

Research paper first draft



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Research Paper First Draft How did the Black Death impact the surviving people of Europe? Submitted by: Kimberly Bouchard LSTD 5003 Introduction to Grad Studies College of Liberal Studies The University of Oklahoma To Dr. Courtney Vaughn April 15, 2013 I certify that I have read the assigned material on academic integrity and this paper is an original paper composed by me for this course. It has not been copied or closely paraphrased from any other source and has not been submitted as a whole, or in part, for credit in any other course at OU or any other educational institution. It has not been created or submitted for any other purpose such as a job assignment at my workplace or any other agency.

Abstract We all know the Black Death was a devastating malady that struck the people of Europe during the Middle Ages and we also know the degree to which the plague wiped out at least one third of the population and the horrifying effects it had on the victims. But there are some questions that remain unanswered in most of the stories about the plague. After the smoke had cleared and the infections ceased, what was Europe like? How did a plague of that caliber impact the surviving people? This paper aims to give a voice to the Europe after the Black Death. What happened to the world of medicine when the physicians all failed to find a cure? How did the economy change in light of so many laborers lost? Why did much of the art of the late 14th and early 15th centuries convey death as a festival? These questions and others are analyzed herein.

Ring Around The Rosie It started with slight fever, some delusions or hallucinations, and then sharp pains in the chest and soon the sufferer was coughing up blood. Black, grotesque-looking spots, or rings, formed in the groin and under the arms, giving the pestilence the name the world would remember. In a failed attempt to surpass the stench, flowers

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such as posies were worn around the neck or hung above the door posts. The decayed ash from all the burned bodies flooded the streets and filled the air, until finally, after roughly 5 years of agony most of Europe's population, economy, culture and faith collapsed. The plague conquered one city after another as the shell-shocked living watched their loved ones burn with fever, vomit incessantly and produce hideous black buboes all over their bodies, mockingly called " God's Tokens". The poor were struck down first, because they could not afford to flee or hide in manors and castle walls, all the while resenting the apparent immunity enjoyed by the wealthy and their accusations of a deserved fate. But no one was immune and within days the wealthy could no longer hide behind their walls and died alongside the poor. By 1352, Europe was a very different place. As much devastation and shock occurred during the years of the plague, just as much change and adjustment had to be made during the aftermath. In the years following the Black Death, the lives of the surviving people were significantly effected in many ways, particularly in regards to the general economy and well-being of the nations, the psychological thought of those left alone to live on, and the trademarks made in the fields of medicine and education. Resident After Evil With one third of the entire population decimated by the plague, it would take almost four generations for the number of Europe's residents to recover. The plague killed indiscriminately of course, but in addition to plague, the men of the medieval world also waged wars or chose a path of God. This left a very unbalanced ratio of men to women for the purpose of reproduction. The women left surviving were not at all burdened by this, for in the years immediately after the plague, many windows of opportunities opened for them. Since workers were scarce and there were too few people

left to tend the fields, work the shops or mend the sick, job opportunities arose for women. Independence was a luxury many women began to enjoy. With their new independence, many women also chose their life partners, with families cut in half or almost completely wiped out, there was no one left to arrange marriages and the young were left to choose their own paths to a wealthy future. They often married younger and faster, in order to gain wealth and solidify their futures. This also led to an explosion of childbearing, since parental guidance was no longer a concern. While the women were enjoying the spoils of their new life after the plague, monasteries were not enjoying much at all. With a good portion of the men dead from the disease and the other portion off to wars, there was a shortage of pious men left in Europe to run the monasteries, and many of them saw decline. The only place where this does not seem to be the case was in Egypt, where despite a massive depopulation caused by the plague, there was also a great number of Ottoman Empire immigrants who flooded the cities looking for religious sanctuary. The East still had its fair share of depopulation, however, mostly in the Mamluk armies. These were men from the surrounding low lands of Egypt who were enslaved by the Sultan for the purpose of fighting in his armies. They were more susceptible to the plague because they had not experienced anything similar before in their homelands. Their residency in Egypt was short lived, and so was the Sultan's Mamluk Army. For a brief time at the end of the 14th century, due to the childbirth explosion, there was an increase in the general population of Europe, almost replacing the population lost by the plague. However, the 15th century has been labeled as the "Golden Age of Bacteria" and saw rise to many more outbreaks and diseases. Influenza and Smallpox claimed many lives directly as well as indirectly. With

