


THE BLACK DEATH

1347-1351



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 Kaffa in 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.



Did You Know?

- In 1346, the Tatars (Mongols) laid siege to Kaffa. While surrounding the city, the Tatars came down with plague.
- The Tatars decided to use this to their advantage. They started loading their catapults of the infected, dead bodies and began flinging them over the city walls.
- An outbreak of plague in the city soon followed. It has been speculated that this operation may have been responsible for



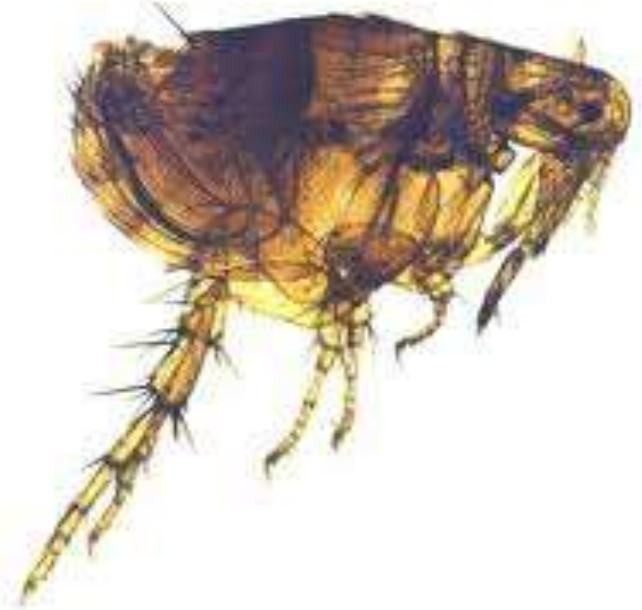
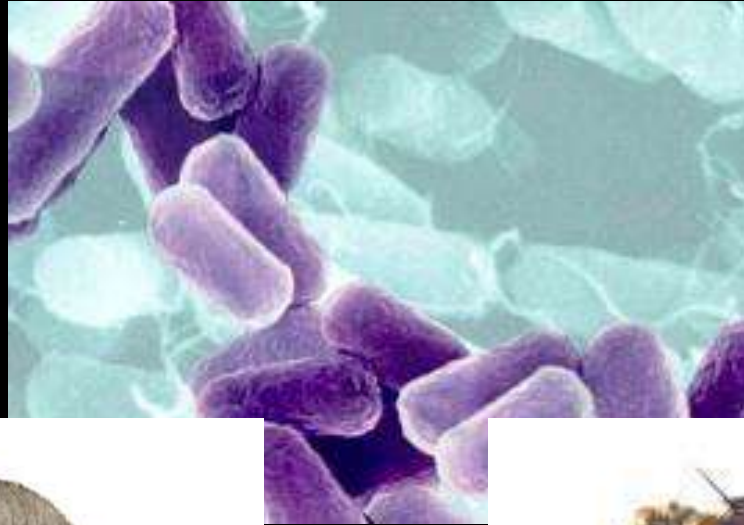
Route of the Plague



