

Introduction of the
overpopulated
peasants became
victims of



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

The Black Death was, no doubt, the greatest population disaster that has ever occurred in the history of Europe. The name is given to the bubonic plague that occurred in the fourteenth century in Europe killing millions of people. The plague began in the year 1348, and by the year 1359, it had killed an approximate 1.5 million people, out of an estimated total population of about 4 million people.

So terrifying was the Black Death that peasants were blaming themselves for its occurrence, and thus some of them resulted to punishing themselves as a way of seeking God's forgiveness. The bubonic plague was caused by fleas that were hosted by rats, a common phenomenon in the cities and towns. The presence of rats in the cities and towns was due to the fact that the towns were littered, and they were poorly managed. The worst part of it is the fact that the medieval peasants did not know that the plague was caused by the fleas hosted by the rats. They actually believed that the plague was caused by the rats themselves.

As more and more people died from the Black Death, the impacts of the plague became more profound. The plague affected the demographic composition of the society, and thus it had far-reaching effects on the social, economic, political and even cultural realms of the medieval society. To this day, the Black Death is remembered as the worst demographic disaster to be ever experienced in European history (Robin, 2011). This paper is an in-depth analysis of the impacts of the Black Death.

Social impacts of the Black Death

The Black Death had far reaching social impacts on the people who lived during the fourteenth century. An obvious social impact of the plague is the fact that the Black Death led to a significant reduction in the human population of the affected areas. This had extensive effects on all aspects of life, including the social and political structure of the affected areas. Before the plague, feudalism, the European social structure in medieval times, had created a society in which inequality was rife, with many poor peasants, and rich lords.

This fuelled overpopulation, which was a catalyst for the mortality of the plague. After the plague, a large number of the overpopulated peasants became victims of the plague, and thus the lords lacked labourers in their farms. This also led to a significant reduction in the population (Bryrne, 2011). The people who were spared by the plague lived full lives. They regarded themselves as the next victims of the bubonic plague.

This led to immoral behaviour that saw societal codes like the sexual codes broken. People did not care about having virtues anymore because they knew that death was approaching fast. As people lost their partners to the plague, the marriage market grew, fuelling more sexual immorality (Carol, 1996). Also among the immediate social impacts is the fact that at one point, the number of people who were dying from the bubonic plague was seemingly more than the number of the living. This made it virtually impossible for the living to take care of the ailing, or even for the living to bury the deceased. This was a social crisis that has remained in the books of history as a remarkable impact of the bubonic plague.

<https://assignbuster.com/introduction-of-the-overpopulated-peasants-became-victims-of/>

Economic impacts of the Black Death

Immediately after the occurrence of the Black Death, all economic activities were paralysed. The first economic activity to suffer substantially from the plague was trade. Although people were not aware that it was the infectiousness of the plague that was making it to kill more people, they were afraid to travel to plagued areas for fear of coming into contact with rats, which they believed was the source of the disease. This substantially affected trade ties between villages and communities in the medieval European society. After the occurrence of the Black Death, other impacts of the plague started affecting the community. The population of the European parts affected by the plague reduced drastically, leading to a severe shortage of labour for the farms. The demand of peasant farmers increased, with the lords competing for them by relocating them from their villages to the farms of the latter. This made the peasants have a competitive economic edge, as they were able to negotiate for better salaries.

As the Black Death claimed more lives, farms were left unattended because the peasants who were responsible for ploughing had fallen victims of the plague. Where the lords were lucky to have had some harvest, it was challenging to bring it home due to a serious shortage of manpower. Some harvest got destroyed in the field as there were no men to bring it home. Some animals got lost because the people who used to look after them had also fallen victims of the plague. These problems led to a number of other impacts in the medieval society of the fourteenth century (Bridbury, 1973). As farms went unploughed and some harvest remained in the fields, people in the villages starved for food.

Cities and towns also faced severe shortages of food since the farming villages around the towns did not have sufficient foodstuffs. Lords had to strategize economically in order to survive, and thus most of them resulted to keeping sheep since it was easier without the manpower. Economic activities that required the presence of large numbers of peasants like the farming of grains lost their popularity. This, in turn, led to serious shortage of basic commodities like bread. This, coupled with the fact that the production of all kinds of foodstuffs had decreases, led to inflationary prices on commodities (“The Black Death And Its Effects”, 1935). The poor were left thriving in an environment full of hardships as the prices of foods skyrocketed.

