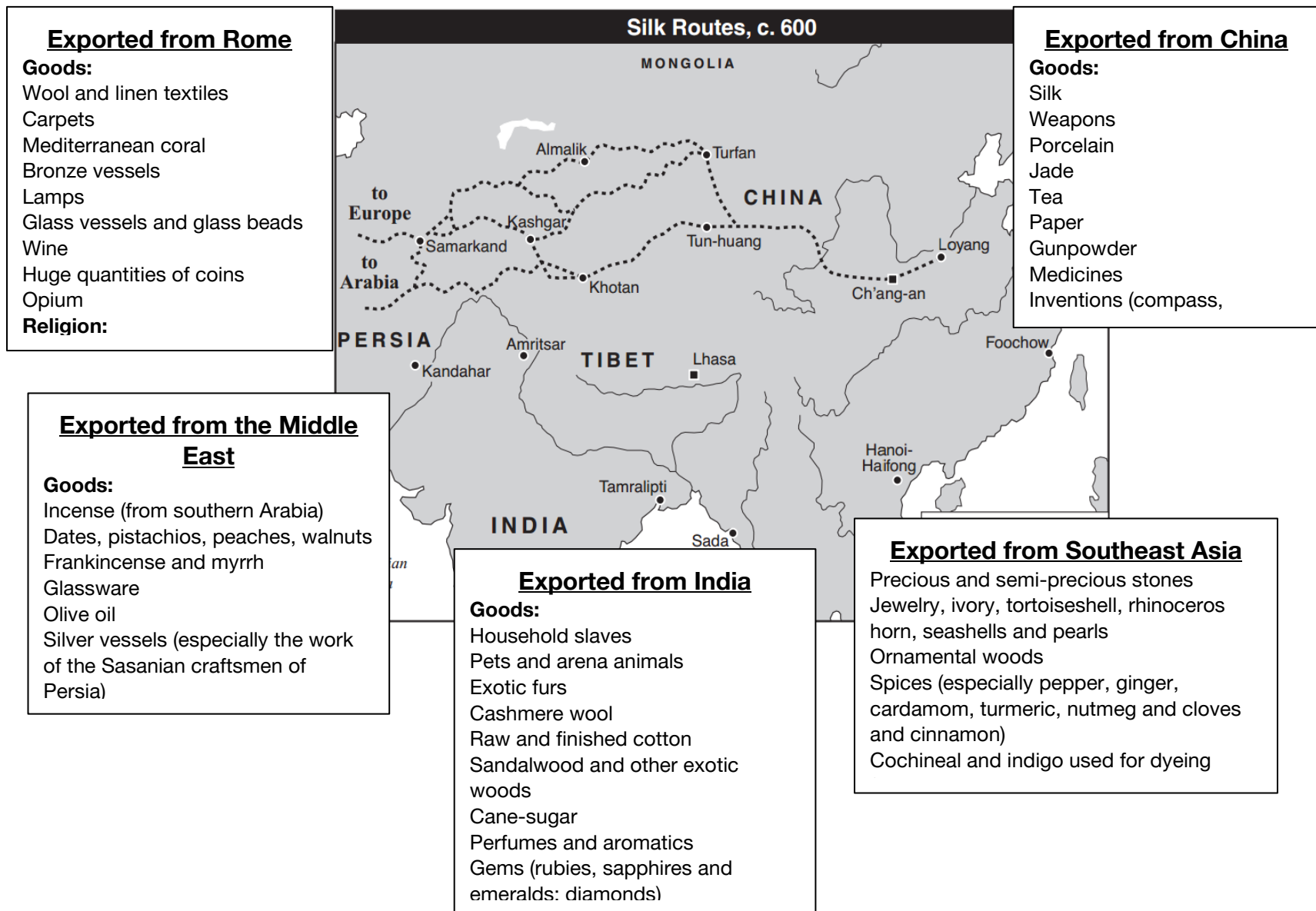
Watch this [TED-Ed Video on The Silk Road](#), read the text below, and examine the maps ([transcript of the video](#)).

The Silk Roads were a vast network of trade routes over land and water that connected the Mediterranean Sea with East Asia and the lands in between. The trade network was in use from about the 2nd century BCE to the 16th century CE. Over the course of that time, the use of the Silk Roads and how safe they were depended on which empires controlled the land the trade routes passed through, how stable those governments were, and how much they protected merchants on the routes.

During the Han Dynasty, trade increased because the Han government placed importance on trade and made the routes safe for traders to travel with little fear of being robbed.



Source: Philippe Beaujard in "The Indian Ocean in Eurasian and African World-Systems before the Sixteenth Century,"



## Exhibit C: Silk- A Valuable Product in China and Europe



What is it? How was it made?

