



Trade in Medieval Europe

UNIT 2: THE MIDDLE AGES

International Trade in Europe

- ▶ Trade was common, but international trade less so.
- ▶ The Romans popularized international trade across their empire with their roads making travel much easier.





Merchants

- ▶ Merchants were more influential than peasants but less than nobles.
- ▶ Not tied to the land or feudal system.
- ▶ Viewed suspiciously by clergy and nobility because of their profit-seeking activities.
- ▶ Level of wealth elevated a merchant's social status.



Markets

- ▶ Organized to bring together many merchants.
- ▶ Paid a small fee to use a stall at a market.
- ▶ Merchants sold exotic goods that were more expensive and hard to find.
 - ▶ Spices, silk, wine, furs, glass, jewelry, etc.
- ▶ Local traders (often women) sold eggs, dairy, meats, handmade goods, etc.

Expanding Markets

- ▶ The Crusades opened new trade routes in the south.
- ▶ Spices, textiles, and precious metals were much more common.
- ▶ Enhanced the wealth and social status of merchants.
- ▶ Italy (especially Venice and Genoa) became prominent trade hubs due to their location.



Merchant Guilds

- ▶ Merchant Guilds emerged in the 11th and 12th centuries.
- ▶ Provided protection against theft, arbitrary taxes, and market instability.
 - ▶ Could refuse to trade if they were being mistreated.
- ▶ Made banking and standardized prices more common.
 - ▶ Bank cheques made travel with money much safer.
- ▶ Towns grew substantially if they had a merchant guild.

The Silk Road

- ▶ Existed as far back as 206 BCE to trade with Europe by the Han Dynasty of China.
- ▶ Eventually connected the European, Asian, and Islamic worlds.
- ▶ Spread trade goods (such as silk), trade secrets (such as glassblowing), and technology (such as gunpowder) between the 3 worlds.
- ▶ China invented gunpowder in the 600s, but Europe wouldn't adopt it until the 1300s.

Marco Polo

- ▶ Marco Polo was a Venetian (from Venice, Italy) explorer who travelled the silk road.
- ▶ He lived in China for 24 years working as a tax collector.
- ▶ He returned to Europe in 1295 and published a book called "The Travels of Marco Polo."
- ▶ It gave Europeans a better understanding of Asian commerce and culture.

