**Chapter Eleven:**   
The Rise of Commerce in Afro-Eurasia 900 – 1300 C.E.

**Chapter Eleven Focus Questions:**

1. Which groups took the most active role in adopting new agricultural technologies in the different regions of Eurasia during the centuries from 900 to 1300?
2. How did the composition and organization of the industrial workforce change in different parts of Eurasia during this period?
3. How did the commercial revival of 900 to 1300 reorient international trade routes across Afro-Eurasia?
4. How did the sources of wealth and power in the Hawaiian Islands differ from those of market economies elsewhere in the world?

**Chapter Eleven Summary:**

After the collapse of the Han Empire in China and the Roman Empire in the west, agricultural technologies and innovations slowed, but in the seventh century the reestablishment of control and empire created stable political and social foundations for economic recovery. In most places, although different in time and pace, agricultural innovation and diffusion allowed for the rise of commerce. While the dynamics of the change varied in China, the Islamic World, Southeast Asia, and Europe, the underlying trends were remarkably consistent. Agriculture stimulated trade, which created a need for money and credit. In additions, new routes and networks were formed to further advance trade. Commerce advanced to the point where organizations and associations were used to better facilitate trade, and often to allow merchants and organizations to gain wealth and status. However, in some places, such as the Hawaiian Islands, highlighted in the Counterpoint of this chapter, rulers forged powerful states based on their monopoly of not only resources but also the exchange of goods, and wealth remained yoked to political power. In most other places, agricultural growth and commercial integration generated a sustained economic expansion that nourished population growth in cities and the countryside alike.

