

The Black Death of Europe

By Evan Lee

Word count 1800

The Black Death was the single most pivotal point in European history, for the conflict with the bacteria raged tearing down entire towns and cities, even reforming the very concept of government and religion. For the people who lived at that time the onslaught seemed to have no compromise.

Introduction

What come to mind when I say death? Tragedy, sadness or are you like most people of the 20th century and you think of how insanely overpriced funerals are? Well because in 1347 Europe, coffins were a fraction of the cost that they are now and were thrown out for a more effective method (I'll touch up on that in a bit.). It's likely if you were to have used the word death, a common citizen would think of a multitude of things, but the general consensus would be the mountain of bodies piling on the streets and directly after they described their depiction of death they would soon join the many people who have already caught the "Black death"

¹ Although the disease itself was still existent before the 13th hundreds and small outbreaks would pop up along with the death count, but until around 1320 AD the population lived in small rural areas without large amounts of people bunched up, but as the population grew and overpopulation in the towns reached a boiling point, the once relatively minor treat of the "Black Death" started to form it's snowball, that snowball had perfect conditions, a large amount of snow (Overpopulation) the snow being sticky (poor hygiene) and the fact that there were no obstacles (limited medical knowledge). With all these factors weighing in on snowballs side, by the time it reached the at the bottom of the hill (all of Europe) it was nothing short of an avalanche.

How And Why The Plague Spread

²Log In." Edited by Henry Morley, *Britannica School*, school.eb.com/levels/high/additionalcontent/primarysources?id=102590&path=%2Fprimary_source%2Fgutenberg%2FPGC_C_classics_02%2F1739.htm.

¹¹"Log In." *Britannica School*, school.eb.com/levels/high/article/Black-Death/15473.

⁵History.com Staff. "Black Death." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2010, www.history.com/topics/black-death.

⁴ *The Black Death, 1348*, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/plague.htm.

¹¹"*The Black Death: The Greatest Catastrophe Ever*." *The Black Death: The Greatest Catastrophe Ever | History Today*, www.historytoday.com/ole-j-benedictow/black-death-greatest-catastrophe-ever.

³ *Decameron*

¹² *Health Ordinances of Pistoia, 1348 [Legal Document]*

In this segment I will describe to you how the three forms of the plague spread, and why they spread so swiftly. To start this segment off as I already mentioned ² many European cities and towns started to feel the weight of overpopulation some of these ailments being the low wages, poor living quarters, packed streets, and the near nonexistent sense of hygiene. All of this lead to the fact that Europe was in a prime condition for a disease to strike and the disease that chose to take that strike began its tsunami of death ⁵in the port of Sicilian, Messina on October 1347 thru the means of 12 Genoese trading ships. But as the crew made their arrival so did the plague rats.

. Now to cover as to how the three strands of plague spread, but considering that there is in fact three I will give each their own segment.

1. (4)-The Pneumonic plague was spread through the medium of the human respiratory system. By having such an effective means of transport one would wonder why it only made up for fraction of the total deaths (we have not discussed bubonic yet). This had a lethality of 90% once caught.
2. (4)-(Septicaemic Plague) Although it is if we are speaking in sense of lethality once caught this strand would by far outrank any other, this of course being because it's the plague that targets the circulatory system and can kill overnight, but since the plague has to actually enter said system first it was and is very uncommon. ¹³ Not a single person who caught this plague survived

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3. (4)- And last but certainly not least the bubonic plague which by far was the most deadly of thee. And one would ask as to why it's the most deadly compared to the Pneumatic (airborne), well let me educate you on the terrifying reality of lice. The Bubonic variant is a blood transmitted bacteria that means that it would be nearly useless if not for a medium to transport it, but unluckily for anyone in Europe the world was teeming with ways of transport, ¹ ever heard of lice? ¹³ not to mention that the death percentage exceeds ¹¹ 60% of people who caught the bubonic plague died.

As I had already proclaimed the bubonic plague was a viral disease or in other words it was spread with the medium of blood. And because of the ² poor hygiene and practically no way to rid themselves of the bugs fleas and more importantly lice spread like wildfire. So what happens when you combine a insanely lethal blood disease and a city seething with modes of transport? Well with the knowledge I have already ⁵ bestowed upon you, one should be able to guess.