Watch this [American Museum of Natural History Video on Silk Making](#)

### Where did silk spread? Why?

The silk that constituted China's chief export remained a mystery fabric to Greeks and Romans for many years. They heard many possible explanations, such as that it was made from bark on trees. Not until the mid-sixth century did the Byzantine emperor learn from two monks that the cloth was a product of silkworms feeding on mulberry leaves.

By the first century CE silk clothes were popular on the streets of Rome among its wealthy citizens. Much consumption of silk, at both ends of the Silk Road, was devoted to religious activities. Christian priests used purple silk embroidered with gold silk thread for their vestments. Kings, priests, and saints were shrouded in silks at their burials; even burials from long ago were dug up and shrouded in silk. In the Buddhist areas, yards of silk were used for banners, sometimes tens of thousands at one monastery. Buddhist lay people made donations of silk to monasteries as a reward for the monks' intercessions and as a way to gain merits for future life. The monks, in turn, traded silk for daily provisions and for the "seven treasures" used to decorate their *stupas*, or shrines: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, red coral, crystal, pearls, and agate. During affluent times, Buddhist monasteries thus became significant economic entities.



Adapted by New Visions from Timemaps of World History at <https://www.timemaps.com/history/world-200ad/>

### What impact did Silk have in Rome?

Quick Facts About The Impact of the Silk Trade on Rome:

- By the time of the Roman Emperor Augustus (27 BCE – 14 CE), trade between China and the west was firmly established and silk was the most sought after commodity in Egypt, Greece, and, especially, in Rome.
- Romans valued silk at its weight in gold
- Politicians tried to ban the sale of silk because Romans were spending all of their money on it instead of buying Roman goods and products of more use
- Politicians also tried to ban silk because they thought it was immoral because it was too revealing when worn

Adapted by New Visions from [Silk Road](#) by Joshua J. Mark which is published on Ancient History Encyclopedia under the [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 Unported](#) license

## Exhibit D: Paper and Paper Making

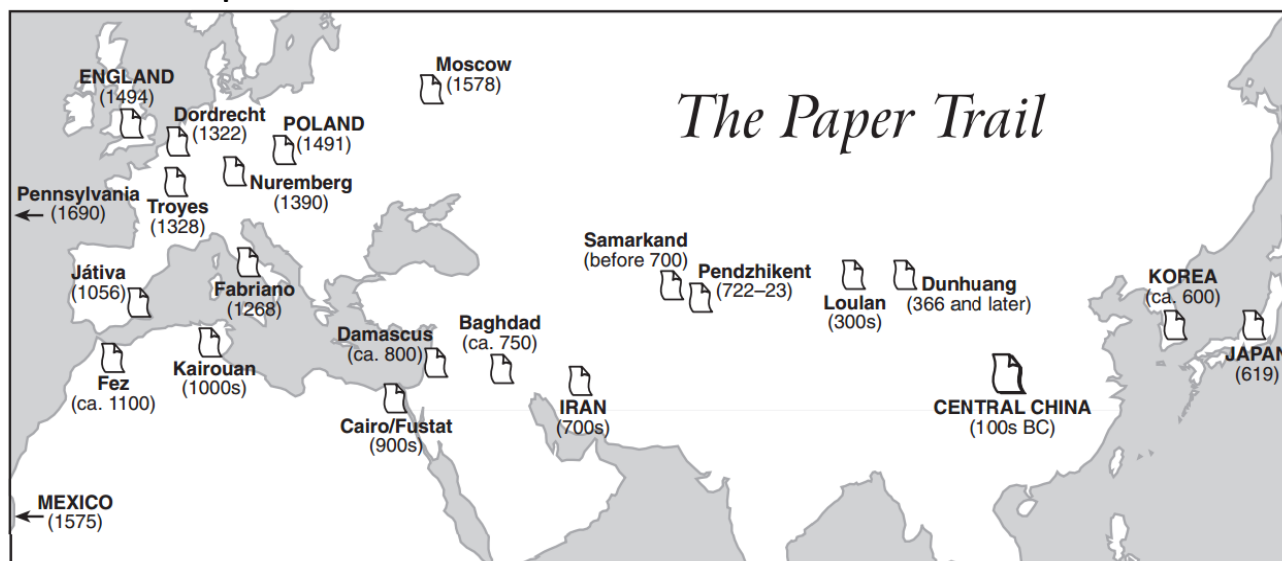
How was it made?

When and where did it spread?



Watch  
this  
[Video](#)

[Clip from China: The Dragon's Ascent on the process and history of papermaking and Hello China's Video on Chinese Paper.](#)



Source: Aramco World, May/June, 1999 (adapted) from the NYS Global History and Geography Regents Examination, June 2005

### What impact did it have?

Paper was invented in China during the Han Dynasty. Though this was the period when Silk Road trade increased, the process for making paper was kept a secret in China. It was first used by the Emperor, other wealthy nobles, and Buddhist temples, but was soon adopted by others and became the most popular material for writing in China and East Asia.