**Chapter Eleven Annotated Outline:**

1. Backstory
   * 1. Latin Christendom remained divided into many kingdoms and city-states, and the reinvigoration of trade and industry came later.
     2. The expanding Islamic world began to reach across the seas and deserts.
     3. Although the pace and dynamics of economic change varied from region to region, the underlying trends were remarkably consistent.
2. Agricultural Innovation and Diffusion
   * 1. Commercial growth was rooted in an increasingly productive agrarian base, and new techniques raised yields and encouraged investment in agriculture.
3. Retrenchment and Renewal in Europe and Byzantium
4. The collapse of Rome disrupted economic life in the cities, but had little direct impact on work and livelihoods in the countryside.
5. Great landowners were the main agents of development and innovation in Europe, and they reduced the rural population to the conditions of serfs. As lordship came to be defined in terms of control over territories and populations, the nobility took greater interest in increasing their revenue.
6. As Byzantium recovered its political fortunes, economic growth was renewed. Cultivation expanded throughout the Mediterranean, but in Anatolia the scarcity of labor prompted a replacement of agriculture with stock-raising.
7. Agricultural Transformation in the Islamic World
8. The Arab conquerors of Syria, Iraq, and Iran had little impact on established agricultural systems, but undeveloped areas were another matter.
9. As new rulers awarded wilderness lands to governors, they started to lose their grip on the provinces, and the governors turned to slave armies to maintain control.
10. They allocated *iqta* to military commanders for the upkeep of these slave forces, and under the Seljuk Turks, most of the land was held as iqta estates to support slave armies.
11. Islamic agriculture was transformed by new crops and new practices from the Indian Ocean region, but Europeans only adopted a few of the new crops spreading through the Islamic world, due to climate, but more so due to prevailing habits and preferences.
12. The Seljuk conquests disrupted the agrarian basis of the Islamic world’s economic prosperity, due to their nature as nomadic warriors, they were ill suited to maintain the fragile ecology of intensive irrigated farming.
13. Rice Economies in Monsoon Asia
14. Between 700 – 1200 an agricultural revolution also transformed economic life and livelihoods throughout monsoon Asia, shifting from dry land crops of wheat and millet to irrigated rice.
15. This was greatest in China, as the An Lushan rebellion had devastated the north China plain, and refugees resettled in the south, especially in the well-watered plains of the Yangzi River Valley.
16. Man-made irrigation channels and canals led to extensive wet rice cultivation, but also encouraged mobility and trade.
17. The imperial state under the Song dynasty limited the social and legal powers of the elite, and as a result, small property owners drove agricultural expansion and economic growth in China.
18. The development of irrigated rice agriculture laid the economic foundation for the rise of powerful monarchies in Southeast Asia.
19. Most notable was the Khmer kings of Angkor in Cambodia, who never created a centralized bureaucratic state, but extended their control by recruiting local landowning elites as allies. Similar situations developed in Java and Burma.
20. The power and wealth of Angkor reached its peak in the twelfth century, when Angkor Wat was built, which was the world’s largest religious monument, and served both as a shrine and a royal mausoleum.
21. In Japan land reclamation efforts organized by aristocratic and religious estates fostered the spread of rice cultivation as well.
22. After 900, warmer temperatures set it, lengthening growing seasons and boosting yields, which led to the growth of populations and cities across Eurasia.
23. Industrial Growth and the Money Economy
    * 1. Although no “industrial revolution” occurred, important strides in technological progress stimulated expansion of manufacturing and transport.
      2. As the volume of transactions increased, so did the demand for money and credit, and money became the lifeblood of urban society, and an important measure of social status.
24. Technological Change and Industrial Enterprise
    * 1. Human and animal power continued to be the main sources of energy, however water and windmills proliferated rapidly from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries.
      2. The production of iron expanded as well, but no significant technological breakthrough occurred until sometime after 1300.
      3. The farthest-reaching technological advances came in shipbuilding and navigation, starting with lateen sails and stern-post rudders in Arabian and Chinese ships.
      4. The magnetic compass had been known in China since ancient times, but the earliest mention of its use as a navigational aid at sea comes from the Arab and Persian vessels in the eleventh century.
      5. In Europe innovations came somewhat later, with the Venetians developing capacious galleys for cargo in the late thirteenth century, and the “cog” from northern Europe in the fourteenth century.
      6. The nautical compass came into use in the Mediterranean around 1270, around the same time that European navigators began to compile “portolan” charts.
      7. Innovations in textile manufacture also developed, including knowledge of silk manufacture, spinning wheels, treadle-operated looms, and water mills, which all sharply increased productivity.
      8. Both woolen manufacture in Europe and silk production in china steadily ceased to be a cottage industry and moved into urban industrial workshops, and as the role of the market grew, men began to monopolize the more skilled and better-paid occupations.
      9. The majority of women who earned wages were domestic servants, and married women typically works at family businesses serving as helpers to their husbands. Cultural preconceptions about the physical, emotional, and moral weaknesses of women aroused anxieties about their vulnerability in the public realm.
25. Expanding Circulation of Money
    * 1. Before 1000, most parts of Eurasia suffered from shortages of money. Gold was scarce, so Frankish kings minted silver coins, and other kings and princes frequently granted coinage privileges to various nobles, which led to a great profusion of currencies.