Events During Said Plague

For the following set of paragraphs and concepts I shall be trying to create a picture in your mind of the streets filled with corpses, the hurried shuffling of plague doctors, and the complete and utter chaos the entire continent was in.

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The Streets

For this brief segment I will be attempting to give you the outline as to what the average citizen (Not the dead ones) was going through at this time period, so starting out to give you a summary of the body count, which was ¹50 million people or 60% of the population died in the span of a few words. As a child during the plague one would ³ either be born into royalty or would be abandoned as depicted in the Decameron children were more than a royalty at this point and time considering the fact that children have a greatly decreased immune system, small body mass, and most importantly they had no way of escape. ² To a vast majority of people the plague was a sign from god to signify some sort mistake upon the part of the common folk, this prompted a series of reactions some of these reactions being attacking ² neighboring civilians,³ running away from the area, and probably the most expected reaction from people of that era,² they blamed the Jewish population.

Plague Doctors

¹²As people from the medical field started to fall victim to the oncoming onslaught, the people's demand for doctors skyrocketed and so the role of the plague doctor. ² To give an image the plague doctor wore a heavily black coat that was coated in wax, often had a cane to examine the infected from afar, the doctors also wore a black brimmed hat (A staple for someone of the medical field at the time.), but what sat under that hat was the stinking feature,² a beak like mask filled with herbs. The contents of that mask were used

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because ⁶the doctors of that era believe in the miasma theory, a theory in which it was thought that disease was the byproduct of “bad air” and the strong smelling herbs were supposed to counter that

Despite them being considered the medical field at the time they never helped anyone, in fact they most likely contributed to the spread of the disease, this is due to two reasons, those being that the treatments that they used only worsened the patient's condition (bloodletting, mercury, burns, ect) and that the doctors traveled, that means that they brought the plague ridden fleas along with them.

The After Effects

This segment will be comprised of three sections and will be the final segment ignoring the closing statement.

Religion

Many thing were brought about because of the black death, but few manage to show the impact death has on a person as well as the massive shift in religious power as people shifted from the roman catholic church and reverting to mysticism. This shift was a massive blow to the church and it's funding dropped to a fraction of what it was, as the bacteria continued to consume the continent. This not only weakened the church at the time but also for an extensive amount of time afterwards

Trading and Supply

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As one would guess the whirlwind of death that took the lives of half the population would also terrify the people of that area and as a byproduct it would terrify everyone else, or in a simple way of putting it nobody wanted to come into contact with the diseased areas and ¹so all to near all trading had stopped. The sudden removal along with the already dire situation the Europeans were in only could shape out to one result, even worsened conditions.

Some of those working conditions included the ¹²mass starving of people and animals, the ⁵ near eradication of sheep, cows and other livestock because of the facts that the other animals could catch the disease and the farmers were also likely to have caught the plague. Repairs to houses and things of the such were nearly impossible to uphold due to the lack of means to transport messages. Corpses started to ³ pile the streets as burials started to become more troublesome and at current times they burned the dead or tossed them into a mass burial.

The Working Situation

Since the only people who survived were the nobles who had ³ holed themselves up and only a handful of what had been a lower and middle class. There were two immediate results, the one that will be remembered the most often is how because of the populations situation wages skyrocketed as people demanded a higher pay the nobles had no choice but the oblige in consideration that they had no other option, the ripples

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from the wage increase can be felt today in the form of laws that provide a standard payment and other similar requirements of law.

Conclusion

The waves of plague did reside eventually and what was left was a ruin of what Europe once was, but what did end the plague? Well that's rather simple every form of transportation was wiped out. Remember how I said the bubonic plague also affected animals and do you also remember how the plague was spread ⁵(insects). Well once there is no way of transporting the plague it eventually seeped back into the gutter from which it had been held for so long.

But as any bad sequel would say it does come back with the most recent outbreak claiming nearly 300 people in Madagascar. Besides the fact that there is no actual cure for it, its effects upon our society are much greater than a few branching outbreaks, because although this might sound strange it saved Europe, the reason I claim this, is because the problems with low wages, overpopulation, food and resource shortages were all solved and somewhat set right for any further generation that had lived upon that constitution thus the black plague was the most influential disease that had ever touched our world.

