

ASTR 308 "Into the Final Frontier"

The Discovers: BOOK V

1. In "Pilgrims and Crusaders"

(a) Who was Pope Urban II and what movement did he start in 1095?

Pope Urban II became Pope in 1088. The Roman Catholic Church was in a bad way with corruption. Urban II became a reformer of the Church. He mandated pilgrimages to reconquer Jerusalem from the Muslims. This began the Crusades.

(b) Compare and contrast Christian pilgrimages and Islamic pilgrimages? What is the historical significance of the differences?

Christian pilgrimages became loosely organized movements of people and were a call to take back Jerusalem from the "heathens", i.e., the Islamic occupants of the Christian God's city. The people who went on the Crusades were not necessarily devout Christians. The pilgrimage of the Muslim was the "devout" duty of every Muslim to the city Mecca. The Crusades resulted in a great migration of western Europeans into the Middle East and influenced the building and toppling of empires (and trade routes) over the next several hundred years. The pilgrimage to Mecca is pretty much unaltered throughout history and did not result in any historical significance outside the religion of Islam.

(c) Who is the Muslim "Marco Polo"? Why were his travels not as history changing as Marco's travels?

Ibn Battuta (1304-1374). Battuta covered roughly 75,000 miles, which surpassed any known traveler up to his time. But all his travels were within the realm of Islam and so he did not cross over to foreign cultures or ways, and so upon his return did not provide insight of "new worlds" to the Muslims.

(d) Compare and contrast Christian and Islamic "institutions" of spreading their religion. What were the long-term implications of these two approaches?

The Christian "institute" was the Missionary. Missionaries comprised a few intrepid individuals who went out to spread the Word in the small local areas where they settled. If locals refused to be converted, they were rarely persecuted, and never executed. The Islamic "institute" is known as Jihad, which is the religious duty to spread Islam "by the sword", and by waging war against non-believers (that refuse to be converted). Christianity spread far and wide throughout the known world, but in small pockets. Islam was successful only if a war was won. This resulted in a much wider spreading of Christianity over the millennia.

2. In "How the Mongols Opened the Way"

- (a) Before the Mongols conquered Eastern Europe (Byzantine), what was the Silk Road and why did it exist in the way that it did?

The Silk Road was actually two "roads" - a north road and a south "road". The north road was a land route that started in eastern China, stretched through central Asia, and ended in the eastern Mediterranean. The south "road" was a sea route that started in the China Sea, went through the Indian Ocean to the Arabian Sea, and terminated in Suez (Egypt). For trade goods to get to Europe through the north road, they would have to be traded through the Arabic nations of Persia and Syria. Goods to Europe through the southern route had to be traded through Arabic nation of Egypt. These routes were required because no European was ever allowed to trade in the Arabic nations and were rarely if ever allowed to travel through the Arabic nations.

- (b) About when did the Mongolians crush the Turks and move into Eastern Europe? How did the Mongolian Empire change the history between East and West? What was the long-term significance of this change?

The Mongols moved into Eastern Europe around 1250 AD. The Mongols allowed open travel of all peoples through their empire, and this provided direct contact between Europeans and peoples of the East. The Silk Road was temporarily open to all travelers to cross its *full* extent. This opening provided a direct experience between East and West, which was mostly exploited by the West. Information as well as trade goods flowed; but it was the information about the riches to be had in the East that provided the motivation and impetus to the West to begin expanding outward into the world over the next centuries. Also see answer to 4(d).

- (c) What grand opportunity did the Christian leaders of Europe pass by after the Mongols crushed the Turks? Why was this an historical opportunity lost?

The Christian leaders would not ally themselves with the Mongols (Khans) until after the Khans were converted to Christianity (Catholicism). Since the Mongol empire lasted only an additional 100 years from the time Europe was opened, the window of opportunity was short. Conversion never came within that time period. Had the Pope and the Christians allied with the Khans prior to their conversion, the Christians may have sped up the conversion process (maybe). But the real lost opportunity was that a Christian-Mongol alliance would have been able to overpower the Christian enemy, the Muslims. Had the alliance occurred, the history of the world today might have been very different, with a much-diminished Islamic world and possibly greater Christian influence in the east.

3. In "The Discovery of Asia"

- (a) Briefly describe the travels of the Polos during the time of the Great Kublai Kahn. What years did these travels take place?

The European "discovery of Asia" was almost exclusively due to the recorded travels of Marco Polo. He traveled with his father and uncle for three years by foot across the northern Silk Road. They set out in 1271 and returned in the winter of 1295.

- (b) How and why did Marco become so entrusted by the Great Kahn?

The Khan was interested in the ways of foreign peoples and he took note that Marco excelled at conveying details of the cultures and behaviors of the peoples where Marco had visited. Marco was an excellent diplomat and the Khan, recognizing this, utilized his talents and sent him on many journeys throughout Asia and China.

- (c) What event befell Marco upon his return to Venice? How is it we came to have Marco Polo's travels so well recorded for posterity?

After Marco's return to Venice, and following a sea battle between Genoa and Venice, Marco, being a Venetian, was imprisoned by the Genoans. Marco shared his cell with a writer named Rustichello, who took the full account of Marco's travels (he had plenty of time to listen and to write!). Without this chance circumstance, it is very possible we may have never heard of Marco Polo or his travels. Marco Polo's travels influenced Europeans for centuries.

4. In "The Land Curtain comes Down"

- (a) What natural events led to the fall of the Mongolian Empire? In the mid-1300s, was the leadership of the Empire in the hands of a strong leader or a hedonist?

In China, there was famine and drought in the first half of the 1300s. The leader of the Mongolian Empire at that time, Toghon Temur Khan, was a hedonist, sporting orgies and the like (Boorstin compares him to Caligula). The Mongols were harshly suppressing the Chinese and they were searching for a means to revolt.

- (b) Who was Hung Wu? How did he bring down the eastern part of the Empire and how did he do it? What year was this?

Hung Wu was a peasant from China who organized the Chinese revolt against the Mongols. He passed messages in moon cookies throughout the Mongol capital inside China that contained the message to revolt on the night of the full moon in August 1368. The message was to "revolt and massacre" the Mongols.

(c) For about how many years were the land paths to the east open under the Mongols?

The land paths were open for a little more than 100 years, roughly from 1250 to 1370, though the Silk Road was not laid waste until about 1400.

(d) What happened after the fall of the Mongols? What were the implications for Europe? In what political/economic direction did China head?

As alluded to in part (c), the land paths between East and West were shut down. No longer could Europeans cross from West to East and back because the Muslims took back their lands in the Middle East. Trade goods went sky high in price. Because Europeans became used to having these commodities in abundance (and at low prices), and because they now knew of the riches to be gained from the East, they spent the next centuries finding pathways to the East while flanking the Arabs. Thus began the great age of sea exploration. At this time, China resumed their ancient ways of isolationism; they were uninterested in Western communion and were in fact wary of foreign influence.