

## **Land Communications and Transport (600-1492)**

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By the year 600 the eastern hemisphere did not have large areas unknown to the learned folk of China, India, the Near East and most of Europe. It is true that people in Africa south of the Sahara had no contact with people to the north while Australia, and much of the Indonesian archipelago, was unknown to the rest of the world, as was northern Siberia and northern Europe. Consequently trade routes did not reach these sparsely settled regions where summer heat or winter cold discouraged large settlements and a growth in population. The main trade routes ran from the Mediterranean to the east or north and were much less used and maintained than under the Roman and Han empires. The end of the Roman empire brought an end to the well made Roman roads and facilities for travel around the Mediterranean, while the Sasanian Persians did not have the developed courier and road services which their predecessors, the Achaemenids, had built. No new technology existed in 600 which made travel easier than previously except for the invention of the stirrup for riding horses.

Although apparently a minor feature of riding a horse, the iron stirrup made possible certain changes both in travel and in warfare. It was easier to mount and control a horse, and to ride longer distances with the stirrup. Heavily armored knights could maintain balance and use their lances with devastating effect when on horseback with stirrups. The stirrup may have been invented on the steppes of Mongolia or Kazakhstan and brought to Europe and China by the Avars shortly before the year 600.