(Perhaps smallpox but let's ignore that)

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I learned that 80-90% of people who got the plague died, It has a large amount of other names, people though the disease spread about 5 ways, the clothing of doctors/Plague doctors. Increase of payment, poor living conditions $\frac{2}{3}$ people died in Europe. Medical knowledge.

Decameron- An Italian story created and told during the time of the plague.

A large amount of people fled cities, these people were called plague runners. Even more about plague doctors

Danse Macabre

Depicts death dragging away nobles who were unwilling, up to this point in time most depictions of deaths were less cruel any more of a guide to heaven. The plague even changed the depiction of death itself.

Shona Kelly Wray, University of Missouri-Kansas City. “Children and Youth in History.”*Omeka RSS*, chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/teaching-modules/167.

Antibiotics would today prevent an epidemic like the Black Death but in medieval times, the lethal disease spread quickly across Europe. Spread by rats and fleas along trade routes, it was particularly deadly in urban areas and port cities. Mortality rates ranged from a third to half of the population. Panic caused social breakdown as doctors and others refused to help. Some sick children and family members were abandoned, but other children were provided for in wills as their parents died.

Dance of death

Showed a skeleton that is supposed to be a death fleeing from the site of the black plague probably referencing the rush that “death was in”.

Health Ordinances of Pistoia, 1348 [Legal Document]

Certain areas affected by the plague, because of their limited medical knowledge they thought everything was caused by bad air, the transport of cloth and goods from

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plague infected areas were cut off. Also burials were starting to devolve into throwing bodies in quarantine. Also butchers were no longer allowed to hang up meat.

Italian accounts of the Black Death [Personal Accounts]

This source did not really provide anything new besides the mention of people's wills being lost.

SECONDARY SOURCES

History.com Staff. "Black Death." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2010, www.history.com/topics/black-death.

I used the following facts in my presentation, The black plague killed upwards of 60% of Europe's population, the bacteria not only killed humans and it nearly wiped out of the sheep population, in the height of the plague neighbors started to turn on each other blaming them for invoking god's wrath.

"Log In." *Britannica School*, school.eb.com/levels/high/article/Black-Death/15473.

Some information that I have collected is that the plague originated in China and in central Asia and was brought to Europe afterwards by trades, trade as expected when 60% of the population is dead slowed and perhaps stopped, The plague was so terrifying and unexplainable that some people switched their faith and as all were in the middle ages the Jews were blamed, The population of Europe didn't recover for nearly 300 years. 1347-1351 is when the pandemic hit the hardest.

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Medieval world Abeland - burgundy v1 / v2 etc v3...

Some of the knowledge I have acquired is that the major plague first landed in sicily in 1347, All of the major pandemic (Black Death) were located from 1350 to 1400 and small outbreaks persisted until the 18th century, so many people died that the survivors were unable to bury all the corpses, some towns had 0 survivors in extreme circumstances and many farmers died leading to starvation and thus more death, boils appeared around the body with bubonic the other form was the pneumonic which killed less people but was equally deadly. The huge drop in trade. The peasants could demand greater freedom along with wages. Huge sections of land were taken back by nature. The main reasons people though it spread was "bad air" which people burned herbs to rid themselves of the smells, another is the four humors, and one more is god. "The plague stopped immigration to the continents/areas

The Black Death, 1348, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/plague.htm.

According to the above link there were three strands of the plague the first being the bubonic which was the most common and created large black spots on the victims this strain typically killed in 3-6 days, the second being the pneumonic plague which was spread by the mere act of breathing killed in 4-6 days, and finally the septicemic plague which was by far the fastest killer because it targeted the circulatory system which killed in 12-24 hours. Also there was no cure at the time and there isn't a cure now.

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The black death 1347-1350 : the plague spreads across Europe Cath Senker.

(Series: When disaster struck)

The Plague spread across the entirety of two continents within the span of a few years, Jews were blamed for the events that were occurring this resulted in even more death.

"KS3 Bitesize History - The Black Death : Revision, Page 4." BBC, BBC,

www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/history/middle_ages/the_black_death/revision/4/.

The bubonic plague killed 60% of the people who caught it the pneumonic 90% and the septicemic 100%

"The Black Death: The Greatest Catastrophe Ever." *The Black Death: The Greatest Catastrophe Ever* | *History Today*,

www.historytoday.com/ole-j-benedictow/black-death-greatest-catastrophe-ever.

60% percent of Europe died, or 50 million people died.

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