      2. The usage of minted coins was largely restricted to the nobility and merchants, the majority of European peasants paid their lords in goods and services.
      3. While Europeans used silver coins for local issues, they conducted international trade using the gold *nomisma*, issued by the Byzantine emperors, which became the monetary standard in the Mediterranean.
      4. Currency reforms in the 690s under the Umayyad dynasty established the silver *dirham* as the monetary standard for the Islamic world.
      5. The revival of gold coinage in Italy confirms Italian merchants’ growing supremacy over Mediterranean trade, and the Venetian gold ducat, introduced in 1284, soon became the new standard of Mediterranean commerce.
      6. The Chinese Empire developed an entire different monetary system based on bronze coins rather than precious metals. However, even using bronze the Chinese had shortages, and when in the 1020s the Song dynasty’s ambition plan of expansion still failed to satisfy the need, the Song government introduced paper money.
26. Credit and the Invention of Paper Money
    * 1. Shortages of gold and silver, coupled with the risk and inconvenience of shipping coin over long distances led to the development of credit, and the use of substitutes for metallic currency.
      2. In Muslim and Christian societies, however, merchants had to overcome strong religious objections against usury.
      3. The global connections created by trade led to every major trading city having money-changers to handle the diverse assortment of coins.
      4. Long distance merchants also benefited from new forms of credit, such as the bill of exchange, which was a written promise to pay or repay a specified sum at a future time.
      5. The flood of African gold into Egypt made the Fatimid capital of Cairo the first great international financial center.
      6. In China, letters of credit were also used, and in 1024 the Song government replaced private bills with official ones, creating the world’s first paper money.
27. Merchants and Trade Networks in Afro-Eurasia
    * 1. During the period 900 to 1300 major trading centers across Eurasia and Africa come to be linked in a series of regional and international networks of exchange.
28. Merchant Partnerships and Long-Distance Trade
    1. The expansion of trade required new forms of association and partnership, which were made during the “commercial revolution” of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but not all promoted open access to trade.
    2. The guild system that developed in European towns reflected the corporate character of urban government and merchant society, as guilds were granted extensive authority to regulate crafts and commerce, restrict trade, and dictate regulations.
    3. While guilds in Europe were aimed at guaranteeing a just price and uniform quality, in China and the Islamic world guilds were formed chiefly to supply goods and services to the government, and they had no authority to regulate and control trade.
    4. Merchants in international trade usually operated as individuals, but as the volume of trade grew, more sophisticated forms of organization emerged.
    5. Partnerships where one partner provided most of the capital, the other traveled and conducted the business, and they shared profits equally began in numerous places, and were the forerunners of permanent joint stock companies.
    6. In the late twelfth century, merchants based in Egypt created an association known as the *karimi* to organize convoys for trading expeditions. These karimi merchants became a powerful cartel that squeezed small entrepreneurs out of the lucrative spice trade.
29. Merchants and Rulers
    1. The wealth and rising social stature of merchant groups altered relationships between government and commerce, as rulers who formerly depended on revenue from the land increasingly sought to capture the profits of the money economy.
    2. The Italians took the lead in putting private capital to work in service to the state, as merchant communities became closely allied with political leaders.
    3. In places (specifically Venice), the government took charge of overseas trade, including dictating who could participate, building the vessels, and regulating the prices of exports and imports.
    4. Along the Baltic seacoast, merchant communities formed an alliance known as the Hanseatic League, which acted as a cartel to preserve its members’ monopoly on exports to western Europe.
    5. In most of the Islamic world, merchants enjoyed high status and close ties to the political authorities. Private trade and banking were largely free of government interference during the Fatimid dynasty, but state intervention intensified under the Mamluk sultans who came to power in 1250.
    6. In China, the imperial state penetrated deeply into the commercial world. The state generated a majority of its revenue by imposing monopolies on the production of rice wine and key mineral resources, but the most dynamic commercial sectors (iron, silk, tea, porcelain, paper, and sugar) private enterprise was the rule.
    7. The Song effectively stifled the formation of strong merchant organizations, but actively promoted official trade with foreign governments and private overseas trading.
    8. However, merchants in China did not enjoy the social prestige accorded to others, as Confucianism viewed the pursuit of profit with contempt and relegated merchants to the margins of respectable society.
30. Maritime Traders in the Indian Ocean
    1. After the An Lushan rebellion in 755, China’s principal trade routes had shifted away from Central Asia to the maritime world.
    2. Muslim merchants, both Arab and Persian, dominated Indian Ocean trade in the ninth century thanks to their shipbuilding and organizational skills, and Srivijaya merchant princes of Sumatra grew wealthy from their share of profits in trade between India and China.
    3. In the eleventh century new maritime powers arose to contest their dominance, with the most assertive being the Chola kingdom at the southeastern tip of India.
    4. While cordial at first, starting in 1025 Chola repeatedly attacked Sumatran ports and fatally weakened the Srivijaya princes.
    5. During the twelfth century, Chinese merchants began to mount their own overseas expeditions, and their commercial interests increasingly turned toward the Indonesian archipelago.