Route of the Plague



The Culprits



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 and

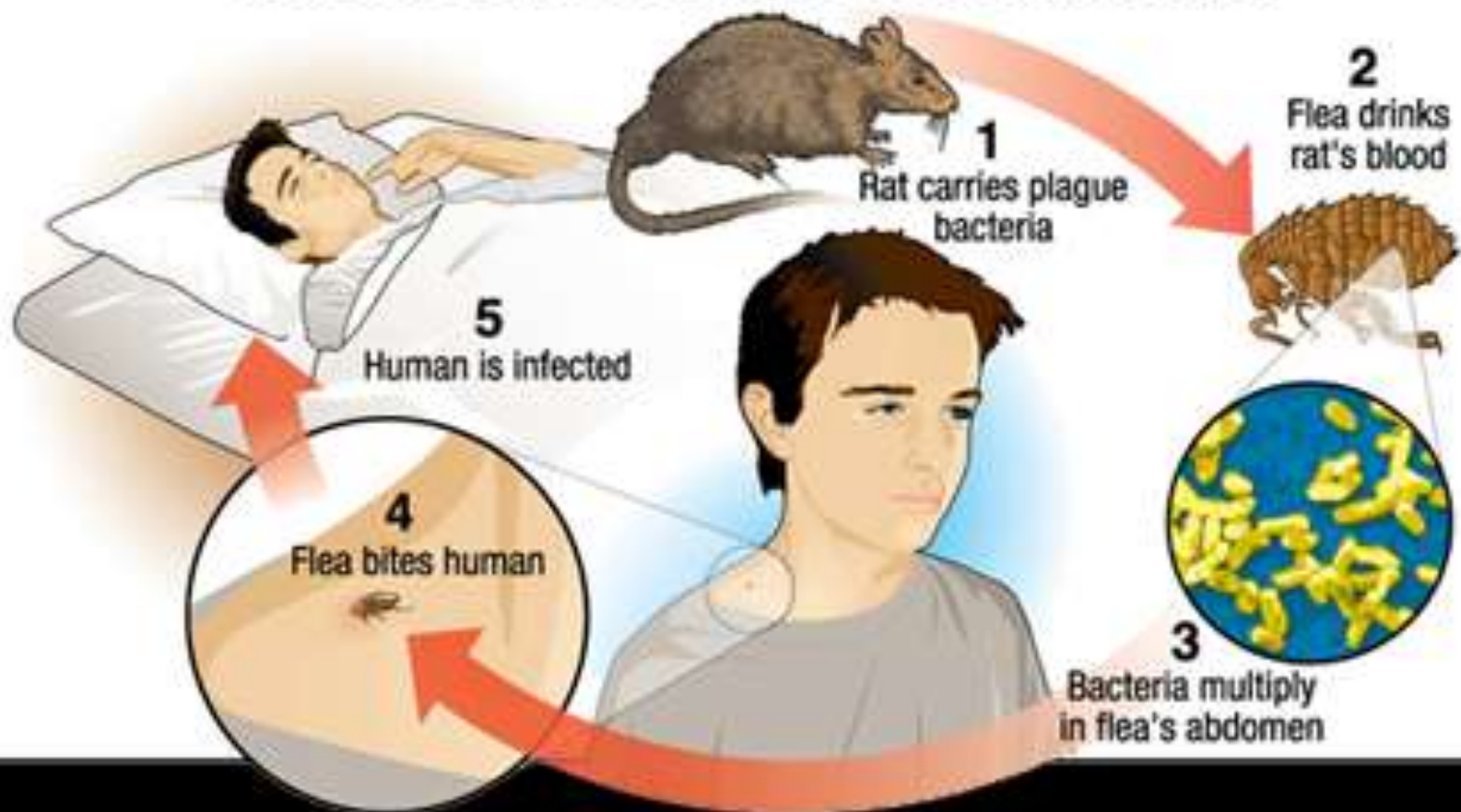


How Did It Spread?

- 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 the Bubonic Plague Was Transmitted



How Did It Spread?

- 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 disease even further as those who handled the dead bodies did not protect themselves in any



way

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])

Bubonic Plague

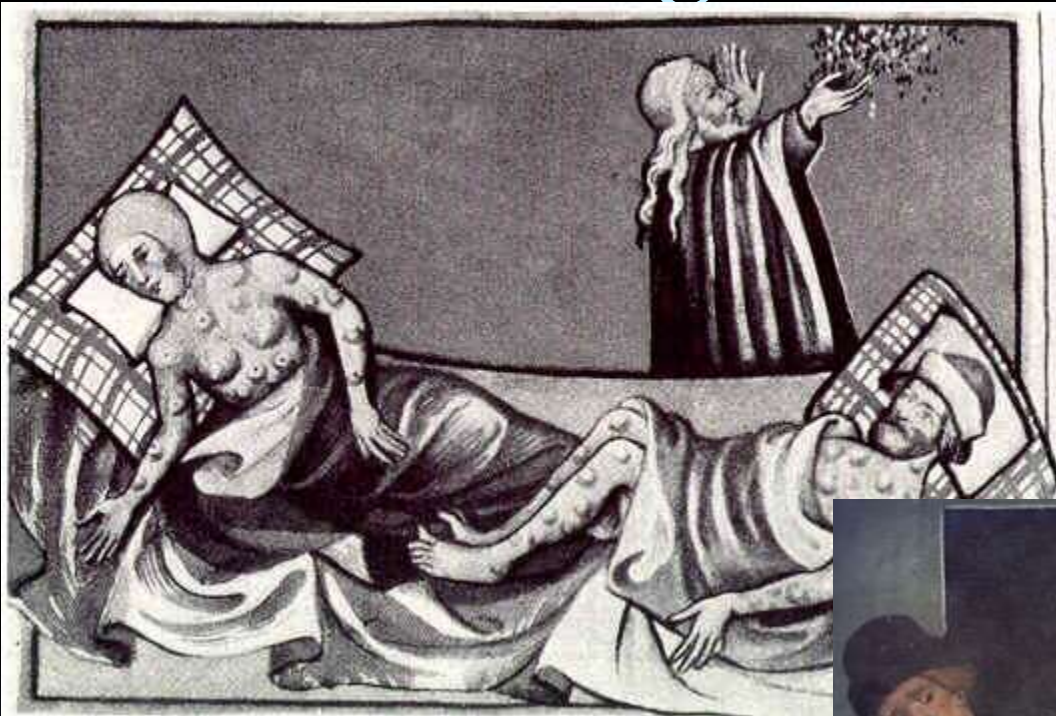
The bubonic plague was the most commonly seen form during the Black Death. The classic sign of bubonic plague was the appearance of buboes in the groin, the neck and armpits, which oozed black pus and bled.

