

Presentation of Book

Central Asia and the Silk Road

***– Economic Rise and Decline over Several Millennia
(Springer Publishing, May 2017)***

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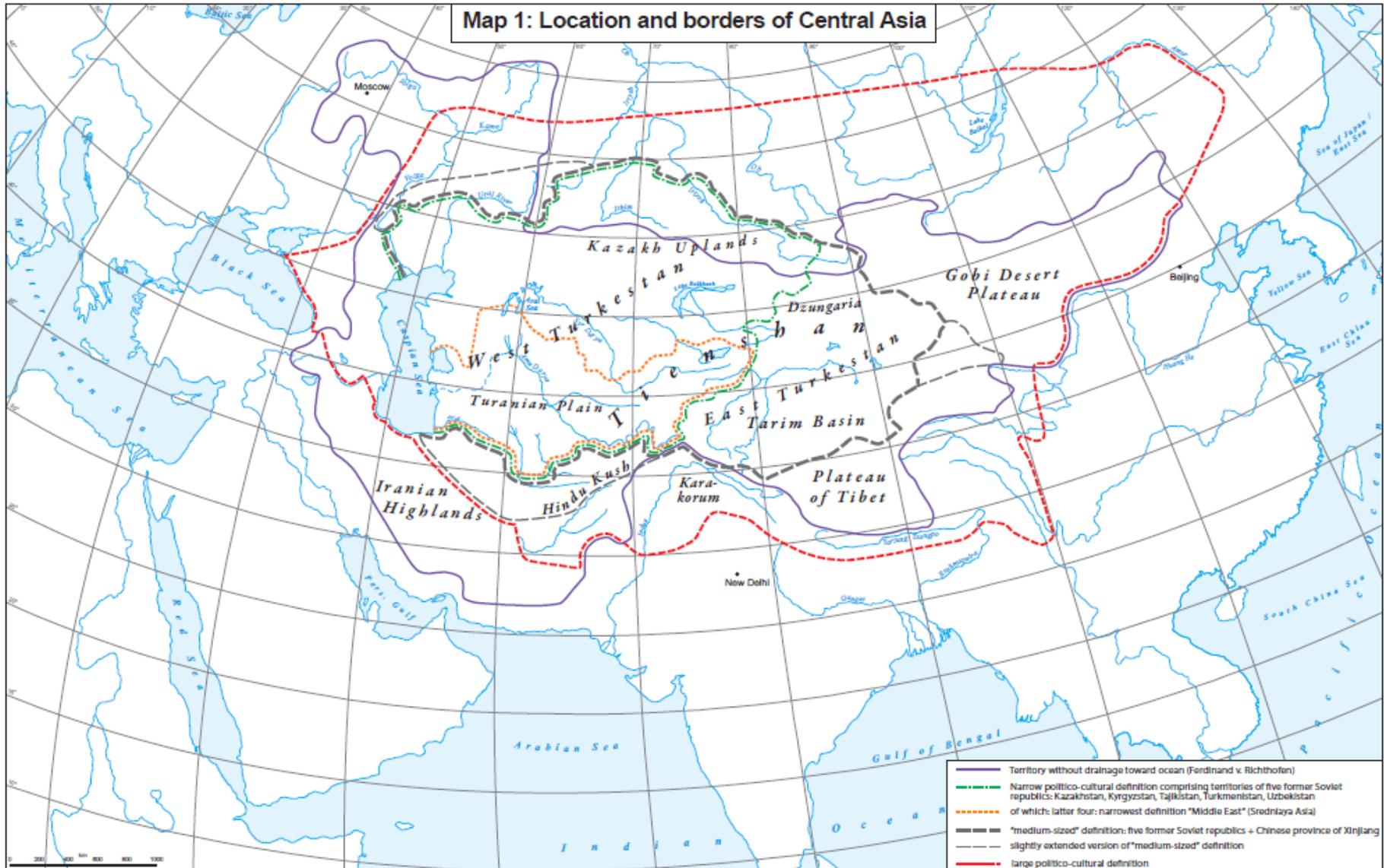
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CA – Elements of physical geography



Some traits of pre-modern Central Asia (CA) and the Silk Road (SR)

