

Chapter Two: Crisis and Recovery in Eurasia

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I. Introduction

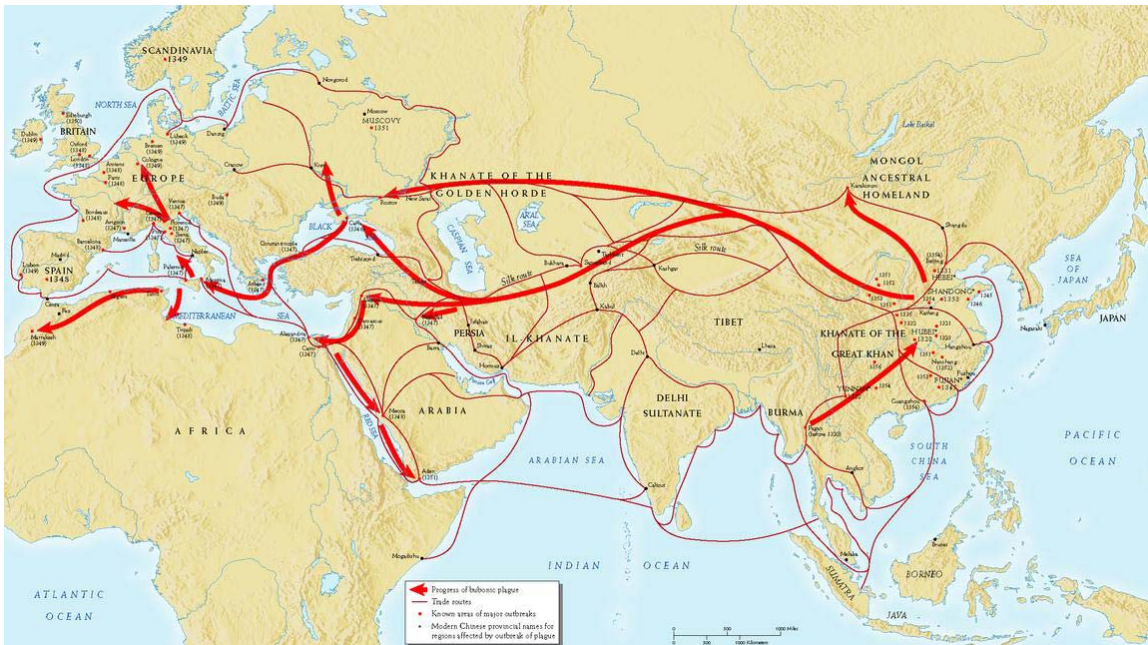
Mongol invasions brought devastation beyond that of their armies. They also introduced the bubonic plague. Following Mongol armies and trade routes, the disease spread throughout Eurasia, resulting in tremendous destruction. Trading hubs, now filled with the dead and dying, suffered as interaction and population declined. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Eurasians rebounded with new polities and dynasties to replace those destroyed by the Mongols and the Black Death.

II. Collapse and Integration

Many people assumed the Black Death to be God's punishment. Falling populations greatly weakened political structures that then had to be rebuilt.

A. The Black Death

The disease involved a number of strains that commonly killed 25 to 50 percent of local populations. While climate changes may have contributed to the disease's spread, it was the Mongol invasions that dispersed it to various points around Eurasia before it began



following trade routes to Italy. Reaching European soil, the disease infected rats before killing people. In China an estimated 40 million people perished. Food supplies dropped since the dead and sick could not farm. Cities, with dense populations, lost as much as two-thirds of their population.

B. Rebuilding States

In the late fourteenth century, Eurasians began to rebuild devastated polities and disrupted trade networks. Most of these new polities were based on hereditary ruling families that claimed divine support, established clear rules of succession, built armies, and formed alliances with other states through marriage. Building powerful states, based on taxes, armies, laws, and so forth, became the focus of these elites. Many states, successful in their state-building efforts, enjoyed considerable longevity and impact on the people they ruled.

