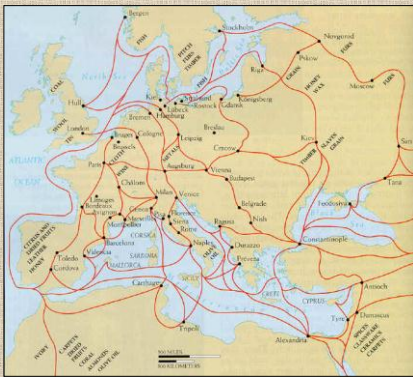


4. The "Dark" Sixth Century



HIST 302

Spring 2012



Plague Strikes the Empire

542 first evidence of plague

- pandemic commonly accepted as bubonic plague
- originated in Ethiopia then Egypt

• At peak

- the plague was killing 10,000 people in Constantinople every day (Procopius)

• disease spread to port cities around the Mediterranean

Bubonic Plague (*Yersinia pestis*)



The Symptoms:



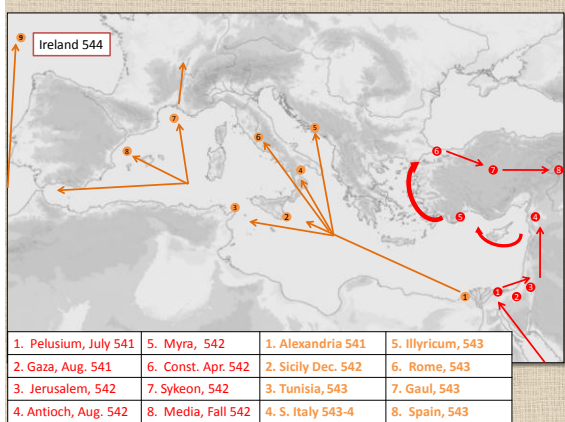
Bubonic (carried by rodents and fleas)

- most commonly seen form during the Great Plague
- it killed slowly after a period of about 4 or 5 days
- only fatal in about 60% of cases
 - fever, headaches, painful aching joints, nausea, vomiting, and swollen lymphatic glands called *buboes*

Pneumonic (spread by human to human contact)

- second most commonly seen form during the Black Death
- invariably fatal and it killed more quickly
- Most victims died within hours/days
 - fever, coughing, and blood-tinged sputum.
 - As the disease progressed, sputum became free flowing and bright red







What is your favorite epidemiological disaster show ?

John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*

“When this plague was passing from one land to another, many people saw shapes of bronze boats and figures sitting in them resembling people with their heads cut off. Holding staves, also of bronze, they moved along on the sea and could be seen going whithersoever they headed. These figures were seen everywhere in a frightening fashion, especially at night.”

Plague thought over

March 543 Justinian declares God’s “education” over

- wages are to return to pre-plague levels

Why would wages be an issue?

Other Bad News

- 28 June, 548 Theodora dies
- 558 Earthquake causes Dome of H. Sophia to collapse
- 559 Kutriger Huns crossed the Danube into Greece

Belisarius called out of retirement—yet again—to fight them

- victorious



Illustration of Huns from a book by Georges Rochegrosse

Waves of Plagues (EMP)

February-July 558	Cilicia, Syria
560-1	Mesopotamia
571	Gaul
573-4	Constantinople
590-1	Constantinople, Rome and Antioch
597	Thessaloniki
598	Avar territory
599	Constantinople, Asia Minor, Syria
599-600	N. Africa
600-1	Ravenna and Verona
747	Constantinople, and Naples

- Emperor Constantine V had to re-people the Capital with settlers from Greece

From P. Horden, "Mediterranean Plague in the Age of Justinian", *Age of Justinian*, (2005) Cambridge

Social Effects of the Plague

- Demographic Collapse
 - taxes fell
 - trade contracted
 - cities declined
- Ruination of professional field army
 - more barbarians recruited
 - Lombards, Avars and Slavs moved in
- Increased political power to the Papacy

Collapse of Urban Life

- Plague
- Invasions
- Largely archaeological
 - In 750s Thessalonica holds out
 - Sirmium never recovered
 - Small town of Bargala in Macedonia relocated to more defensible location
 - Then abandoned

End of Justinian's "Golden Age"

Justinian dies in 565

- Justin II (565-78)
 - nephew
- Severe Military problems
 - 550s Avar/Slavic Incursions in Balkans
 - 568 Lombards invade Italy
 - 572 refuses to pay Persians
 - war breaks out (Lazican War)
 - Start of constant warfare for 50 years





Consular diptych (540) of Justin, son of Germanus, cousin of Justinian.

Byzantines lose the European West

- Within three years of Justinian's death, Lombards quickly conquer Italy
 - hardest blow
 - most resources
- hold onto "Exarchate of Ravenna" (till 751)
- Reliance on Ecclesiastical civic structure helped Papacy emerge as only effective power



Caucas or Lazican War of 572-91



- 573 Fall of Dara
- Justin orders assassination of Ghassanid king al-Mundhir II
 - fails
 - no longer ally

Hunting scene depicting King Khuro I. 7th century Sassanid art. Cabinet des Medailles, Paris.



Armenia, 591-654 A.D.

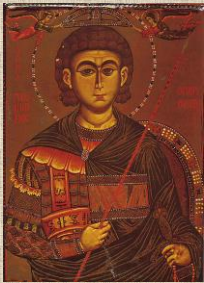


Justinian Dynasty briefly stabilizes

Maurice Tiberius (582-602)

- ablest of Justinian's successors
 - concluded an alliance with Khosroes II
- Italy remained fragmented
 - Byz. controlled S. Italy
- restored frontiers in the Balkans

Procopius (c. 500-565)



- from Caesarea
- possibly knew Aramaic
- witnessed Nika Revolt and plague
- 527 appointed *consularius*
- Legal secretary to young Belisarius
- 533 w/ Belisarius to Vandal N. Africa
 - 540 Italy
 - 542 witnesses Great Plague
- eventually obtained the title *illustris*

Early Works:

- *History in Eight Books (Wars)* (527-33)
 - style modeled on Thucydides
 - great attention to accuracy and objectivity
 - deals with Persian, Vandal and Gothic wars
 - first seven books focused on Belisarius
 - general account of Justinian's reign
 - slight criticism

Early Literary Portraits of Theodora

- Procopius depicts her as a strong woman
 - Founded many monasteries
 - Protection of Monophysite luminaries within the walls of the palace
 - seems to invert the traditional patriarchal paradigm



Two faces of Theodora



Procopius on Nika Revolt (532)

- Empress Theodora on the Nike Revolts:

"If, now, it is your wish to save yourself, O Emperor, there is no difficulty. For we have much money, and there is the sea, here the boats. However consider whether it will not come about after you have been saved that you would gladly exchange that safety for death. For as for myself, I approve a certain ancient saying that royalty is a good burial-shroud."

Later Works

An unbalanced portrayal of Justinian

- *On the Buildings* (553-5)
 - panegyric for some imperial favor (?)
 - praises Justinian’s construction of churches, fortifications and other public works
 - best literary source for Byzantine architecture
- Planned to write a work on Justinian’s religious policy
 - never undertaken

Historia Arcana = Secret History

- unpublished but entitled *Anekdotai*
 - secret and posthumously published work to smear political enemies
 - written 550s
- supplement and corrective text for his *Wars*
 - claims the “inside story” of imperial politics and court intrigue
 - Scathing, malicious, vituperative attacks on Emperor, Empress and their friends
 - HOW and WHY? (Discussion Topic)