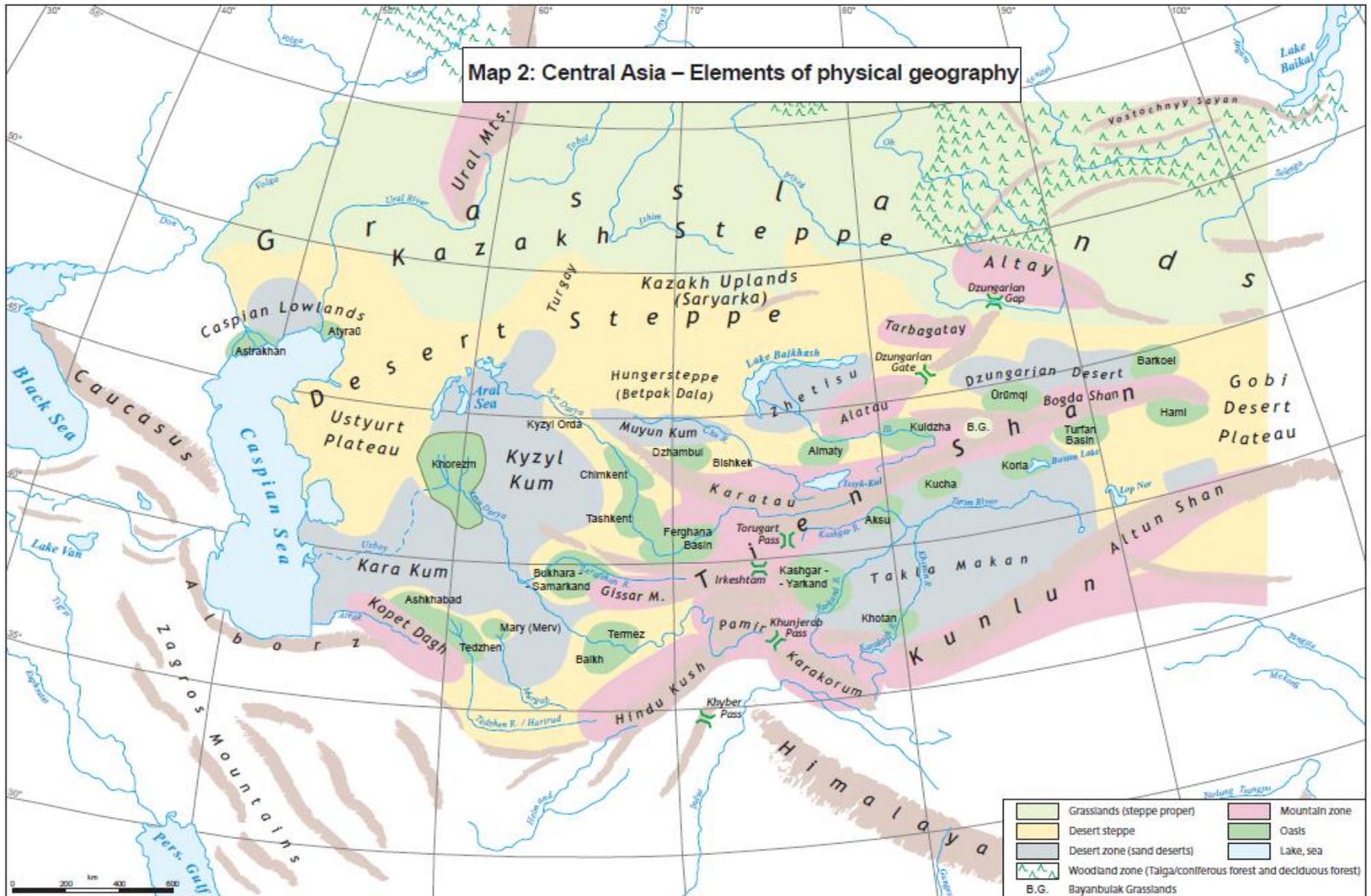
Borders and location of CA – the heart of the Eurasian double-continent



Source: Stephan Barisitz: Central Asia and the Silk Road - Economic Rise and Decline Over Several Millennia, Springer Publishing, Heidelberg, New York 2017

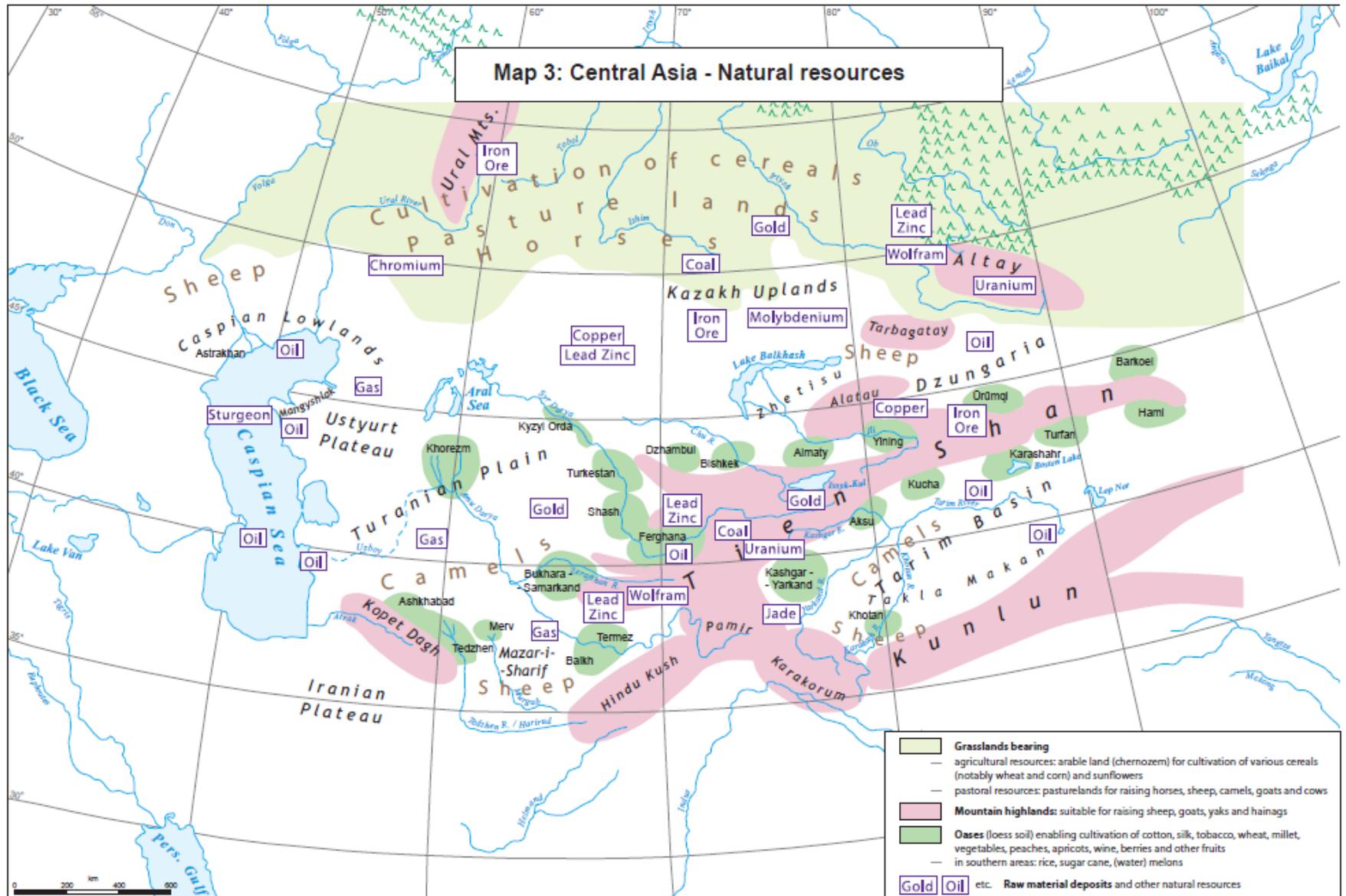
CA: 4 zones of economic geography: steppe belt, deserts, oasis belt, mountains