III. Islamic Dynasties

The Mongol invasions and the Black Death left the Islamic world in tatters. Great centers of Islamic learning and civilization were destroyed. The Mongols, however, failed to establish a long-lasting regime in their place. Unwilling to share power with local, conquered peoples, the Persian Il-khans had no base on which to build a more permanent system of government. Instead, they relied on brute force and intimidation to maintain their positions of power. When factionalism broke out among the Mongol overlords, their power fell apart. Within the power vacuum of southwestern Asia, new contenders began to rise. Beginning small, the Ottomans and Safavids gradually attracted followers and built power.

As these post-Mongol states expanded, the borders of Islam began to extend outward. What had existed primarily as an Arabic-speaking culture with some Turks and Persians, soon spread to new vistas in which Turkish and Persian speakers rose as the majority. With the sixteenth century, three emerging Islamic empires began to dominate the Islamic world: the Ottomans in Anatolia (and around the Mediterranean), the Safavids in Persia, and the Mughals in India.

A. The Rise of the Ottoman Empire

The Turkish Ottomans rose to power under the leadership of Osman. Beginning as Islamic warrior bands, they defeated rival bands and conducted a holy war against Christian Byzantines. Based in Bursa, the Ottomans avoided the primary failure of the Mongols by establishing a system of rule that attracted and included educated urbanites. At the top of the system sat a sultan who oversaw both military and civilian bureaucracies. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Ottomans had expanded into the Balkans as the most powerful force in the Middle East.



The Tools of Empire Building:

Promises to new subjects fueled military expansion, which provided spoils for more expansion and rewards for followers. By sharing wealth and power, the Ottomans turned conquered peoples into loyal subjects. In 1453, only half a century after roaming as a nomadic tribe, the Ottomans conquered Constantinople and renamed it Istanbul. Suleiman the Magnificent continued the conquests. More than just a military man, he supported the arts and headed a government known for just and efficient rule. Istanbul had become the primary link between Europe and the Islamic world and the Ottomans reaped rewards in trade and status. Ottoman power also employed religion. Sultans combined features of the warrior with those of Islamic believers.

Istanbul and the Topkapi Palace:

Defending and promoting Islam, the Ottomans built mosques and schools, kept the peace, and protected Muslims from Christians and other rivals. Istanbul reflected Islam's greatness. Rebuilding after the conquest, the Ottomans constructed palaces, mosques, walls, public buildings, bazaars, baths, and inns. Muslims and non-Muslims alike were invited to Istanbul, which eventually grew to a population of 400,000—the largest city outside China. From Topkapi Palace, the sultan governed via a large bureaucracy headed by the grand vizier. Young men selected to be trained for government service went to the

palace to learn Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and martial skills. These became elites that fought and ruled for the sultan. Topkapi also housed the sultan's harem of 12,000 or so women, ranging from slave girls to favorite consorts.

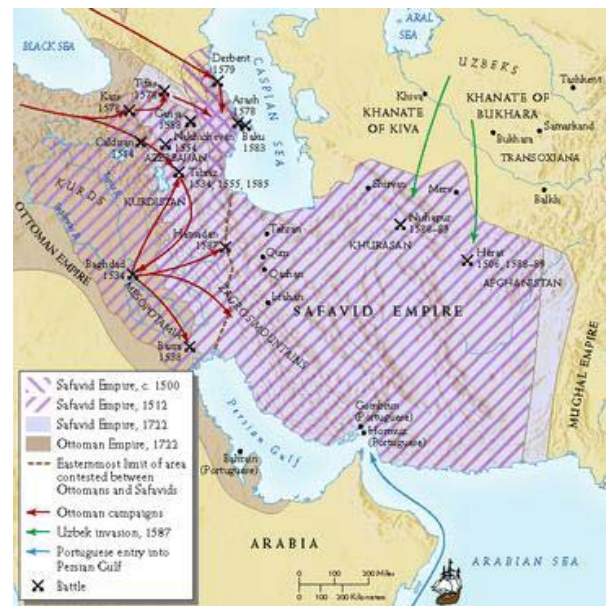
Diversity in the Ottoman Empire:

Reaching into Europe and North Africa, Ottoman streets hosted numerous languages, although Ottoman Turkish was the official language of governing. Regions were allowed significant autonomy. As long as they paid taxes and provided soldiers, local authorities governed themselves. This decentralized approach threatened Ottoman control, however, particularly as local leaders short-changed Istanbul. Thus, center-appointed administrators and janissaries, soldiers loyal to the sultan, were placed throughout the empire. Conscripted from Christian villages and trained as Islamic warriors, the janissaries became an elite corps of military and administrative leaders, loyal to the sultan only. Balancing local rule with central control, the Ottomans proved very successful at holding the crossroads between Europe and Asia.

B. The Emergence of the Safavid Empire in Iran

In Persia (modern Iran) the Safavid empire rose from the smoldering ruins of Mongol conquests. Here, Mongol rule had been particularly destructive and had offended local Muslims by using Jews and Christians as the area's new elite administrators. When Mongol rule crumbled, the area broke into chaos, with warrior chieftains fighting for influence and religious movements seeking followers. Safi al-Din, head of a religious brotherhood, managed to gain warrior and religious support.

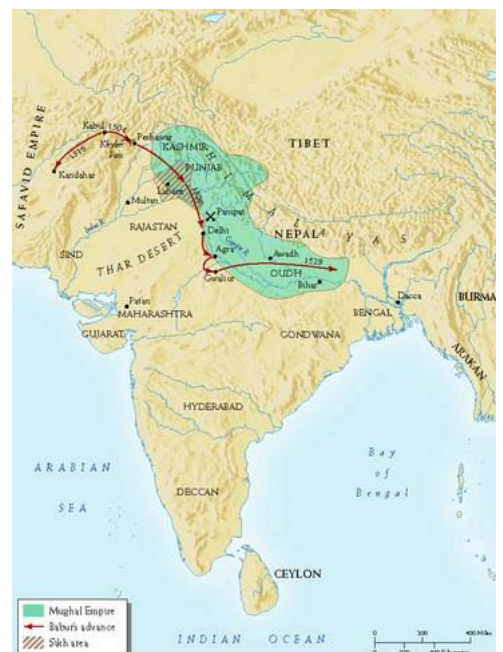
As the Persian state rose, his successors, such as Shah Ismail, began to champion Shiism, killing those opposed to it and making it the state religion. The Safavids also claimed that God had given them divine right to rule. Ismail pronounced himself the first shah of the Safavid Empire. The Safavids did not tolerate diversity, insisting that all conform to the standards of the theocratic regime. As a result, they were never as successful in expanding as the Ottomans.



C. The Delhi Sultanate and Early Mughal Empire

In 1206, the Delhi Sultanate rose in India. By the time the Mongols reached India in 1303, the Delhi Sultanate was strong enough to meet the Mongols with a powerful military force that drove them back (one of the few examples of Mongol failure). The sultanate embarked on campaigns of conquest for glory and resources, both to help support the large military and to aid further expansion of the empire.

Near the end of the fourteenth century, however, declining revenues and rising expenditures cut into the military budget. This, plus feuds within the military, ensured that the next great wave of invaders could not be turned back. Sweeping down from Central Asia, Timur wreaked havoc on Delhi itself before leaving with artisans and plunder. Religious movements then challenged the weakened Delhi authority, causing large regions like Bengal to break away. Other regional movements defied Delhi authority, and northern



India broke into a variety of polities all competing for power. To gain advantage, the governor of Punjab asked Central Asian Turks from Afghanistan to help him against his rivals. Babur (the "Tiger") accepted the invitation, but then destroyed the Delhi Sultanate before proclaiming himself emperor of a new dynasty: the Mughal Dynasty. The three Islamic dynasties all based their power on strong militaries, religious backing, and extensive bureaucracies. Since all three were expansive, they competed with each other. Nevertheless, Islam also gave them common ground, as did the exchange of goods and ideas.