Political impacts of the Black Death

The Black Death had a number of political impacts.

First of all, the feudal social system of the fourteen-century European population demanded that peasants could not relocate from their villages at will. For a peasant to relocate from his/her village, he/she had to seek the permission of his/her lord. After the Black Death, it became increasingly difficult for lords to get the number of peasants they required to provide them with the labour for their farms. This made lords to disregard the law, and relocate peasants to their villages so that they could work in their farms. Most of the times, the lords even declined to return the latter to their rightful villages in a bid to get maximum benefit from their labour. Another political impact of the Black Death also stems from the reduced population of the affected areas.

This is because after the number of peasants reduced, and they were able to negotiate salaries and even relocate from their villages, contrary to feudal law, the government imposed stricter rules to regulate the way peasants offer their manpower to the lords. This was done by the introduction of the 1351 “statute for labourers” (Bridbury, 1973). The statute provided that payments to peasants were to be made with reference to the payments that were made in 1346.

This meant that peasants would receive payments using the terms that were prevailing before the plague occurred. The statute was structured such that both the lord and the peasant could be accused of breaking the law by either the peasant receiving a higher payment, or the lord giving the same. The effect of this statute was that a good number of peasants disobeyed it, leading to, arguably inhumane punishment. This fuelled revolt among the peasants who sought to fight for their rights in the 1381 Peasants Revolt (Bentley et al., 2008).

After oppressive statutes like the statute for labourers came into force, peasants started to be resistant. They therefore organized a number of revolts in a bid to attract the attention of legislators to their plea of fairness. The most serious of these revolts was the aforementioned 1381 peasant revolt. The peasants had gathered in huge numbers and marched to London. They killed senior officials of the King and took control over the tower of London. Among their main grievances was the fact that, thirty-five years after the occurrence of the Black Death, the population had reasonably grown and the pre-existent demand for labour had substantially reduced.

The lords were therefore threatening to withdraw the privileges they had given to peasants since their demand was no more.

This led to the revolt as the peasants sought to fight for their privileges.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is evident that the Black Death had a lot of impacts on the European medieval society. It changed the demographic set-up of the community and thus it substantially affected the social activities of the peasants. This can be evidenced by the aforementioned increase in cases of sexual immorality as people had lost their partners in the plague.

The Black Death also had a number of economic impacts which resulted from the drastic decrease in the population of peasants. This can be evidenced by the aforementioned change by lords from grain farming to sheep farming.

Lastly, the Black Death had a number of political impacts which can be exemplified by the development of the aforementioned statute for labourers. Studies of the impacts of the bubonic plague are still ongoing. This is despite the fact that most of the impacts were realized immediately after the plague and their effects on the society analyzed.

Political activists during the time, who were mostly lords, had observed the effects of the plague and made societal changes that were bound to benefit them. However, scientists still believe that the European society still suffers significant effects of the bubonic plague. For instance, it has been established that England, where the greatest effects of the bubonic plague were perhaps felt, has significantly lower genetic diversity than it is

suspected to have had in the eleventh century. Geneticists explain this by <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-of-the-overpopulated-peasants-became-victims-of/>

the argument that the deaths that resulted from the Black Deaths were the cause of the low genetic variation in Europe.

Reference List

Bentley, Jerry H.

, Ziegler, Herbert F., Streets, Heather E. (2008) Traditions and Encounters: A Brief Global History, ch9, 15, 19, McGraw-Hill, Inc. Bridbury, A. (1973).

The Black Death. The Economic History Review, 26: 577 – 592. Bryrne, J. (2011). Black Death. World Book Advanced. Web.

Carol, B. (1996). Bubonic Plague in the nineteenth-century China. Robin, N. (2011). Apocalypse Then: A History of Plague. Special Report.

World Book Advanced. Web. The Black Death And Its Effects. (1935).

Readings in English History Drawn from the Original Sources: Intended to Illustrate a Short History of England.

Boston: Ginn.