Map 2: Central Asia – Elements of physical geography



Source: Stephan Barisitz: Central Asia and the Silk Road - Economic Rise and Decline Over Several Millennia, Springer Publishing, Heidelberg, New York 2017

Some natural resources of the region: chernozem, pasturelands, fertile oases, oil, gas, metals



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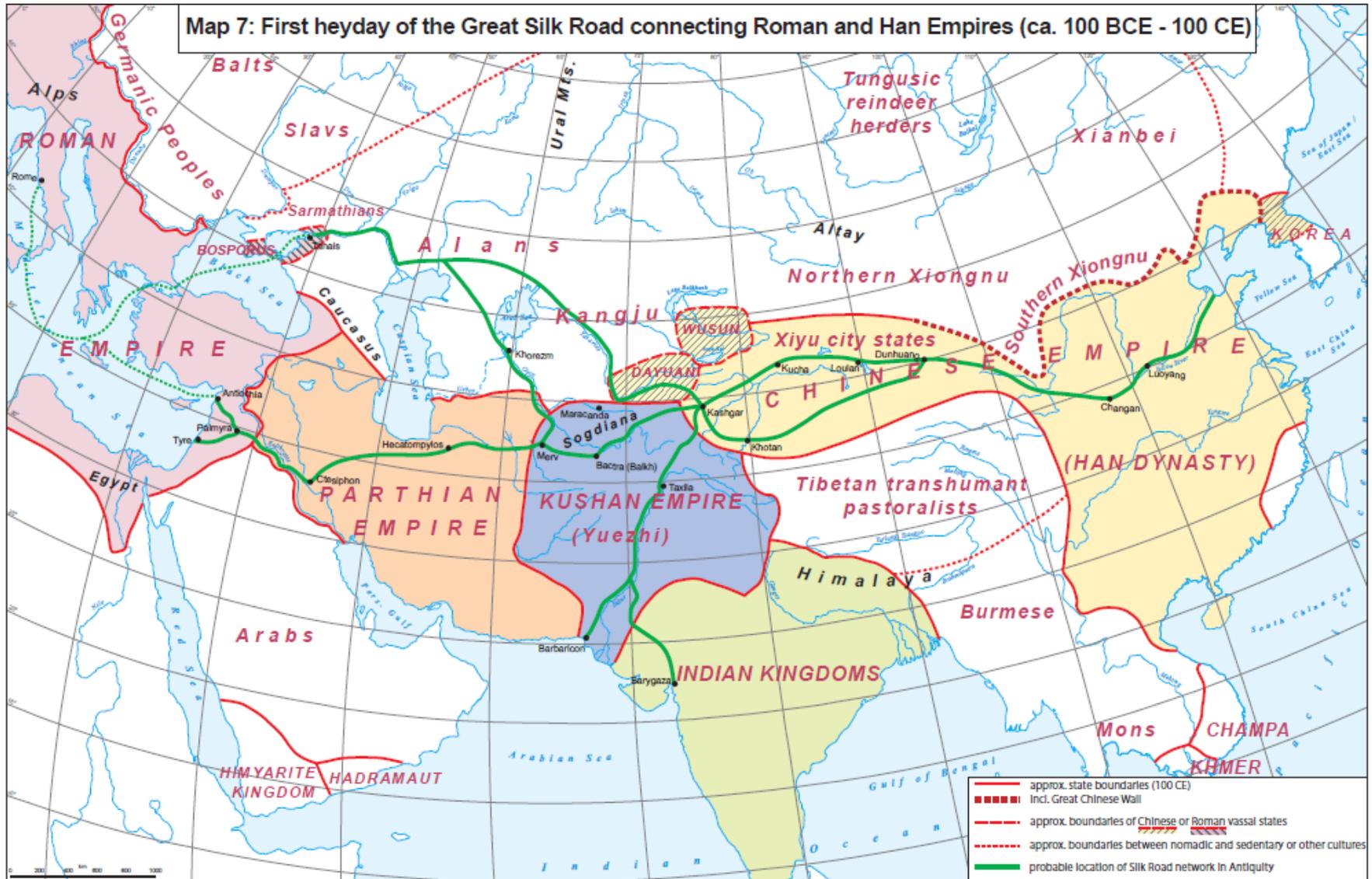
Central Asia (CA)

