

## **Travelers, plague, Renaissance**

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- Now we jump over a lot of complicated Medieval history
  - both in Europe and in Asia
- A few key background events
  - The Abbasid dynasty, ruling the *dar al-Islam*, was taken over first by Persians in 945
  - then by Seljuk (or Saljuk) Turks in 1050
    - these were nomads of Central Asia who came into contact with the Abbasid caliphate, and mostly converted to Islam
    - they left the Abbasid Caliphs nominally in place
    - but ruled secular affairs through their own sultans
  - while other groups of Turks took Anatolia from the Byzantine empire
    - turning Anatolia Muslim
  - still others began plundering in northern India, eventually staying to establish the Sultanate of Delhi
    - there, too, trying to suppress Hinduism and Buddhism, while forcibly converting people to Islam
  - Meanwhile, other groups of nomads from further east in north-central Asia were united for the first time
    - by Temujin, later called Chinggis (Ghengis) Khan (“universal ruler”)
    - extremely effective, ruthless horse warriors
    - very destructive in order to leave potential future opponents weakened
    - military conquests, but not long-term administration
    - ruled and led conquests 1206-1227
  - Like Alexander’s empire, Chinggis Khan’s empire was almost immediately divided up after his death
    - China consolidated by Khubilai Khan, 1260-1294
    - with capital at Khanbaliq, near Beijing
  - the Seljuk Turkish Abbasid empire was finally taken over by Mongols in 1258
    - mostly as the Ilkhanate of Persia
      - mainly leaving Persian administration in place, just collecting taxes
      - although Egypt kept them from advancing further to the Mediterranean
  - In Medieval Europe (1000-1300 CE), a patchwork of varied regional states, rather than any one empire
    - vigorous trade, urbanism, architecture, etc.
    - has an undeserved reputation for being conservative and backwards
      - partly due to historians’ habits of thinking about the Renaissance (below)
  - Mongol conquest of Mesopotamia destroyed irrigation systems, pushed the region from economic power
- Travel and trade in the *dar al-Islam* and Mongol world
  - control of central Asia pacified the overland silk routes, renewing travel and trade

- Marco Polo, a trader from Venice
  - father and uncle visited Mongol Khanate of China 1260-1269
  - supposedly got to China, the great Khanate of Khubilai Khan
  - Marco Polo went with them for a second trip, 1271-1295
  - served in many capacities
  - but many historians doubt whether he really got past Persia!
    - many of his stories are obviously fanciful
    - and many things that he should have noticed if he were there, he did not
  - we only know his stories because after his return, he was captured by Genoa in a battle between Genoa and Venice
    - in jail he told his stories to a cellmate, who was a writer
    - the cellmate published them and sold the book widely
  - note that there were other long-distance travelers around, even Europeans, some mentioned in Polo's stories
  - purpose: trade, personal enrichment
- Ibn Battuta, travels in *dar al-Islam*, 1325-1354
  - purpose: *hajj*, then serve as Muslim scholar and *qadi* (judge)
- spread of religions by traveling missionaries
  - Sufi Muslims in India, SE Asia, sub-Saharan Africa
  - Roman Catholics
    - successful in the N Europe, S central Europe, less to east
    - John of Montecorvino, Roman Catholic bishop to expatriate Roman Catholics in China! 1291-1328
      - but made few converts
- interactions
  - Muslim traders introduce cotton to West Africa, luxury good by 1100, main textile there by 1500
  - Muslim traders spread sugar cane and refined sugar
    - Italian investors set up plantations on Mediterranean islands after 1100
      - often with slave labor
  - gunpowder weapons originated in China
    - adopted by Mongols in early 1200s
    - Muslims adopt from Mongol attackers in later 1200s
  - this is the speeding-up of innovation through diffusion that Diamond was talking about
- Little Ice Age
  - 1300-1800s
  - reduced agricultural production
- Bubonic plague
  - starts around 1331 in SW China
    - up to 90% mortality
  - by 1350s in China, 66% mortality in many places
  - spread along Silk routes

- by 1348, plague reached Europe
  - killed in a few days
  - 60-70% mortality
  - but little in Scandinavia or India
  - kept breaking out into late 1600s
- China:
  - plague in 1330s
  - rebellion against Mongol rule
  - 1368, Hongwu drives out Mongols, they return to Central Asia
  - establishing the Ming dynasty, 1368-1644
  - centralization: Mandarins and Eunuchs
  - lasted to 1644
  - Zheng He's 7 massive naval expeditions, 1405-1433
- Europe
  - Renaissance; 1300s-1500s
  - Portuguese explorations around Africa towards India
  - Fernando of Aragon and Isabel of Castile marry, drive Muslims out of Grenada 1490s
    - the “Catholic kings”
    - reasons for supporting Columbus's voyages
    - religion vs. commerce