the caregivers killed by the diseases, the young and the elderly were left without care, and were added to the mix of dead. The population declined yet again and life expectancy was driven to an ultimate low. The Infusion of Frugality and Fortune The economy of Europe was arguably the most drastic change after the Black Death. Initially, the survivors' way of life had changed for the good. The loss of workers meant a stable income to those still available to work and that income actually increased as the demand for laborers increased and landowners became desperate to keep their land cultivated. Stable income, however, did not make the job of cultivating the lands any easier. Things had changed in fields since the plague had abated. The outrageous number of diseased bodies buried impacted the quality of the soil, making it very difficult to find produce to grow well. The decrease in grazing animals, because they too were victims of the plague, led to abandoned arable land, which in turn led to an increase in vegetation and forest cover. Many plots of land were taken back by the wild, overgrown and neglected. Evidence shows that the least affected lands and the ones easier to cultivate were taken care of and everything else was left to nature's devices. Of course this was not the case everywhere in Europe and there were areas left unaffected in terms of agriculture after the plague. Over time, the lands left to reforestation and nature resulted in an increase of pollen, which fertilized the diseased soils and made them ready to cultivate once again. Farmers started guilds and banded together with a new found value in success through hard work. This made for successful trades and profits, thus becoming a positive effect of the Black Death. As food production increased, the prices fell dramatically. The survivors were well-fed because there were less mouths to feed. And as the farmers began to notice their importance in

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this new world they began to feel overworked. It did not take long for them to demand higher wages and shorter hours and thus began a breakdown of moral authority. Their idleness led to the government imposing a movement to try and stop it, and idleness became a crime punishable by jail time. Those who demanded higher wages were fined, and although the average wage did eventually decrease, they did not immediately go back to normal. Authority was somewhat lacking due to noble deaths during the plague. In fact, in the fifty years after the plague, the rich and the poor almost seem to switch places. Frugality seemed to infuse itself with fortune when the landowners watched their statuses diminish with low food costs and high labor costs, while the poor began to rise to the top as their labor value increased dramatically and with it, their standard of living. Serfs and peasants had the freedom to leave their fields, take up residence in the abandoned manors, or even move to other cities with the knowledge that work would find them anywhere. In the Far East, the economy suffered greatly as the plague drew to a close. The textile industry severely diminished in Alexandria and as markets closed their doors, casks of wine sold for as little as 500 Dinars, roughly seven American dollars. The fishing industry fell under as well, since there were few fisherman left and all the waters were polluted with the dead. Bodies fill the streets and were piled in front of the mosques, were wild dogs would devour them. The sultan then ordered the execution of all dogs in the cities. There was a decline in the purchase and sale of foreign merchandise as well as in the supply and demand of farming produce. There just was not enough people left to make a difference. With the agriculture in decline, many monasteries who depended on the farmlands for their survival also declined and disappeared.

The second half of the 14th century in Egypt was just trying to readjust the levels of revenue. Ranks Laid Siege When the Black Death reached France and England in 1349, the two countries had already been waged in a war for a decade; the 100 Years War. It should have been a quick victory for England, given the battles won prior to the outbreak and the sheer numbers of man power on the English side. But as plague claimed more victims, not only did the fighting come to a halt, but so did daily living. Sieges and hostilities still continued but major campaigning did not. Since the war was fought primarily on French soil, the plague would be carried back to England with the returning armies, repeatedly devastating England and reducing their troops at twice the rate of those from France. Not only did they lose their current men-at-arms, but the population decline also meant no future enlistments. In an attempt to keep the war effort going, there was an increase in taxes placed throughout England. This was thought to be a good idea because the wealth now held by the laboring classes seemed ripe for the picking and made perfect sense. But there were less tax payers now, which led to even higher tax rates, and that in turn led to a whole new kind of war. By 1381, the lay people of England were tired of watching all of their hard-earned wages sent to the war effort over in France. Since the nobility were no longer wealthy in the new after-plague economy, many of them joined the war in the hopes that their ranks still held meaning in the military world. Therefore, the protectors and the authorities were both warring in France, while the lay people started their own war with no opposition against them. Thus began the Peasant Revolt. The plague and the revolt both bought time for France to gather troops and strategy, and eventually led to their victory over England in 1453. Confusion Meets Innovation The Plague

