

The Black Death

From 1347-1350, a great plague swept across Europe, killing an estimated 1/3 of the entire human population. As if that wasn't bad enough, the fourteenth century also witnessed animal diseases, famines, large-scale climate change, and the human crisis of war. This had both immediate and long-term effects on medieval Europe, changing daily life, social networks, and economic decision making. Understanding the degree to which the medieval world was altered by (and survived) this natural disaster also offers glimpses of medieval psychology, scientific knowledge, spirituality, and aesthetics. This class will use the medieval epidemic as a way to understand how diseases affect human and animal survival, and how environment can be an agent for changing human history. We will also set the medieval epidemic in its broader context, by discussing problems in studying historical plagues and by looking at the earlier outbreak of plague in Europe at the end of the Roman Empire.

Ellen Arnold
Hist 294-01/Envi 294-02
MWF 10:50-11:50 OM 111

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Course Materials:

John Aberth, *The Black Death, The Great Mortality of 1348-1350 A Brief History With Documents*, Paperback edition, (Bedford St. Martin's, 2005) **Sourcebook** needed by

David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West* ed. Samuel K. Cohn (Harvard University Press, 1997). **TOW** needed by 20 October

Lester K. Little, ed. *Plague and the End of Antiquity*, (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008). **PEA**

Colin Platt, *King Death: The Black Death and its Aftermath in Late-Medieval England*, (London: University College of London Press, 1996). **KD** needed by 3 October

Also, one of the following novels (your choice): (Not available at the campus bookstore)

Geraldine Brooks, *Year of Wonders*

Albert Camus, *The Plague*

Connie Willis, *Doomsday Book*

Other readings will be available through Moodle throughout the semester. See weekly schedule for details.

Course Grade:

Component	% of Final Grade	Due Date
Weekly Writing	20%	Fridays (see schedule)
Participation	25%	Daily
Preparatory Stages 1-3	20%	See below
First Draft	10%	23 November
Primary Source Essay	25%	16 December by noon

A= Exceptionally strong, thoughtful, and effective work. Written work or participation that stands out and shows that you have a strong understanding of the course materials and topics.

B= Work that exceeds basic expectations, and that shows independent thought and analysis. Written work is clear, effective, and structured. Participation is consistent, steady, and engaged.

C= Work that meets basic expectations; satisfies all assignment requirements and demonstrates a basic understanding of course materials. Participation is occasional, but could be improved.

D= Work that fails to meet basic expectations yet still demonstrates some degree of understanding of course materials and shows an effort to tackle materials/assignment effectively. Participation is minimal or disconnected from class discussions/activities.

F= Work that fails to meet expectations, fails to understand or effectively engage with course materials, or that engages with materials but does not address task at hand.

Weekly Writing Assignments

Most weeks, I will post two “reading questions” on Moodle. The questions will deal with either primary or secondary work that we have read since the last assignment. You will need to choose one to respond to in **one single-spaced** page. There will be **ten** of these assignments over the course of the semester. They will constitute **20 %** of your final grade. They will be graded on a five-point scale (roughly, though not exactly, equivalent to an A = 5, B = 4, C = 3, etc.) If you complete all of the assignments, I will replace your lowest grade with your highest grade (substituting a 3.5 with a 4.5, for example). If you do not complete an assignment, you will receive a 0 for that assignment. These assignments are due IN CLASS on Fridays.

These assignments are intended to help you engage directly with the readings, and to work through problems, connections, and scholarly disagreements. There are two writing goals that you need to focus on in each response, both of which will help you prepare for the final project. The first is to succinctly and precisely answer the question—one page does not allow for an over-emphasis on style and “filler” material. You will become better and better over the course of the semester at making a precise argument/answer. This is an important skill in academic writing.