IV. Ming China

The Mongols also devastated China. Ironically, the Black Death brought by the Mongols contributed to their demise as rulers of China. Despite tremendous development, productivity could not keep up with population growth. Already weakened by food shortages, Chinese fell to the Black Death in horrifying numbers. In Hebei province as much as 90 percent of the population succumbed. The Mongol leaders of China's Yuan dynasty could not cope. Religious movements, sounding the end of the world, sprang up to challenge the government. Zhu Yuanzhang, a peasant of very humble origin, rose to take charge of the Red Turbans before moving to challenge Mongol rule in China.



A. Centralization under the Ming

Zhu took the southern city of Nanjing as his new capital, founded the Ming ("brilliant") Dynasty, declared himself its first emperor (the Hongwu emperor), and moved to drive the Mongols from northern China. After defeating rival rebel leaders, Zhu moved to reconstruct the remnants of China's shattered society. He began by rebuilding Nanjing and fortifying its massive walls. (The third emperor, Yongle, moved the capital to Beijing and built the enormous Forbidden City as a majestic symbol of the emperor's power.) The Hongwu emperor initially sent his sons to defend the northern border against renewed Mongol attacks. When they failed to heed his commands, he reduced their power and built a huge bureaucracy selected from exam-degree holders. He eliminated the position of prime minister, chief post in the bureaucracy, so he could govern it himself. He took prime interest in direct administration, determining salaries, appointing officials, forming the examination system—all to augment his own power. Thus, the Ming established the world's most rational but also most centralized system: one that sought the classification of people into hierarchies even down to the village level.

B. Religion under the Ming

The Hongwu Emperor also took control of Chinese religion as a means of legitimizing his rule. Cults and ritual were classified and made to revolve around the emperor's central role as the performer of sacrifices and mediator between the human realm and supernatural realm. In spite of the powerful role of government in religious life, local Buddhist and Daoist cults maintained remarkable independence and refused to be subordinated to the state hierarchy. Many local administrators dared not interfere with local religious organizations lest local ire be provoked.

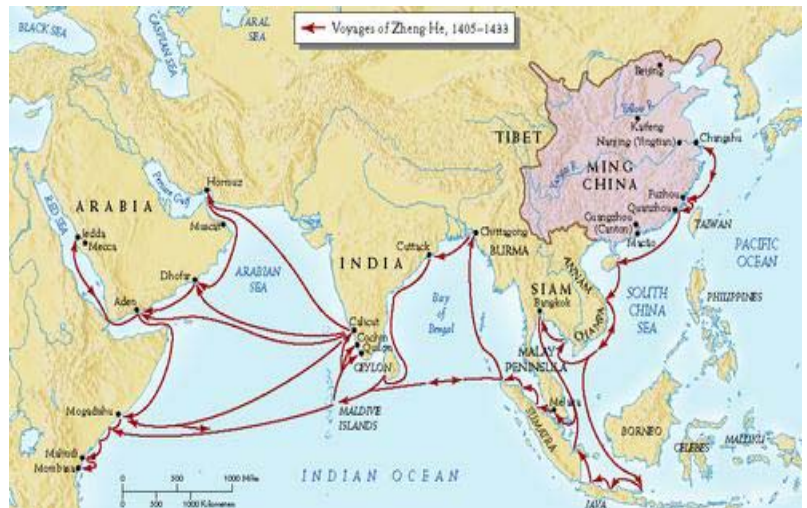
C. Ming Rulership

The Ming's extensive bureaucracy allowed the dynasty to establish a stable society, remarkable for its sheer size. To gain allegiance and taxes from small communities far from the emperor's throne, the emperor employed a system of local leaders, selected from among the local residents. These local leaders often had blood ties to the various families in their small communities and provided local peoples some autonomy from government officials like the magistrate. Nevertheless, sometimes autonomy went too far. When he felt his authority was threatened, the Hongwu Emperor killed some 100,000 people, including military men, scholars, and even members of his own bureaucracy. With so much power in the hands of the emperor, Ming China suffered from insufficient government. Given China's immense population, one man could not do it all. The system did, however, allow the Ming to remain powerful for a very long time.