devastated the economy and population of Europe, but that only led to a response effort by the survivors to dig themselves out of their “ deadlock”. David Herlihy sums it up nicely in his book *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*: “ A more diversified economy, a more intensive use of capital, a more powerful technology, and a higher standard of living for the people - these seem the salient characteristics of the late medieval economy, after it recovered from the plagues initial shock and learned to cope with the problems raised by diminished numbers. ” (Herlihy, pg. 51). In other words, out of the ashes of plague ridden Europe, rises a new era flooded with innovations and technologies and ideas, all centered on making the world a place worth living in again; the Era of the Renaissance. The people of the post-plague world began to change the way they thought about life and their place in it. Some took a “ why bother” approach and took to excessive gambling, gluttony, frequenting taverns and succumbing to unbridled lust. Others saw opportunity in ransacking the houses of the dead because the need for security outweighed forgotten laws. Still others found a new spirit and found positive ways to reinforce the fact that they alone had survived. The 15th century saw a rise in new religions and faiths, all of which called for group cleansing to make amends for all the death. People wanted to improve their wealth and power with new and extraordinary things. They were proud of their survival, yet confused by it, and that only made them more determined to make the most of their gift of existence. The aftermath of the plague intensified the religious consciousness of the people which resulted in new magical cults and healer saints and protectors. Also, the concept of death materialized into a festivals of the macabre as the people became obsessed with how fragile life was and how quickly it could be taken

away. Death Art and Plague Saints With the strange personifications and fixations on death came a new wave of art work depicting men struggling to survive in a hostile world as well as vast images on heavenly protection used to abate God's wrath. Art in the medieval world was taken very seriously. The people believed that if they understood the messages conveyed in the artworks, and acted out those ideas and beliefs in their everyday lives, they would be protected. In this way, many used the new death artworks as protection against the plague. Then in the 15th century, there emerged in the art world depictions of the plague saints. They were first shown as heavenly bodies throwing down arrows to the earth, symbols of sudden death. St. Sebastian was one of the first plague saints. He was killed by arrows, thus giving life to the symbol's meaning. At first his images in art were dark and mournful, much like the medieval mindset after the plague. But over time, St. Sebastian's images changed from a suffering arrow-ridden saint into a youthful, peaceful body with no arrows at all. These images showed his as surviving all disease depicting him as a youth conveys the symbol for "good", not young. Again, this corresponds to the medieval mindset as the people finally began to overcome their grief and loss. Another plague saint depicted in art after the plague was St. Roch. St. Roch actually lived during the years of the plague, and not only survived it, but was said to perform healing miracles on others as well. He was canonized for his Godly deeds it was believed that whoever called upon him would not die of disease or illness. His images in art reminded the people that it was possible to survive such a catastrophic experience and gave them hope. Out of these plague saints also came new names for children that were not used as such before the plague arrived in Europe and reflected the new saints or ordinary

people that did extraordinary things. Some of the new names included Niccolo (meaning wonder worker), Bartolomeo (an apostle), Lorenzo (suffered painful martyrdom), and Christopher (saint who guarded against sudden death). In addition to artwork and Saints, the people also took a hands-on approach to combating with the effects of plague. Votive Churches were one such endeavor that gave the people hope and the will to continue on. Whole communities would band together and build by hand a small church, and they would do this in the span of just one day. The people believed that in using only one day to build with continuous effort, it would prevent any “evil” from entering the Votive Church, therefore making it a sacred places with a special function. These were popular in Russia and Eastern Europe where there was really no recognizable patron saint for plague. Instead, they built holy places for God in the hopes that He would save them from infection. In Mecerata, Italy, the people actually did both. They would build Votive Churches and fill them with depictions of their plague saints. This undertaking gave the able-bodied survivors something constructive to do and immobilized the community to work together for a common goal, much like the farmers’ guilds did. They were bringing Godliness into a Godless situation. The Learned Few Between 1355 and 1369 there was an increase in the number of universities in Europe. This was probably done in an effort to revive the number of learned men. The spread of these universities across the map actually mirrors the spread of the plague a few generations earlier. As the areas hit with the plague began to recover, universities were constructed. For example, Italy was devastated by the Black Death in the early years and they were the first to build new schools a century later, and as the English Isles were devastated later, there