A second skill that these assignments will focus on is the appropriate and measured use of evidence. It is important to learn how to integrate the work of others into your own writing, and how to draw on both primary and secondary sources to support your own argument/answer. To that end, each assignment **MUST** draw directly on the relevant readings. Each assignment will need to include at least one *direct quotation* of either a primary or secondary source. Make sure that the quotation eloquently expresses a point that supports your larger answer/argument, but do not let the words of others overwhelm or drown out yours. One way of avoiding excessive reliance on quotation is to become good at *summarizing* (while still giving credit to) another person’s words, ideas, and evidence. To practice this, each of your assignments **MUST** also draw directly on the arguments, specific facts, or types of evidence discussed by (or found in) the readings. Each assignment should then attribute (parenthetically—details on this format will be provided separately) the information to the source you found it in.

Primary Source Essay

This is an exercise in working with history's raw materials. The essay (10-12 pages) will be your chance to dig in more detail into one primary source (or a set of 2-4 smaller sources connected to each other). This project can be based on ancient, medieval, or early modern sources.

Throughout the semester, the weekly writing assignments allow you to practice using writing not only to relay facts, but also to make and prove an argument that answers a question. This paper gives you the chance to frame the question on your own! The goal of the essay is to contextualize your source, its author or producer, and its contents, and to use this to make an argument about the nature, impact, or importance of the plague.

For this project you will need to use the skills that you will develop in the weekly responses—you will need to provide quotations from your sources and be able to summarize them when appropriate. You will also need to summarize and interpret the work of other scholars to help you develop and prove your own argument.

There are several important stages in successfully completing this project. Each is crucial for getting this project done in a timely manner. The first three stages will be worth a combined **20%** of your final grade.

1) Identify and obtain your source or sources. You will need to identify (and show that you have access to) your primary source. Provide me with full bibliographic information on your source and a brief (1 paragraph) explanation of why you have chosen it. This is due **28 September**.

2) Brief Essay: Understand your source

Before trying to understand what the source can tell us about the plague, it is crucial to understand when, where, why, and by whom it was produced. In no more than **2** double-spaced pages, introduce your source to your audience. This introduction should explore when the source was written, who may have written it (and for what purpose). Also be sure to pay attention to its plague context (was it produced during, immediately after, or in the absence of an outbreak, for example?) and any other information about the document that will help both you and your reader understand and interpret it. This stage is due **5 October**.

3) Annotated bibliography: Find help interpreting your source

It is important that historians do not work in a vacuum, but instead rely on and build on the work done by others. Identify **five** scholarly secondary works (books, articles, chapters or essays in books, etc.) that can help you both contextualize and understand the source you have chosen. (You may use *one* relevant source from the syllabus). These works could be about the source itself, about the genre of sources (i.e. wills, saint's lives, medieval poetry), about the aspect of the plague the source primarily focuses on (i.e. mortality, religious response, burial of the dead), or about the historical context in which the source was produced. These works will help you understand what other people have said about the source, its author, or its context, and help you to frame your own question and response. You will assemble an annotated bibliography (details provided separately) which provides both full bibliographic information and brief (1-2 paragraph) explanations of each work, and how they help you interpret your source. This stage is due on **23 October**

4) First Draft: Test-drive your interpretation

It is impossible to overstate the importance of practice in the writing process. As with any other intellectual skill, writing is something that everyone can become better at. Writing a first draft allows you

to experiment with a paper structure, test out an argument, and make sure that your ideas and arguments are expressed clearly enough for readers to follow them. Producing and revising a first draft is a different process than proofreading. The (graded) first draft should be **8-9** pages, double-spaced. The final paper will be **10-12** pages. After writing, re-reading, and receiving feedback on the first draft, you will need to actively decide the best way to expand, deepen, or better support your argument and analysis before turning in the final paper. Thus, this draft is something that you know you will not only edit but also substantially revise. The draft is due **23 November** and is worth **10 %** of your grade.

5) Final Paper: Turn it in!

I won't say "finish it" because it's important to recognize that no piece of writing is ever truly finished. There are always ideas that could be more nuanced, sentences that could be cleaner, or data that could be added. But there comes a point where you recognize that the piece is going to be a strong enough vehicle for conveying your ideas and arguments, and that it is time to share it with others! So, the final paper (10-12 pages, double-spaced, with separate bibliography) is due via email by noon on **16 December**, and is worth **25 %** of your grade.