- The C Asian steppe belt: The cradle of horseback nomadism, far-reaching mobility, and military prowess
- Eurasian steppe civilization: seamlessly linking CA and Eastern Europe
- CA as a unique terrain of sedentary-nomadic interaction and of related economic and political dualism
- Technologically based nomadic military superiority over settled civilizations lasted almost 2½ millennia: up to the 18th century
 - with incisive consequences
- No other global region can call as many major civilizations its neighbors
- No other global region can boast of as complex a political history as CA

The Silk Road (SR)

- Nomadic powers tended to be materially interested in the good functioning of international trade networks
- The (traditional) Silk Road (SR) was a network of overland trade routes running through CA that provided commercial and cultural exchange between Europe, CA, India and China (Ferdinand v. Richthofen, 1877)
- The SR is estimated to have existed for almost two millennia – up the 19th century
- The SR enjoyed at least three heydays:
 - Han Dynasty – Roman Empire (ca. 100 BCE – 200 CE)
 - Tang Dynasty – Caliphate (ca. 675-875 CE)
 - Mongol Empire (ca. 1245-1345)
- As its name indicates, silk was very popular as SR merchandise; it often even served as a de-facto means of payment
- From the late 16th century, silver also attained importance as a medium of exchange

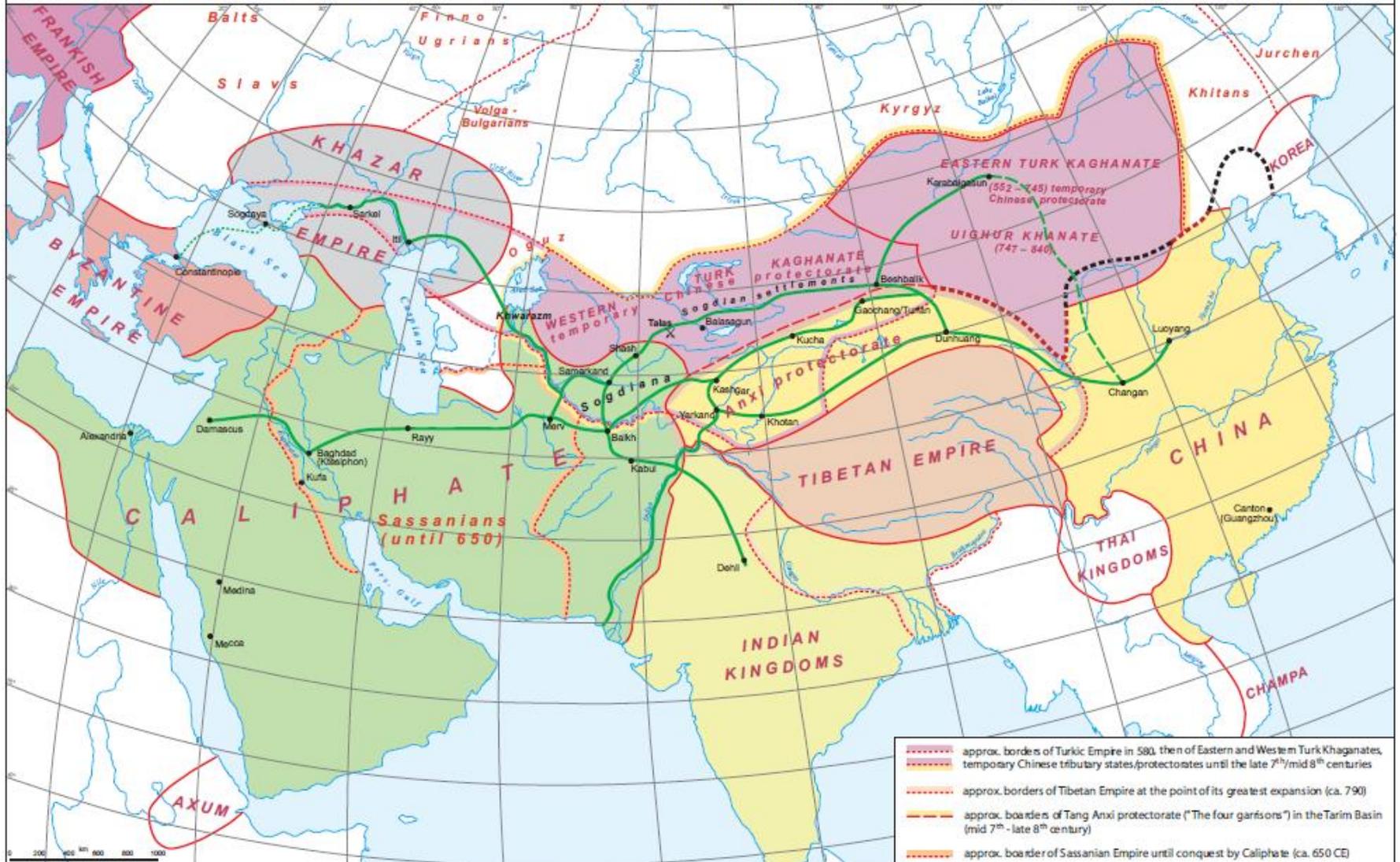
First heyday of the Silk Road



Source: Stephan Barisitz: Central Asia and the Silk Road - Economic Rise and Decline Over Several Millennia, Springer Publishing, Heidelberg, New York 2017

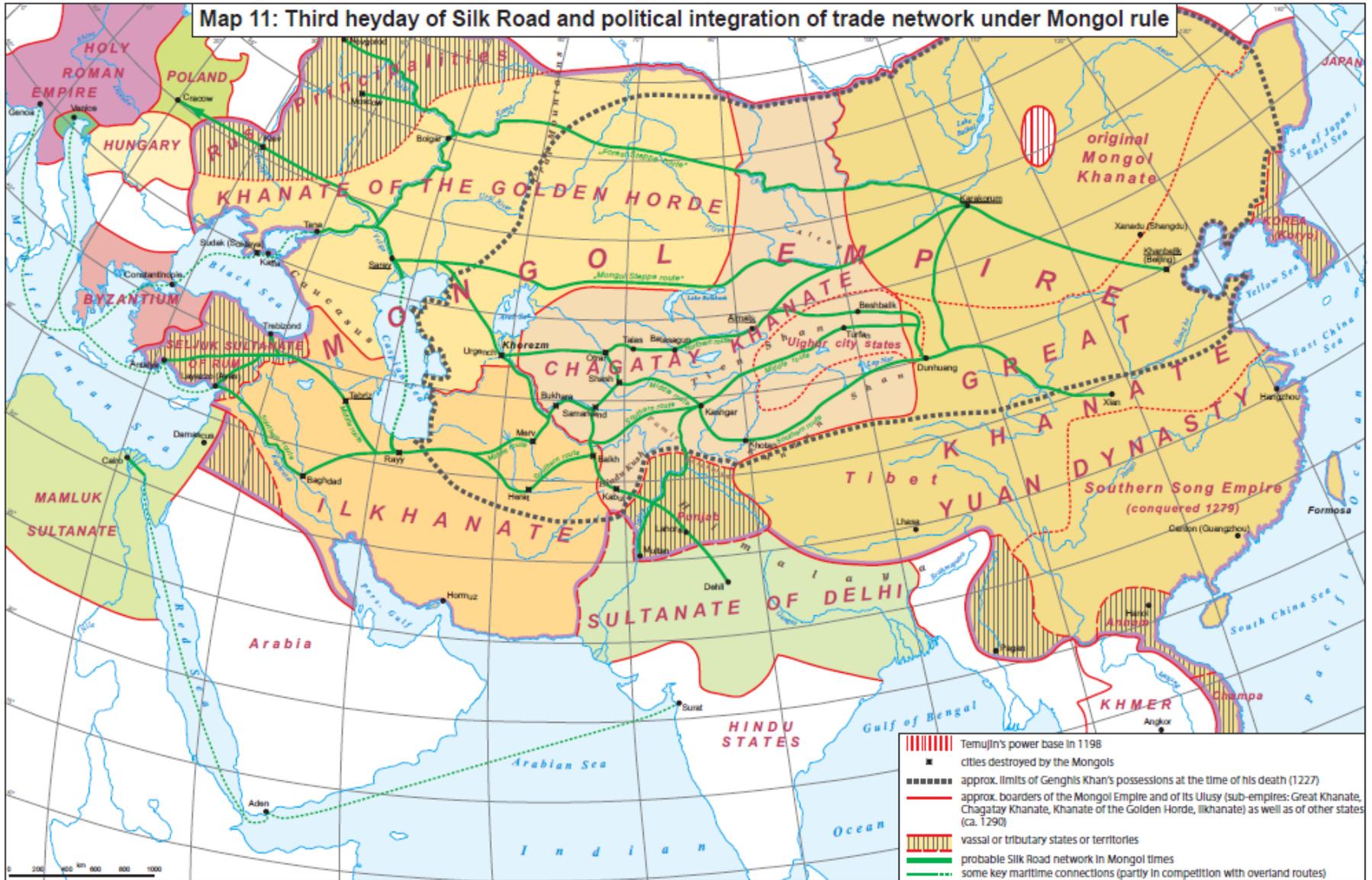
Second heyday of Silk Road

Map 9: Second heyday of the Great Silk Road under the Turkish steppe empires, the Tang Dynasty and the Caliphate (ca. 575 – 850)



