TRADE ROUTES BETWEEN EUROPE AND ASIA DURING ANTIQUITY

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Long-distance trade played a major role in the cultural, religious, and artistic exchanges that took place between the major centers of civilization in Europe and Asia during antiquity. The trade routes served principally to transfer raw materials, foodstuffs and luxury goods from areas with surpluses to others where they were in short supply. Some areas had a monopoly on certain materials or goods. China, for example, supplied West Asia and the Mediterranean world with silk, while spices were obtained principally from South Asia. The Silk and Spice Routes were the main arteries of contact between the various ancient empires of the Old World. Cities along these trade routes grew rich providing services to merchants and acting as international marketplaces.

The trade routes were the communications highways of the ancient world. New inventions, religious beliefs, artistic styles, languages, and social customs, as well as goods and raw materials, were transmitted by people moving from one place to another to conduct business. These connections are reflected in the sculptural styles of Gandhara (modern-day Pakistan and northern India) and Gaul (modern-day France), both influenced by the Hellenistic styles popularized by the Romans.

The Silk Road – Ancient Trading Route Between Europe and Asia.

The Silk Road is a name given to the many trade routes that connected Europe and the Mediterranean with the Asian world. The route is over 6,500 km long and got its name because the early Chinese traded silk along it. Although silk was the main trading item there were many other goods that travelled along the Silk Road between
Eastern Asia and Europe. In the course of time, medicine, perfumes, spices and livestock found their way between continents.

The Chinese learned to make silk thousands of years ago. For a long time they were the only ones who knew how to make this precious material. Only the emperor, his family and his highest advisers were allowed to wear clothes made of silk. For a long time the Chinese guarded this secret very carefully. The ancient Romans were the first Europeans who became aware of this wonderful material. Trading started, often with Indians as middlemen who traded silk with the Chinese in exchange for gold and silver which they got from the Romans.

In the early Middle Ages traffic along the route decreased because of the breakup of the Roman Empire. Trading along the Silk Road and became stronger again between the 13th and 14th centuries, when the Mongols controlled central Asia. During the Age of Exploration the Silk Road lost its importance because new sea routes to Asia were discovered.

The Silk Road was one of the first trading routes that connected European world with Asian world. It played a major role in the development of international trade because this road served for cultural and technological transmission that linked traders, merchants among China, India, Persia and Mediterranean countries for almost 3000 years.