Writing and Research Support

Maren: This semester we are lucky to have the assistance of Maren Hagman, who will be the course preceptor. Maren's primary role is to help you with your individual research projects. She is an excellent library researcher, and will have regular office hours in the library where she can work with you to identify and work with both primary and secondary sources. Maren will be attending class regularly, and will also be available to help you with keeping up with and working through the regular course readings and with the weekly writings.

Regular consulting times (1st floor of library): Mondays and Thursdays, 3-5

Contact: mhagman@macalester.edu

MAX: The Macalester Academic Excellence (MAX) Center, located in Kagin Commons, has peer tutors available for assisting students in all stages of their writing. Hours are 9:00 A.M. – 4:30 P.M., M-F and 7 P.M. – 10 P.M., S-Th. Becky Graham and Jenny White also provide writing assistance to students during the daytime hours, M-F. You may drop in for help or call x6121 (daytime) or x6193 during evening hours to schedule an appointment.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. All of your written work should reflect your own ideas, and should properly attribute the work of others who you engage. For help on how to avoid plagiarism, see <http://www.macalester.edu/max/fym>.

Grades

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*I reserve the right to emend this syllabus to enhance student learning

CLASS SCHEDULE

INTRODUCTIONS

W 9 September Introduction to the Pre-Modern Pandemics

F 11 September Disaster

Jonathan Bergman, "Disaster: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *History Compass* 6/3 (2008): 934–46.

Theodore Steinberg, "Introduction: Hometown Blues" in *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xv–xxiii.

Websites, posted on Moodle

M 14 September Disease

Jo N. Hays, "Historians and Epidemics: Simple Questions, Complex Answers" *Plague and the End of Antiquity*, (PEA) ch. 2

Websites, posted on Moodle

THE JUSTINIANIC PLAGUE

W 16 September Context: The World of Late Antiquity

F 18 September The Course of the Plague and General Questions **Weekly Writing due**

Lester K. Little, "Life and Afterlife of the First Plague Pandemic" PEA ch. 1

M 21 September Responses to Plague in Late Antiquity

Dionysios Stathakopoulos, "Crime and Punishment: the Plague in the Byzantine Empire 541-749" PEA ch. 5

Alain J. Stoclet, "Seeking Succor and Solace in Times of Plague" PEA ch. 7

W 23 September Using Religious Sources to Understand the Plague

Michael Kulikowski, "Plague in Spanish Late Antiquity" PEA ch. 8

John Maddicott, "Plague in Seventh-Century England" PEA ch. 9

F 25 September Cultural Responses to Plague in Late Antiquity **Weekly Writing due**

Peregrine Horden, "Disease, Dragons, and Saints: the Management of Epidemics in the Dark Ages." in Terence Ranger and Paul Slack, eds. *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45-76.

F 16 October Long-term Demographic Effects **Weekly Writing due**

Herlihy, "The new Economic and Demographic System" in **TOW** ch. 2

John Hatcher, "Mortality in the Fifteenth Century: Some New Evidence" *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Feb., 1986), 19-38.

INTERPRETATIONS AND MEDICAL RESPONSES

M 19 October Initial interpretations of the Plague in Europe

Samuel K. Cohn, Jr. "Chroniclers and Doctors" in *The Black Death Transformed*, (London: Arnold Publishers, 2002) 99-139.

W 21 October Interpretations in the Middle East

Michael W. Dols, "Medieval Muslim Interpretations of Plague" in *The Black Death in the Middle East*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 84-122.

F 23 October Treating and Avoiding the Plague **Stage 3 (Annotated Bibliography) due**

Christiane Nockels Fabbri, "Treating Medieval Plague: The Wonderful Virtues of Theriac" *Early Science and Medicine* 12 (2007) 247-283.

Sourcebook Set 3, "Medical Responses"

THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE-DOWN: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REPERCUSSIONS

M 26 October Sources: Plague's Immediate Impact

Sourcebook Set 4, "Societal and Economic Impact"

W 28 October Economic Impacts

Christopher Dyer, "The Black Death and its Aftermath, c. 1348-c.1520" in *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain, 850-1520* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 271-97.

F 30 October No Class--Fall Break!

