



# BLACK DEATH

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GROUP- 1917

Coming out of the East, the Black Death reached the shores of Italy in the spring of 1347 unleashing a rampage of death across Europe unprecedented in recorded history. By the time the epidemic played itself out three years later, anywhere between one and two thirds of Europe's population had fallen victim to the pestilence.

# The Origins

- Usually thought to have started in China or Central Asia, the plague had reached the trade city of Kaffain the Black Sea by 1346. From there, black rats carried it onto merchant ships bound for Italy. It then spread throughout the Mediterranean and ravaged Europe.

## the Plague



## Route of the Plague



# How Did It Spread?

- Towns were dirty places, with narrow filthy streets.
- Waste disposal back in the Middle Ages was very crude. People would simply dump their trash out the window and onto the streets.
- The filth that littered streets and gave rats the perfect environment to breed
- Typical bathing and cleanliness in the Middle Ages was not very good.
- In fact, most people typically only washed their hands and face; limiting baths to once a year, usually around Easter.
- Additionally, people tended to sleep on beds of hay or sheep's wool and rarely would have been changed or cleaned.
- Because of this, people would often have problems with bedbugs, lice and fleas.

# How Did It Spread?

- disease even further as those who handled the dead bodies did not protect themselves in any way
- Having no defense and no understanding to the cause of the pestilence, the men, women and children caught in its onslaught were bewildered, panicked, and finally devastated. Also, the disposal of bodies was very crude and helped to spread the

# What Was the Black Death?

The Black Death is categorized into three specific types of plague caused by the same bacteria, *Yersinia pestis*:

**Bubonic Plague** (infection in the lymph nodes, or buboes)

- **Pneumonic Plague** (the infection in the lungs)

- **Septicemic Plague** (the infection in the blood [also the most deadly of the three])

## Efforts to Stop the Plague

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Cities were hardest hit. In crowded cities, it was not uncommon for as much as fifty percent of the population to die.

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Although governments had medical workers try to prevent the plague, the plague persisted. Most medical workers quit and journeyed away because they feared getting the plague themselves.

# Efforts to Stop the Plague

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There were; however, methods that did work. For example, in Milan, city officials immediately walled up houses found to have the plague, isolating everyone (even the healthy along with the sick) inside of them. Venice took sophisticated and stringent quarantine and health measures, including isolating all incoming ships on a separate island.

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People died anyway, though fewer in Milan and Venice than in cities that took no such measures.

# The Death Toll

It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of people killed by the Black Death. Many times, the Church and monks kept records of the census and populations, but as the sick poured into their monasteries, monks themselves were infected and their records were also lost or destroyed. At best, it can be estimated that between  $\frac{1}{3}$  and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of European population were decimated by the disease. (25-50 million people out of 75 million)

In fact, the bodies piled up so fast, the people were unable to provide proper Christian burials. Instead, they threw them in pits and burned them. This adds to the confusion of how many people died.



# Dark Humor

The Black Death crept slowly into the everyday lives of people. The abundance of death was used for laughter. Funeral processions were used as jokes. It got to the point where deaths were nearly ignored altogether. Citizens looked for causes and the developmentally delayed, deformed and crazy people outside town were the perfect candidates.

Bored? Go throw some stones at the crazy person to help stop the plague.

# Economy

Fields went unplowed as the men who usually did this were victims of the disease. Harvests would not have been brought in as the manpower did not exist. Animals would have been lost as the people in a village would not have been around to tend them. Therefore whole villages would have faced starvation. Towns and cities would have faced food shortages as the villages that surrounded them could not provide them with enough food. Those lords who lost their manpower to the disease, turned to sheep farming as this required less people to work on the land. Grain farming became less popular – this, again, kept towns and cities short of such basics as bread.

One consequence of the Black Death was inflation – the price of food went up creating more hardship for the poor. In some parts of England, food prices went up by four times.

How did peasants respond?

Those who survived the Black Death believed that there was something special about them – almost as if God had protected them. Therefore, they took the opportunity offered by the disease to improve their lifestyle.

Peasants could demand higher wages as they knew that a lord was desperate to get in his harvest.

# Did You Know?

Not only were the children effected physically, but also mentally. Exposure to public nudity, craziness, and (obviously) abundant death was premature. The death of family members left the children facing pain and anguish at an early age. Parents even abandoned their children, leaving them to the streets instead of risking the babies giving them the dreaded "pestilence". Children were especially unlucky if they were female. Baby girls would be left to die because parents would favor male children that could carry on the family name.

# Did You Know?

Children during the Black Death suffered greatly. A common nursery rhyme is proof

*Ring a-round the rosy*

*Pocket full of posies*

*Ashes, ashes!*

*We all fall down!*

**Ring around the rosy:** rosary beads give you God's help or possibly the round, bruising marks left on the bodies.

**A pocket full of posies:** used to stop the odor of rotting bodies which was at one point was thought to cause the plague, it was also used widely by doctors to protect them from the infected plague patients.

**Ashes, ashes:** the church burned the dead when burying them became too laborious.

**We all fall down:** dead.



THANK YOU