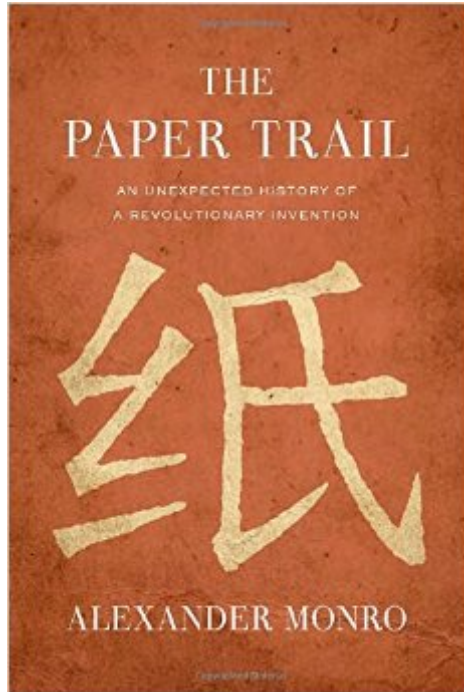


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The Paper Trail: An Unexpected History Of A Revolutionary Invention



Synopsis

A sweeping, richly detailed history that tells the fascinating story of how paper—the simple Chinese invention of two thousand years ago—wrapped itself around our world, humankind’s most momentous ideas imprinted on its surface. The emergence of paper in the imperial court of Han China brought about a revolution in the transmission of knowledge and ideas, allowing religions, philosophies and propaganda to spread with ever greater ease. The first writing surface sufficiently cheap, portable and printable for books, pamphlets and journals to be mass-produced and distributed widely, paper opened the way for an unprecedented, ongoing dialogue between individuals and between communities across continents, oceans and time. The Paper Trail explores how the new substance was used to solidify social and political systems that influenced China even into our own time. We see how paper made possible the spread of the then new religions of Buddhism and Manichaeism into Japan, Korea and Vietnam . . . how it enabled theologians, scientists and artists to build the vast and signally intellectual empire of the Abbasid Caliphate and embed the Koran in popular culture . . . how paper was carried along the Silk Road by merchants and missionaries, finally reaching Europe in the late thirteenth century . . . and how, once established in Europe, along with the printing press, paper played an essential role in the three great foundations of Western modernity: the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. Here is a dramatic, comprehensively researched, vividly written story populated by holy men and scholars, warriors and poets, rulers and ordinary men and women—an essential story brilliantly told in this luminous work of history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is highly unlikely that you are reading this review on a piece of paper held in your hand. And yet, it was the invention of paper that enabled mass communication and exchange of information quickly and effectively. Now we have the internet rapidly replacing the likes of the daily newspaper, but we must cast a thought back to where it all began. First produced over 2000 years ago in China, paper very quickly replaced bamboo as a writing surface and from then on was unstoppable in its spread. Although, it was not till over 1000 years later that paper made its way in a westerly direction to what is now Iran, Iraq, then Turkey to Europe. The movement and development of paper has been integral to the history of these regions over the last 2000 years. As a form of storing religious texts, whether they be Buddhist as in the early centuries of paper use in China, the Koran or the Bible; as a means of distributing religious messages amongst the populace as seen in the work of Martin Luther in the 1500s looking for an alternative to the Catholic church, or as fuel to the French Revolution in the late 18th century, paper has been at the centre of it all. Even New Zealand's very own Treaty of Waitangi has two pages in this book devoted to it. Apparently the Treaty was a very rare type of document in British imperial history, in that it was a bilingual document - Maori and English - drawn up for both sides to sign. Which is what happened. Although as we now know, the two versions actually had two different meanings. However it is considered remarkable for its time, as it attempted to come to a political settlement without going to war.

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