D. Trade under the Ming

As the Ming stabilized conditions in China, trade began to rebound, including long-distance trade. Chinese goods such as silks and porcelains were sought the world over, prompting merchants to converge on Chinese ports. As trade in Southeast Asia expanded and accelerated Indian Ocean trade, China's southern ports became major trading hubs. Fearful that expanding trade would empower a rising merchant class and bring foreign contact that might undermine his rule, the Hongwu Emperor banned private trade. After his death, however, trade exploded as merchants and officials alike defied the ban to engage in the lucrative practice.

The Ming court itself engaged in official maritime ventures. To head these enormous missions to the seas, the Yongle Emperor sent a trusted eunuch named Zheng He. The voyages did not seek conquest or economic gain, but aimed to signal China's greatness to the known world and establish tributary relations with "lesser peoples" to the south. Communities willing to accept Chinese dominance were given permission to trade with China. Those that did not face attack from Chinese armies. Rulers establishing tributary ties were expected to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor, but generally received gifts worth much more than their own tribute in return.



In 1433, the voyages suddenly ceased. Reviving Mongol threats led to official criticism for the expensive voyages to the southern seas. Thus official journeys ended, leaving the seas to intrepid private Chinese traders willing to defy the imperial ban. Stimulated by trade, maritime networks expanded. Southeast Asian ships grew to enormous size, as much as 1,000 tons. Muslims extended their reach while Japanese pirates began plundering the sea lanes. Europeans even began to arrive, but in small ships and small numbers relative to the vast numbers of ships and tons of goods being moved by Asian traders.

V. Western Christendom

Unlike the Ming or Islamic cultures, Europe struggled to regain stability after the devastation of the Black Death. Rulers tried to rebuild their states, but they failed to fully consolidate power, leaving chaos and disruption.

A. Crises and Reactions During the Fourteenth Century

In 1300, most of Europe's population of some 80 million still lived in small communities in the countryside. Urbanization, however, was increasing. Universities helped to spread knowledge, and inventions, such as the clock, began to appear. With the fourteenth century, however, these positive developments gave way to disaster. Cooling temperatures, exhausted soils, and heavy taxation crushed the peasantry, leading to failed harvests and famine that killed millions. Weakened by hunger, Europe's population was then set upon by the Black Death. People avoided each other. Crowded cities were decimated. Between 25 and 50 percent of Europe's total population died within five years. Outbreaks continued to the end of the century. Three centuries passed before the population recovered to pre-plague numbers.



The disease greatly impacted all aspects of European life. The church, in particular, struggled. Many people turned to pleasure-seeking before they died. Others turned to extreme spirituality. For many, rational Christianity could not account for the losses to the plague. Others struggled with the loss of clerics, the representatives of church authority, many of whom died or simply fled. As religious leaders moved to reestablish their authority, some challenged the church, prompting church-led inquisitions that persecuted heretics, Jews, witches, and others. Raising money for its campaigns and other ventures, church leaders turned to selling indulgences, a practice that prompted the Protestant Reformation.

Popular dissatisfaction also grew with the feudal system. Peasant rebellions broke out, protesting both the failure of lords to defend them from marauders and the imposition of feudal restrictions. French peasants rose up and killed lords and high clergy. In England, rioting peasants were ruthlessly crushed.

B. State-Building in Europe

Leaders tried to reconstruct a stable society but never achieved the successes of Asia. No common language unified the political realms of Europe. In France, several different languages thrived. Similarly, few models of centralized government inspired emulation. Rulers of local regions thus began to rise. Like dynasts elsewhere, they claimed divine

legitimacy by performing sacred rituals and demanding that priests teach obedience to the king. They used marital alliances with other kings to gain support. Kings sponsored an official language for their state that all administrators were required to know. Military force was also employed as nobles and peasants alike resisted the court's efforts to tax or control them. Kings also instituted strict social hierarchies that extended from themselves, at the top, down through the nobles and clergy, learned lawyers, great merchants, artisans, and peasants, at the bottom. Family life reflected these hierarchies, with fathers governing mothers and children.