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Third heyday of Silk Road

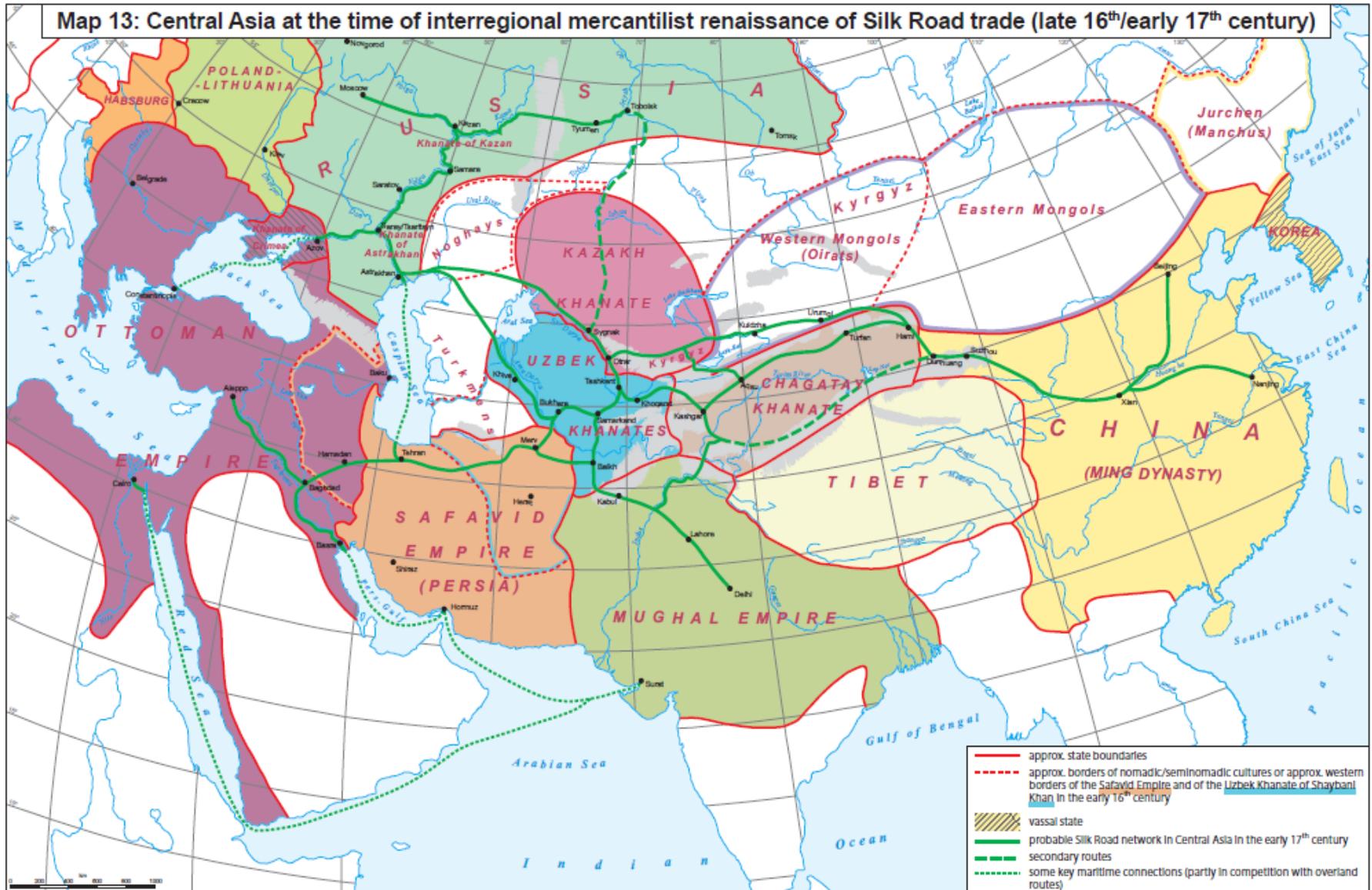


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Important products traded on the SR

- Exorbitant transport costs meant that only goods with very high value-to-weight ratios would be carried over long distances for profit
- Over the centuries, regional markets for lower-cost bulkier goods also expanded
- Example: 16th to 18th centuries
 - **Relatively highly developed sedentary economies:**
 - **China:** tea, silk and silk textiles, porcelain (china), lacquerware
 - **India:** cotton and textiles, silk, indigo, precious stones
 - **Western Europe:** silver, fine cloth, apparel, manufactured products
 - **“Emerging markets”**
 - **Persia:** silk and silk textiles, carpets/rugs, cotton, horses
 - **Russland:** furs, leather, wool products, metal utensils, wood
 - **C Asian sedentary economies:**
 - **Uzbek Khanates:** cotton, Bukharan lambskins, slaves
 - **Chagatay Khanate:** jade, musk, wool, textiles, dried grapes
 - **C Asian nomadic economies:**
 - **Dzungar Empire** (without Tarim Basin): horses, sheep, camels
 - **Kazakh Khanate:** sheep, horses, camels, leather, slaves
 - **Turkmens:** horses (notably Akhal-Teke breed), sheep, carpets, slaves

