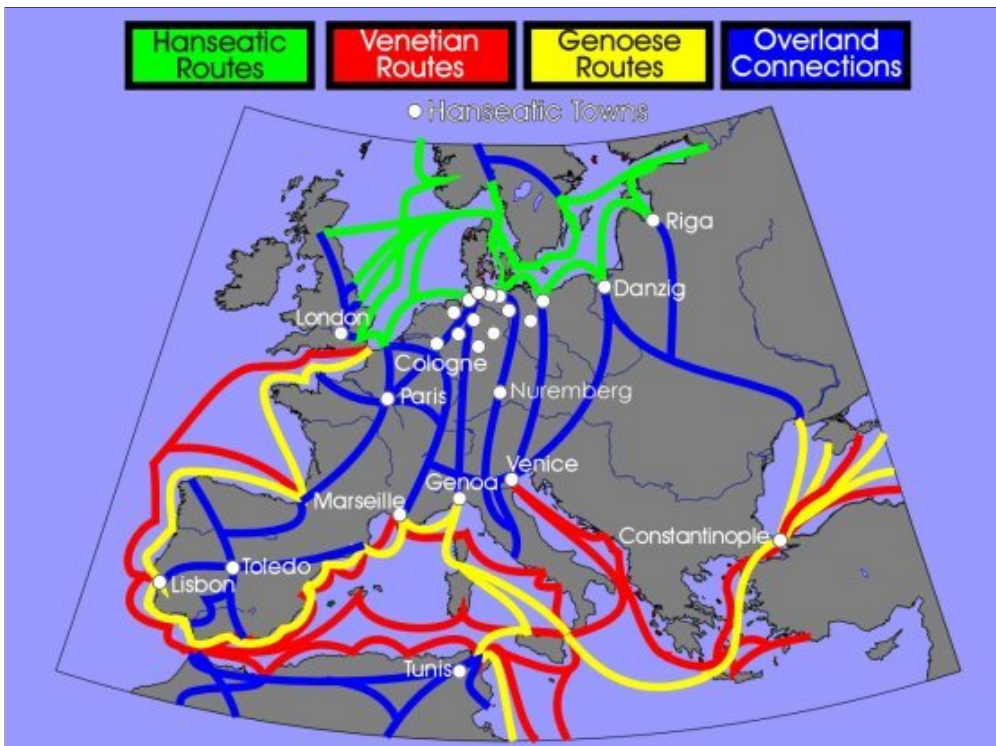


## Trade

Explain how Europe benefited from cultural diffusion during the period c. A.D. 1000 - 1500.



The Crusades stimulated trade, as the crusaders discovered many new goods that they had never seen before, including cotton, sugar, and black pepper.

**There were three reasons for the rise of the medieval Mediterranean spice trade.**

**First**, the monotony of a lifetime of consuming bread, more bread, and gruel resulted in a powerful desire to, literally, spice up the food. Even today it is people in the poorest countries of the Third World who are most likely to use spices in their food.

**Second**, there was the need for the emerging new class of bourgeoisie to culturally demonstrate its power and superiority, which it did through the purchase of luxury items like spices, used in foods, medicines, and ointments.

In the emerging bourgeois economy of the 13th and 14th centuries, the potential success of merchants grew ever greater. More and more people began to have the means to purchase more and more goods, and so the demand for such goods increased.

**Third**, there was the insatiable desire for gold and silver among the Mediterranean's trading partners in the East: the Chinese and Indians.

**Trade in turn led to the growth of towns and greater urbanization among the people of Europe.**

- Town merchants benefited from increased trade and loaned money.
- Towns grew as serfs gained their freedom.
- Serfs gained their freedom. Attracted to new opportunities in towns.
- Towns were granted charters in the king's absence.
- Towns could govern themselves independently of feudal system.

Trade made an excellent facilitator of cultural diffusion. Not only were new items being introduced into Europe, but so was the technology and information on how to use and adapt these items.

The word traffic had its origin from this time, coming from the Italian verb *traffico* (c. 1323) “to carry on trade”.



**Venice, a trading city whose networks and influence extended to the Black Sea.**

### **The Example of Venice**

The main players in the trade game were the Italian Maritime Republics, especially Venice & Genoa. In an ongoing battle to control trade routes, the competition between these two cities was fierce, at times escalating into violent confrontations. Trade increased dramatically as ports controlled by these rivals were opened in the Middle East (Outremer).

In the Outremer ports, Italians, Catalans, and Provençals possessed their own dockyards, storage facilities, tables of exchange, and residential quarters administered under their own laws. Any citizen from a maritime republic, such as Venice, was assured credit and sureties for the conduct of business in the Outremer ports. Trade proceeded predictably under a rule of law and accepted exchange rates. The extent and range of goods, including relics, silk, and spices, passing through Outremer ports increased dramatically.

Venice came to monopolize the spice trade in Europe between 1200 and 1500, through its dominance over Mediterranean seaways to ports such as Alexandria, after traditional land connections were disrupted by Mongols and Turks. The financial incentive to discover an alternative to Venice's monopoly control of this lucrative business was perhaps the single most important factor precipitating Europe's Age of Exploration. Christopher Columbus, a Genoese who sailed for Spain in 1492, and Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese who sailed in 1497, were both trying to find an alternative trade route to India.

The old route between the Baltic to the Black Seas across Russia that had linked Constantinople to Europe diminished in importance as the axis shifted to the Mediterranean, to the Italian cities, and to Western Europe. The trading network in the Mediterranean led to expansion of river transportation across France and the Rhineland inasmuch as eastern goods were exported to northern Europe.

### **The Example of Nürnberg**

From 1050 to 1571, the city of Nürnberg in Southern Germany expanded and rose dramatically in

importance due to its location on key trade routes. It is often referred to as having been the “unofficial capital” of the Holy Roman Emperor, particularly because Reichstage (Imperial Diets) and courts met at Nürnberg Castle. The Diets of Nürnberg were an important part of the administrative structure of the empire.

In 1219 Nürnberg became an Imperial Free City under Emperor Frederick II. Nürnberg soon became, with Augsburg, one of the two great trade centers on the route from Italy to Northern Europe. The cultural flowering of Nürnberg, in the 15th and 16th centuries, made it the center of the German Renaissance.



**Panoramic view of Nürnberg from the city castle.**