These efforts gave some control to the king, but people continued to rebel and organize themselves in defiance of the king's laws. Despite their efforts, European kings failed to approach anywhere near the success of the Asian rulers. Europe's communities were still very small and fragmented.

Portugal:

Under the House of Aviz, the Portuguese began to consolidate power. Promoting trade and religious tradition, the crown built unity and pitched the country into a search for a direct sea route to Asia, especially after the primary land route—which led through Constantinople—fell to Ottoman control. Pressing into the Atlantic and down the coast of Africa, and attacking Muslim strongholds that threatened the way, Portuguese seamen gradually worked south. The crown won support of the nobles by granting them Atlantic islands like the Canaries on which sugar could be grown for profit. Threatened by outside rivals, the people of Portugal pulled together and eventually succeeded in sending a ship (under Bartholomeu Diaz) around the tip of Africa. This and other successes helped Portugal to remain united in the chaotic period after the Black Death.

Spain, France, and England:

Spain, France, and England followed suit, but struggled with fragmentation even more than Portugal. In Spain, noble houses quarreled incessantly until marital alliances began to unite various regions in Spain. Unity was achieved by the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon in 1469. This union brought Spain's wealthiest province together with that hosting the country's most ambitious traders. The crown then began to unite other regional lords, attack heretics, and reclaim lost lands from Muslims, culminating in the conquest of Granada in 1492. Isabella and Ferdinand also married their children into other reigning families, strengthening Spanish power.

France and England spent most of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries at war with each other. After finally ousting the English from the continent, France sought to rebuild power. Marriage alliances helped, although the French nobles in the various regions remained quite powerful for the next two centuries. After warring with France, civil war divided England before the Tudors took control. Even as kings rose to take power, they first emerged as merely the greatest of the nobles and could be challenged by members of the noble class. Nobles advised the king, governed their territories with autonomy, and pursued their own interests. Centralization, in short, still had a long way to go.

C. Trade in Europe

During the Black Death, people did not trust merchants or gather in large groups, lest they catch the plague. Trade, therefore, suffered. With time, it began to recover. In Italy, trading centers like Genoa and Venice suffered huge losses but then rebounded quickly to broker the flow of goods between Europe and the Islamic world. To trade, however, Europeans needed precious metals since so few European goods were sought by trading partners outside Europe. In search of silver and gold, Europeans conquered new lands or imported them from Africa. Like their kingly lords, merchants intermarried to strengthen their connections and avoid competition, thus centralizing economic control.

D. European Identity and the Renaissance

Rising stability also contributed to a cultural flowering in Europe. The Renaissance represents the expansion of knowledge and a renewed interest in the ancient culture of the Greeks and Romans, which had been largely ignored as "pagan" before the Renaissance. Scholars showed new interest in ancient societies for insights into geography, arts, philosophy, medicine, and natural history. Moving beyond sacred, church-dominated theology, Renaissance thinkers began studying the secular humanities and using their discoveries to judge Europe's current conditions.

Printing spread ideals of wealth, knowledge, and cultivation. Kings began to follow these ideals by purchasing paintings and sculpture, patronizing artists, and supporting scholars. Merchants followed suit, and even the church began to support the new movement in limited ways. Renaissance scholars and artists used their new influence to advocate political changes modeled on political structures of the ancient Greeks. Other thinkers defended the church and the secular authorities. In Florence, a political movement featuring commercial interests and Renaissance values, like patriotism, liberty, and civic virtue, emerged as a new model for government. Machiavelli challenged these ideas, claiming that virtue meant nothing without raw power to back it up.

Rivalries between Renaissance thinkers, commercial interests, and political authorities ensured that no consensus or unifying rule could emerge. Nevertheless, the ideals of good government, freedom of thought, civilization, and stability that eventually came to characterize parts of the world had been born.