schools also emerged later in the next century. Inside the general curriculum itself was a transfer from a religious undertone to a more secular based theme. This was due to the following chain reaction: Because of obvious sanitation reasons, the majority of plague survivors were wealthy. This led to an increase in authority figures and learned men, which then led to them battling their ideas out in The Great Schism (1378-1415). After the Schism, universities began to teach more secular material and tried to stay away from too much religion and stepping on the toes of others. Another reason for less religion in schools is because of the increased interest in medicine, human anatomy and dissections and an increased desire to prevent another catastrophe like the plague from happening again. The first dissection used for teaching purposes in a classroom was in 1407, when the Bishop of Arras died of an illness. His body was examined and later the evidence found saved the life of the Duke of Burgundy a few years later who was sick with the exact same ailment. Even though there was an increase in all teachings secular, the religious teachings were still prominent. In fact, most of the clergy were taught in universities, and since the plague decimated the number of clergymen across the globe, there was a need for traditional knowledge to be preserved. In order to prevent infection and spread of disease, many of these new universities were constructed locally, so as to minimize travel. Effects of the plague were at the forefront of almost every innovation and idea in the 15th century. Surrounded by abandoned farms, unrepaired bridges, and crumbling houses, even the school boys translating Latin were reminded of the tragedy as they wrote their daily sentences — “*Cecidit domus super tectum paene heri.*” or “The roof of the house had almost fallen on me yesterday.”

against the Bubonic Plague were introduced in 1920 and antibiotics came in 1941 rendering the plague now treatable. Even so, there has been rumors of the Yersinia Pestis virus being stock piled by the Soviet Union, ready at any moment to unleash biological warfare. Interestingly enough, bio warfare was the very first response to the Black Death in 1346, at the port city of Caffa, when the Tartars catapulted the heads of their diseased men into the city walls where the Italians laid in waiting. However, this solution to fight the disease was for obvious reasons ludicrous. For that matter, so were many others. The physicians of the time tried everything to combat the sickness and cure the people, but when bloodletting and self-flogging proved ineffective, the people began to doubt the medical methods and started branching out in search of something real. The failed medical treatment of the plague resulted in modern medicine. With more and more people trying to get on board with the search, unlicensed practices were very common. All over Europe people were trying their hand at medicine, and this also meant a rise in vernacular medical texts. Later, the invention of the printing press would sky rocket this idea into the modern world. Physicians either succeeded in solidifying their futures or failed miserably and lost all prestige. They began to write preventative treatises about the diseases based solely on what they already knew and had seen. This was a new concept in the field of medicine. Within this new world of practical medicine, hierarchies took shape with the physicians and surgeons at the top and beneath them were apothecaries, barbers and lay practitioners. The physicians gained a sort of selfish modesty with their success. This led to inspections of the lower class medicine shops as well as territory boundaries placed in which lower class barbers were banned from practicing in the vicinity of any physicians.

However, since the physicians tended mainly to the wealthy, the non-licensed practitioners always had a market among the regular people. In the century following the plague, there was a tremendous increase in modern medicine innovations. The quarantine was developed not long after the spread, since trading was not something that could just be halted with the onset of disease and life needed to go on. So with every incoming ship, there was a designated period of time in which the ship, crew, passengers and cargo all had to sit in isolation until it was assured that nothing malicious had come ashore with them. The plague also set the stage for the modern day scientific method. Plague theories and cures were posted, tested against known facts, analyzed and then supported with like facts. Also, the hospital ward system was enacted keeping those with similar maladies together in the same areas. After All is Said and Done The Black Death was a earth-shattering experience for all who lived through it, but those who survived it led an equally earth-shattering existence during its aftermath. Religious insecurity led to the Great Schism, and in turn the eventual Reformation. Less-educated priests led to the introduction of new languages. People lived for the moment and ignorance ran rampant. The moral breakdown and collapse of law and order gave rise to an increase in violence in some parts. For example, the murder rate from 1349-1369 was nearly doubled from the rate of 1320-1347. Images of death and horror became common in religious art. Funerals became festivals. Villages were left abandoned and in some areas, so few people were left that the rest had no choice but to migrate away. The poor became suddenly wealthy with the riches people had left behind and serfs could become landowners. Laws against higher wages and bigger profits left the peasants bitter as they watched their opportunities

limited and resulted in a series of violent revolts that shook the essence of society. The need for human labor sparked inventiveness. New windmills and water mills appeared. A Shortage of scribes stimulated the invention of the printing press in 1450. The changes after the plague contributed to the eventual collapse of the feudal system and put an end to the Dark Ages as well.

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