The term 'bubonic' refers to the characteristic bubo or enlarged lymphatic gland. It had a mortality rate of thirty to seventy-five percent and symptoms including a high fever, headaches, painful aching joints, nausea and vomiting, and a general feeling of discomfort. Of those who contracted the bubonic plague, 4 out of 5 died within eight

Bubonic Plague



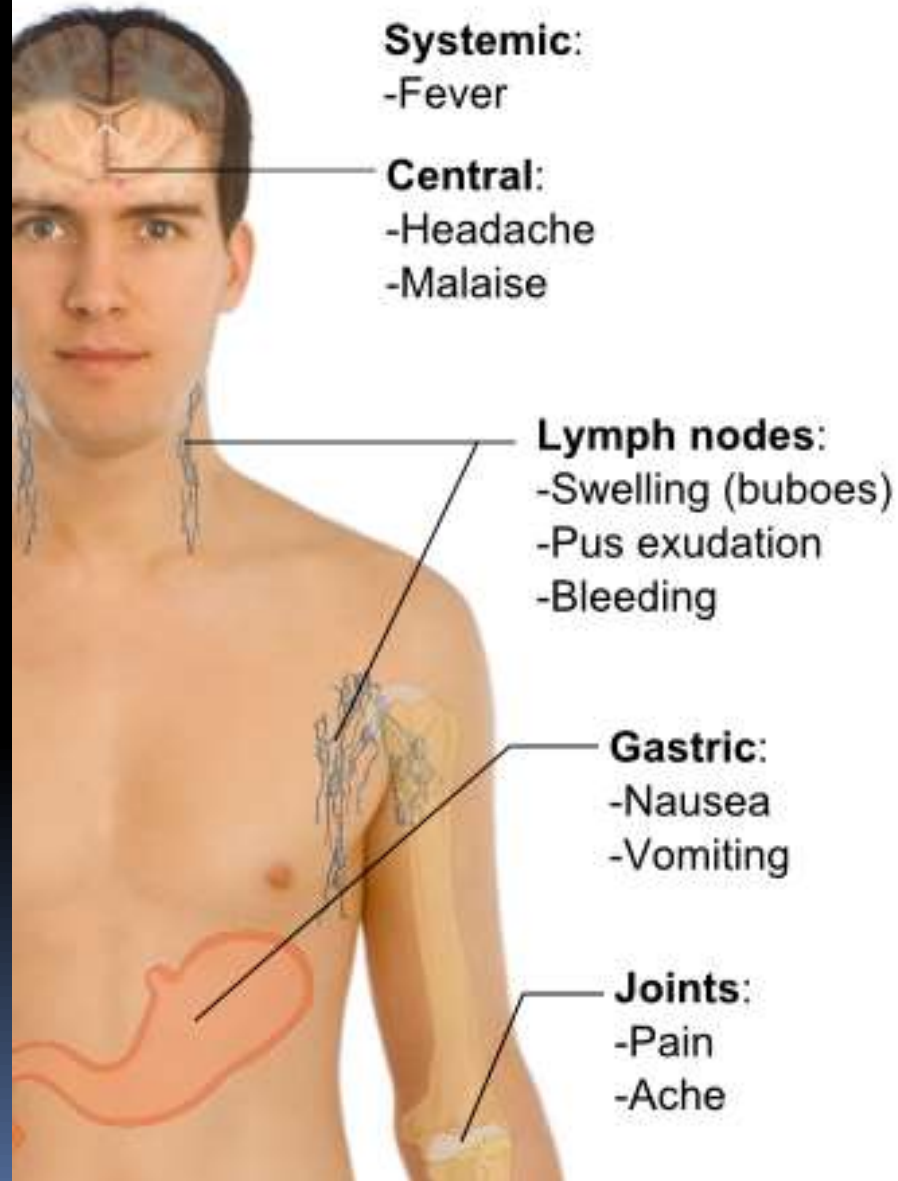
Bubonic Plague



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Symptoms of Bubonic plague





Pneumonic Plague

Pneumonic plague was the second most commonly seen form during the Black Death, with a mortality rate of ninety to ninety-five percent. Symptoms included fever, cough, and blood-tinged sputum. As the disease progressed, your lungs basically start to liquefy and the sputum became free flowing and bright red.



