# Medieval Jobs: Merchant

Merchants traveled to other regions or faraway lands and returned with goods to sell in local markets. Both craftsmen and merchants discovered that by banding together with others who did similar work in organizations called guilds, they could grow and protect their business interests and increase their own profits.

As craftsmen and merchants grew their businesses, they also brought some changes to society. Small marketplaces along trade routes and coastal ports eventually turned into towns and cities. People moved from rural villages to these cities in search of jobs or other opportunities, so urban populations boomed. Although most Europeans still remained tied to the land and their place in society, a slow and eventual shift was underway.

Merchants moved coal, wool, and tin between England and Scandinavia. They transported citrus fruits, leather, and barrels of honey from the Iberian Peninsula to Stockholm, Leipzig (Germany), and Moscow. The northern woods of Russia provided fish, furs, timber, and grain for the merchants of the Mediterranean trading region.

Wives of merchants were often well educated with more opportunities than textile workers. Most women of the merchant class had attended private schools where they learned to read, write, and compute. Women used these skills to help run their family businesses. Wives of merchants also worked as teachers, music instructors, and lace makers. Some engaged in trades commonly associated with men, such as carpentry, barbering, and saddle making.

Merchant wives oversaw household cleaners and cooks and controlled the family finances. They paid bills and taxes, donated to churches, and hired laborers. Some wealthy women organized charities and oversaw construction of orphanages, schools, and hospitals.

Adapted from:

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