M 2 November Changes in Rural Life **Weekly Writing due**

Platt, **KD** ch. 3, "Villages in Stasis"

Mavis Mate, "Agrarian Economy after the Black Death: The Manors of Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 1348- 91." *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 37, No. 3, (Aug., 1984), 341-54.

W 4 November The Impact on the Elite

Platt, **KD** ch. 4 “Impoverished Noblemen and Rich Old Ladies” and ch. 5 “Knight, Esquire and Gentleman”

MAKING SENSE OF DISASTER: CULTURAL RESPONSES

F 6 November Artistic Responses: *The Danse Macabre* **Weekly Writing Due**

Sourcebook Set 7, “The Artistic Response”

M 9 November No class: Research Release

W 11 November Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages

R. I. Moore, “Jews” and “Lepers” in *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1987 2nd ed. 2007), 26-56.

David Nirenberg, “Epilogue: the Black Death and Beyond” in *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 231-49.

F 13 November Hysteria and Persecution during the Plague **Weekly Writing due**

Herlihy, “Modes of Thought and Feeling” in **TOW** ch. 3

Sourcebook Set 6, “The Psyche of Hysteria”

M 16 November Arts and Architecture

Christine M. Boeckl, “Black Death and its Immediate Aftermath (1347-1500)” in *Images of Plague and Pestilence* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2002), 69-90.

Platt, **KD** ch. 9, “Architecture and the Arts”

RELIGIOUS RESPONSES AND REPERCUSSIONS IN EUROPE

W 18 November Renewed Piety: Plague Saints

Sheila Barker, “The Making of a Plague Saint: Saint Sebastian’s Imagery and Cult before the Counter-Reformation.” in Franco Mormando and Thomas Worcester, eds., *Piety and Plague: From Byzantium to the Baroque* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2007), 90-131.

F 20 November Sources for Religious History

Sourcebook Set 5, “Religious Mentalities”

M 23 November Effect on the Clergy **Stage 4 (First Draft) due**

Platt, **KD** ch. 7, “Like People, Like Priest”

W 25 November Ideas about Death and the Afterlife

Robert E. Lerner, "The Black Death and Western European Eschatological Mentalities" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Jun., 1981), 533-52.

Philip Morgan, "Of Worms and War, 1380-1558", Peter C. Jupp, Clare Gittings, eds., *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick, N.J. : Rutgers University Press, 2000), 119-46.

F 27 November No class: Thanksgiving

SCIENTIFIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS

M 30 November What Was the Plague? Modern Questions

John Theilmann and Frances Cate, "A Plague of Plagues: The Problem of Plague Diagnosis in Medieval England" *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 37: 3 (Winter, 2007), 371-93.

Herlihy, "Bubonic Plague: Historical Epidemiology and the Medical Problems" **TOW** ch. 1

W 2 December Some Modern Answers

Norman F. Cantor, "Serpents and Cosmic Dust," in *In the Wake of the Plague: the Black Death and the World it Made* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 171-84.

Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., "The Black Death: End of a Paradigm" *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 107, No. 3, (Jun., 2002), 703-38

Robert Sallares, "Ecology, Evolution, and Epidemiology of Plague" **PEA** ch. 11, only pages 231-254

F 4 December The State of the Field: Archaeology and Ecology **Weekly Writing due**

Michael McCormick, "Toward a Molecular History of the Justinianic Pandemic" **PEA** ch. 12

Michael McCormick, "Rats, Communications, and Plague: Toward an Ecological History." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 34.1 (Summer 2003), 1-25.

EPILOGUE

M 7 December Book Club! The Black Death in Popular Culture

Come prepared to discuss the novels

W 9 December The Plague in the 17th Century

Selected Readings from Defoe's *Journal of a Plague Year*.

F 11 December The Legacy of the Black Death: Disease as Metaphor **Weekly Writing Due**

Susan Sontag, selections from *AIDS and its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989).

Colin Jones, "Plague and its Metaphors in Early Modern France." *Representations* 53 (Winter 1996), 97-127.

M 14 December Conclusions

Papers due Wed. 1 December by noon