    6. The introduction of Muslim traders in the Indian Ocean also stimulated commerce along the east coast of Africa. Swahili merchants (descended from Bantu settlers in the region) transformed island towns into major trading ports that functioned as regional crossroads.
    7. The mid-thirteenth century brought the rise of Great Zimbabwe, which would exert direct control over the main goldfields and copper mines in the interior of Africa, and became a central trading location.
    8. Great Zimbabwe’s dominance over trade could not be sustained indefinitely, however, and in the fourteenth century the copper and ivory trade routes shifted north to the Zambezi River Valley, and Great Zimbabwe disintegrated and was abandoned by the 1450s.
31. Trans-Saharan Traders
    1. The conversion of the Berbers to Islam and their incorporation into the Muslim trading world provided the catalyst for the rapid escalation of trans-Saharan trade.
    2. The earliest Muslim accounts of West Africa, from around 800, report that the great king monopolized the gold trade.
    3. At first the impact of Islam on the indigenous peoples was muted, yet local rulers found the lucrative profits of trade in gold and slaves irresistible, and the wealth and literacy of Muslim merchants made them valuable allies and advisers.
    4. The kings of Ghana and other trading cities converted to Islam by the early twelfth century, and to varying degrees required their subjects to embrace the new religion as well.
    5. As Ghana’s monopoly on the gold trade eroded, in the thirteenth century a chieftain named Sunjata forged alliances to create a new empire known as Mali, which enforced its dominion with a strong military and secured direct control over the gold mines.
    6. The Mali monarch Mansa Musa caused a great sensation when he visited Cairo on his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1325, giving out gold to nearly everyone and providing evidence of both the power and wealth of Mali.
32. Mediterranean and European Traders
    1. The contraction of commerce persisted longer in Europe than in Asia and the Islamic world, but ty the twelfth century rising productivity and population growth in Europe had widened the horizons for trade.
    2. Lords encouraged the founding of towns by granting the free citizens of towns (burghers) certain liberties and economic privileges, such as trading rights.
    3. In northern Europe commercial expansion altered the political landscape, as seen in England and Flanders, where merchant guilds grew so powerful that they chose their own city councils and exercised considerable political autonomy.
    4. Economic revival in northern and western Europe breathed new life into the defunct Roman commercial network.
    5. In the twelfth century the counts of Champagne offered their protection and relief from tolls to the growing numbers of merchants who traveled between the textile areas of Flanders and Italy’s commercial centers.
    6. They established a cycle of six two-month fairs, and Champagne’s location between Flanders and Italy enhanced its stature as the major crossroads of international commerce and finance in western Europe.
33. Counterpoint: Production, Tribute, and Trade in the Hawaiian Islands Conclusion
    * 1. The expansion of the market economy provided access to a wider range of goods and allowed entrepreneurs to acquire independent wealth.
      2. However, in societies that lacked market exchange, like the Hawaiian Islands, rulers maintained firmer control over wealth and social order.
      3. The construction of irrigations systems strengthened the chiefs’ authority, and after 1400 complex systems of tribute payment facilitated the formation of powerful states.
34. Settlement and Agriculture
35. Humans first arrived in the Hawaiian Islands during the great wave of Polynesian voyaging of the first millennium C.E., and with the cessation of voyaging around 1300, the Hawaiian archipelago remained a world unto itself until 1788.
36. Original settlers introduced a wide range of new plants and animals, but the human impact on the ecology was modest until after 1100.
37. From 1100 to 1650 the human population grew rapidly and agricultural exploitation radically transformed the natural environment.
38. Population growth and irrigation systems reached their peak with the *ahupua’a* system of land management, which consisted of tracts of land running down from the central mountains to the sea, thus each ahupua’a cut across different ecological zones and had a wide range of resources.
39. The land belong to the powerful kings, and they distributed the ahupua’a in return for tribute and fealty, especially in times of war.
40. Exchange and Social Hierarchy
41. Strict rules of descent and inheritance determined social rank in Hawaiian society, and an elaborate system of taboos reinforced social stratification.
42. In genealogical lore, the older royal lineages were on Kauai and Oahu, where leaders drew power and wealth from irrigated agriculture, whereas kings on Hawaii and Maui derived their power from military might.
43. By 1650 single, island-wide kingdoms would be established through conquest on both Maui and Hawaii.
44. Long before contact with Europeans, Hawaiian rulers forged powerful states based on highly stratified systems of social ranking, and private property did not exist.
45. Through their monopoly of not only resources but also the exchange and use of goods, Hawaiian rulers gained full command over the wealth of their realm and the labor of their subjects.
46. Conclusion
    * 1. Beginning in the tenth century, agricultural growth and commercial integration generated a sustained economic expansion across much of Eurasia and Africa.
      2. The farthest-reaching transformations in economic life and livelihood were the expansion of trade networks and the growing sophistication of commercial practices.
      3. In most places, the dynamic market economy threatened to subvert the existing social order.
47. Chapter Eleven Special Features
    1. Seeing the Past: Imitation and Innovation in Islamic Coinage
       1. Islamic coinage and its progression from retained use of Byzantine images to its use of Qur’anic quotations.
    2. Reading the Past: A Chinese Official’s Reflections on Managing Family Property
       1. Chinese official Yuan Cai, living in a time of rapid economic change, concentrated on the practical problems of acquiring wealth and transmitting it to future generations.
    3. Lives and Livelihoods: The Mande Blacksmiths
       1. In West Africa ironworking was a useful technology, but also a fearsome instrument of symbolic power.

