

ISTITUTO DI STUDI SULL'ASIA - UNIVERSITÀ DI TORINO

# A PAN-EURASIAN PLAGUE? NEW NARRATIVES OF THE BLACK DEATH AND A PATH FORWARD IN ASIAN EPIDEMIOLOGICAL HISTORY

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**1 June 2022**  
**17:00 - 18:30**

Online:  
<https://unito.webex.com/meet/isa>

This lecture will present the current state of research on the Second Plague Pandemic. Genetics has allowed us to reconstruct the evolutionary history of *Yersinia pestis*, the pathogen that causes plague, since its emergence as a new disease about 7000 years ago. That allows us to look at the travels of the microorganism separately from human reports of epidemic outbreaks. This has been crucial for plague, which is a disease of rodents and fleas, animals that are normally out of sight—and even more so, out of mind—to historical human observers. Most importantly, data from genetics suggests that our chronologies for the Black Death, the most lethal pandemic in human history, have been off: because we weren't looking at the correct events (disturbances of the disease in its rodent hosts, rather than major human outbreaks), we've missed a full century of the pandemic's early history. And in broadening the chronology, the geography is broadened, too.

The present lecture will focus on how the recovery of a hitherto invisible history of plague allows reconsideration of the involvement of Asia in the pandemic. Western observers in the 14th century regularly observed that the calamity "came from the East." But what did they mean by that? How much did they really know about the epidemiological conditions of Central and East Asia?

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