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Silk and Spice, and Everything Nice: Trade in Luxuries and Commodities Across Eurasia

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This lecture will examine trade in luxury goods and commodities across Eurasia during the first Millennium of the Common Era (roughly). What were some of the luxury items that moved along the Eurasian trading networks, how and why were they valued, what underlying factors gave rise to and governed their export and import, and how were they at the heart of transformative processes that led to the growth of global cosmopolitan cultures in cities involved in international trade?

The answers to these questions are quite complex and will be addressed through a number of case studies focusing on a diverse set of products originating in distant places across Eurasia such as silk from China, long pepper and ivory from India, and exotic animals from Africa. Finally, through an examination of textile patterns, this lecture will discuss how the appropriation of certain symbols of status, wealth, and power contributed to the development of an elite culture across borders, brought closer by global trade.

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