**Chapter Eleven Overview (Discussion) Questions:**

**Major Global Development:** The sustained economic expansion that spread across Eurasia and Africa between the tenth and fourteenth centuries.

1. How did agricultural changes contribute to commercial and industrial growth?
2. What technological breakthroughs increased productivity most significantly?
3. What social institutions and economic innovations did merchants devise to overcome the risks and dangers of long-distance trade?
4. In what ways did the profits of commerce translate into social and economic power?
5. Above all, who benefited most from these economic changes?

**Chapter Eleven Making Connections Questions:**

1. In what ways did the spread of new crops and farming technologies during this period have a different impact in the Islamic world and in Asia?
2. How had the principal east-west trade routes between Asia and the Mediterranean world changed since the time of the Han and Roman empires (see Chapters 5 and 6)?
3. To what extent did the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim merchant communities of the Mediterranean adopt similar forms of commercial organization and business practices during the “commercial revolution” of 900 to 1300? How can we explain the differences and similarities among these groups?

**Counterpoint: Production, Tribute, and Trade in the Hawaiian Islands**   
 **Counterpoint Focus Question:** How did the sources of wealth and power in the Hawaiian Islands differ from those of market economies elsewhere in the world?

**Chapter Eleven Special Features:**

**Seeing the Past: Imitation and Innovation in Islamic Coinage**

1. Why did Muslim rulers at first retain the images of Byzantine and Sasanid rulers on their own coins?
2. How did Muslim and Christian rulers differ in expressing their religious commitments and values through the images on their coins?

**Reading the Past: A Chinese Official’s Reflections on Managing Family Property**

1. What did Yuan identify as the greatest threats to the preservation of the family’s wealth and property?
2. What values did Yuan regard as crucial for gaining and maintaining wealth?

**Lives and Livelihoods: The Mande Blacksmiths**

1. Why did Mande society regard blacksmiths as exceptional?
2. In what ways was the caste system of West African peoples such as the Mande different from the caste system in India discussed in Chapter 5?
3. Why did the rulers of Mali perceive the Mande blacksmiths as a threat?

**Key Terms**

bill of exchange

burgher

cartel

guild

iqta

joint stock company

karim

serfs

taboo

tribute

usury