Overtime, the manufacture of paper spread west. In the dynasties following the Han, papermaking technology expanded into Central Asia and the Middle East before passing through Islamic Empires in Africa, and eventually to Europe.

In China, during the Han Dynasty, papermaking and the invention of printing led to the duplication of important religious texts, government documents, instructional texts, and literature that helped fueled an increase in literacy, learning, and the sharing of knowledge.



## Exhibit E: Compass



Watch [Hello China- Compass Video](#) and [Han Dynasty Compass](#) videos and read the information below.

<b>What is it?</b>	A device that uses magnetic forces to help the user determine which direction is North.
<b>Where and when was it invented?</b>	China around 200 BCE during the Han Dynasty
<b>What problem did it solve?</b>	The compass helped travelers more accurately determine which direction they were headed. This was especially difficult at sea and on cloudy nights when one could not use the stars to navigate.



Replica of a Han Dynasty compass.

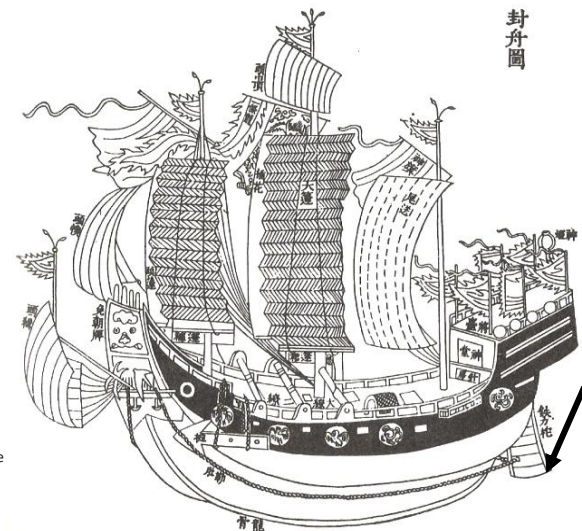
[Model Si Nan of Han Dynasty.jpg](#) by Typo~commonswiki is published under the [CC BY-SA 3.0 Unported](#) license

## Exhibit F: The Junk with Rudder

A **junk** is a Chinese sailing vessel. The English name comes from Javanese *djong* (Malay:*adjong*), meaning 'ship' or 'large vessel'. Junks were originally developed during the **Han Dynasty** and further evolved to represent one of the most successful ship designs in history. Junks were used both for military combat and for trade, traveling long distances on rough inland rivers and at across the sea. Numerous accounts by early Chinese historians and by medieval travelers describe the junks and attest to their size and efficiency.

Junks incorporated numerous **technical advances** in sail plan and hull designs that were later adopted in Western shipbuilding. The **sails** were rigged so that they could direct wind into each other, allowing the junks to sail into the wind and to travel in heavy winds and rough seas. **Multiple compartments** were built in the **hull**, accessed by separate hatches and ladders, and similar in structure to the interior of a bamboo stem. These could be made watertight to slow flooding, but the front compartments often had “limber holes” that allowed water to enter and leave the compartment, helping to ballast [stabilize] the ship in rough waters. Junks employed stern-mounted **rudders** centuries before their adoption in the West, though the rudder, origin, form and construction was completely different. **The rudder helped steer the ship.**

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Citation [1](#)

## Exhibit G: Art

Like the ancient Egyptians, the Han-dynasty Chinese had complex beliefs concerning the afterlife. They referred to the tomb as a “subterranean palace” (*digong*), and filled it with items they believed the soul needed after death. The most striking of these are ceramic and wood sculptures of soldiers, maids, and other servants, including dogs to guard the tomb’s entrance. The tomb walls were decorated with murals, or with designs on ceramic tiles envisioning the afterlife.

### Female Dancer



Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–9 A.D.), 2nd century B.C.

Earthenware with slip and pigments; H. 21 in. (53.3 cm)

This figure is a quintessential example of early Chinese sculpture, which found its highest expression in the third to first centuries B.C. Unlike the geometric approach of the Greeks, the Chinese sculptors sought to capture the “life spirit” of the human subject, concentrating on facial expression and a posture that suggests movement—in this instance, a moment in a dance.

[Nswag, dinastia han, figurina dipinta di danzatrice.JPG](#) by Sailko is published under the [CC BY 2.5 Generic](#) license

### Crossbow



[Warring States or Western Han crossbow.jpg](#) by Gary Lee Todd is published under the [CC BY-SA 4.0 International](#) license

A Chinese crossbow with a buttplate from either the late Warring States Period (3rd century BC) or the early Han Dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD); made of bronze and inlaid with silver.