“Mercantilist renaissance” of overland trade



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Factors that contributed to ups and downs (heydays and declines) of the SR

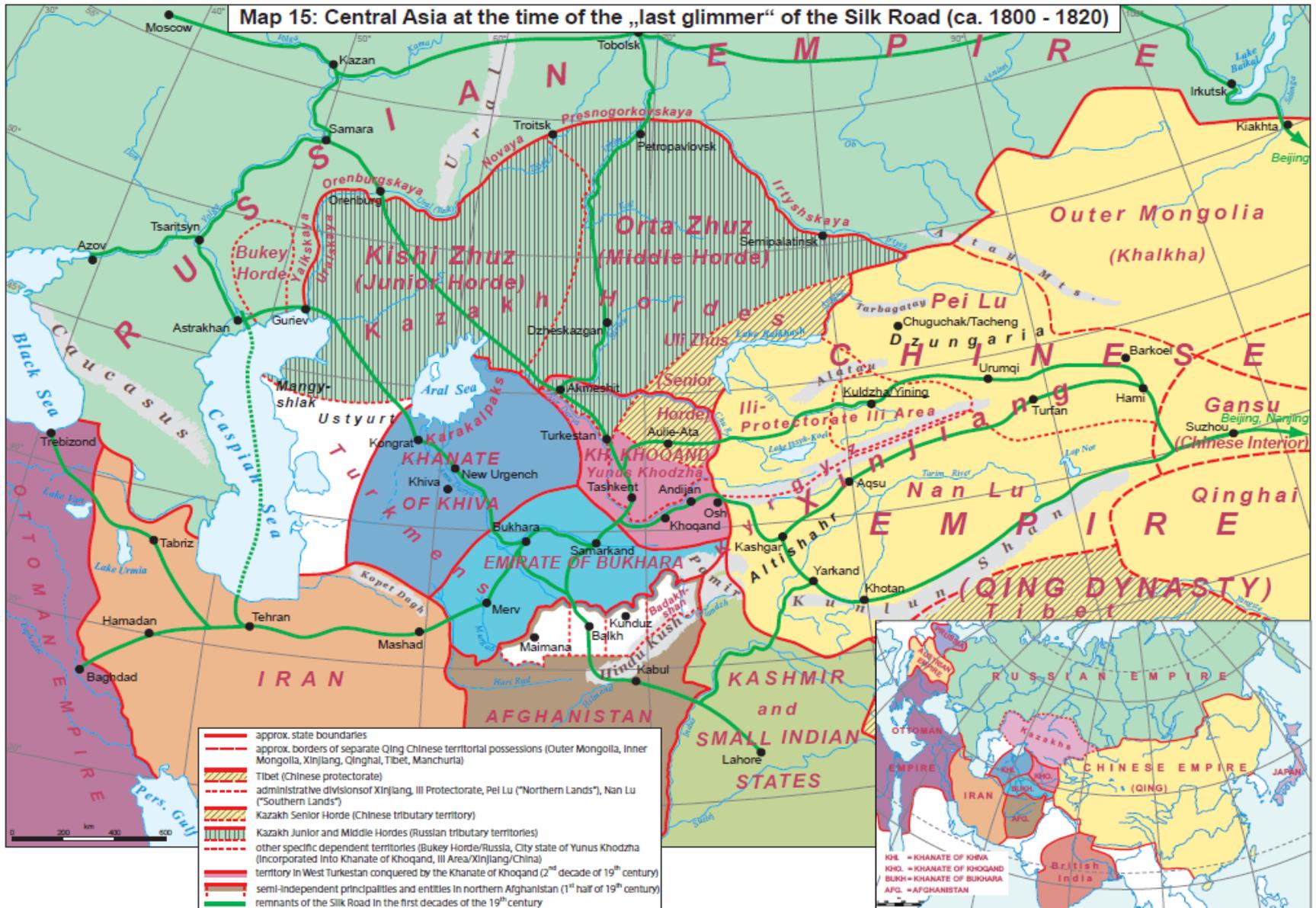
- Heydays

- Simultaneous political stabilization
- Successful economic reforms
- SR infrastructure investments
- Political = economic integration (of large parts) of SR
- Tendencies toward religious unification
- Spillovers of Western silver flows from America to Eurasia (late 16th century)
- Networks of enterprising merchants

- Downturns

- Political instability/de-stabilization, turmoil, warfare
- Unraveling or lack of economic reforms
- Vicious circle between political instability and loss of SR revenues
- Diseases/pandemics spread by the SR, notably the “Black Death”
- Slow loss of importance of SR through increasing Western maritime competition circumventing CA (from 16th century)
- Emergence of Siberian Route (Russia), equally bypassing the SR

China remains largest economic power of the Silk Road (the world) until the early 19th century

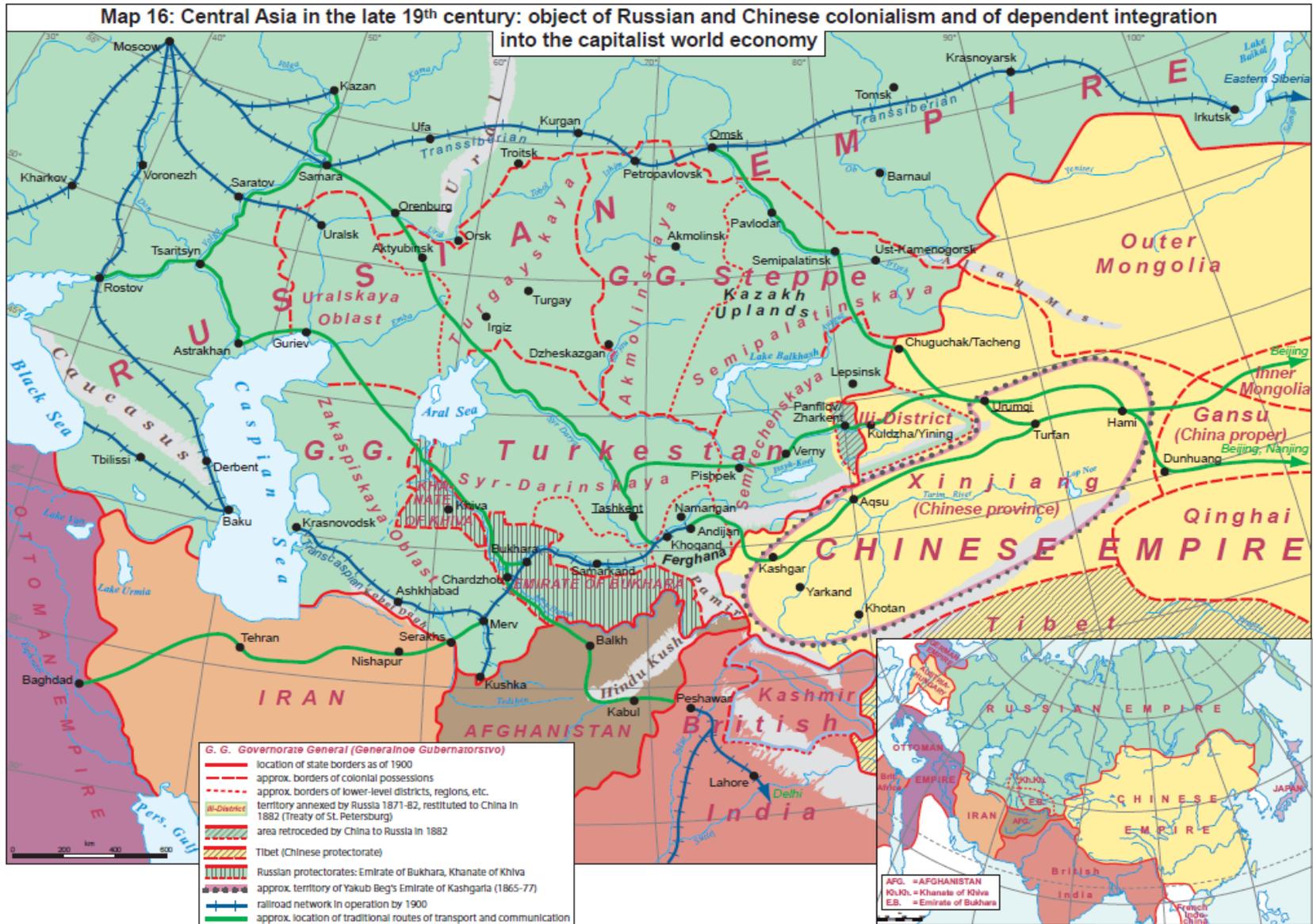


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Some further aspects

- **CA's political and partly economic centrality** in Eurasia up to the 15th century, followed by lengthy decline
- Some of the renowned C Asian traders and their networks: from the Sogdians, via the Uighurs, to the Bukharans
- Nomadic imperial “**Law and Order**” was not generally accompanied by “**Rule of Law**”, which rendered long-term investment difficult
- **C Asian versus European medieval experiences**: differential exposure to invasions, no urban bourgeoisie on the SR
- Stylized cycles of C Asian monetary reforms, inflation and currency crises
- **The Middle Kingdom remained** the economically predominant and most resourceful power along the Silk Road

The SR and CA are finally “overrun” by modernity (second half of 19th century)



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Some *New Silk Road* projects (One Belt, One Road), spatial overview



- | | | | |
|--|---|----------------|---|
| | (Highspeed) railroad link | | Deep-sea ports (newly constructed/modernized) |
| | Highway or expressway | (US), (I), (J) | Project supported by the U.S.A., by India, by Japan |
| | Oil or gas pipeline | | North-South Transport Corridor (supported by India, Iran and Russia) |
| | Electricity transmission or distribution system | | Bangladesh |
| | Major sea lanes (container shipping, MSR) | | United Kingdom: in process of exiting the EU (following referendum in June 2016 and notification in March 2017) |
| | Northeast Passage and other sea lanes to be developed | | |

Source: Authors' compilation, technical cartographic expertise of Florian Partl.

Many thanks