Main symptoms of Pneumonic plague

Systemic:

-Fever

Central:

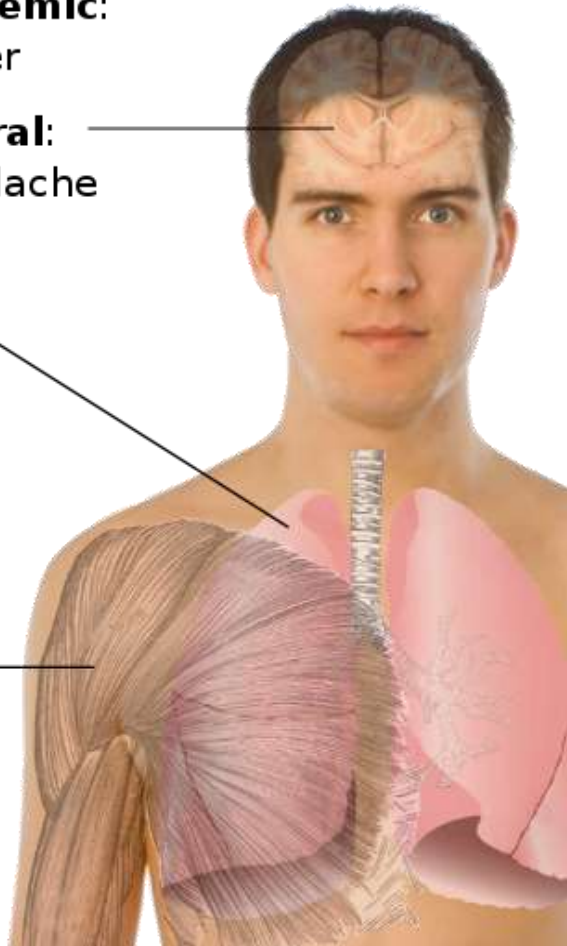
-Headache

Respiratory:

- Cough
- Hemoptysis
- Dyspnea
- Chest pain

Muscular:

-Weakness



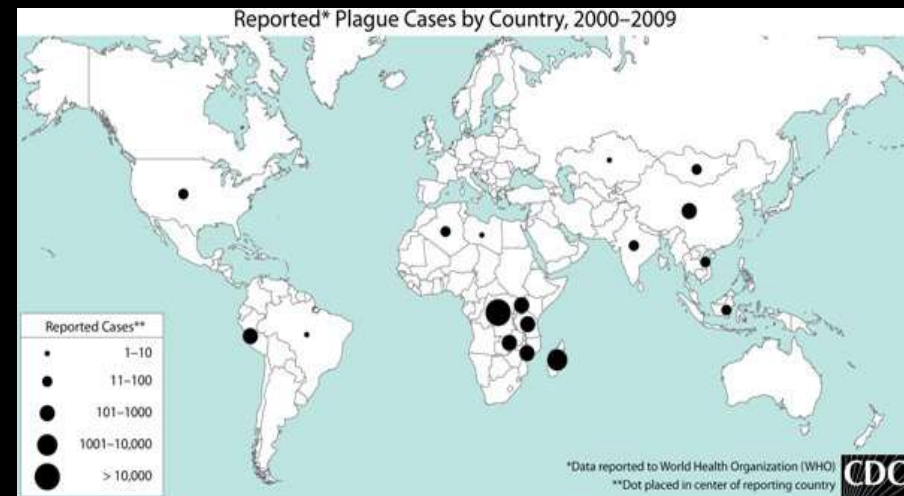
Septicemic Plague

Septicemic plague was the least common of the three forms, with a mortality rate close to one hundred percent. Symptoms were high fevers and purple/black skin patches. Your blood would simply not do its job of bringing oxygen to your body and also would not clot. As a result, your skin started to die and you tended to bleed uncontrollably all over your body.



Did You Know?

- Black Plague still exists around the world today, especially in Third World or developing nations where trash and pollution are prominent and vermin like rats exist.
- However, there are even cases of it reported in the United States each year.
- While this is a very serious illness, it is easily treatable nowadays with commonly available antibiotics. Mortality rate is about 8-10%.





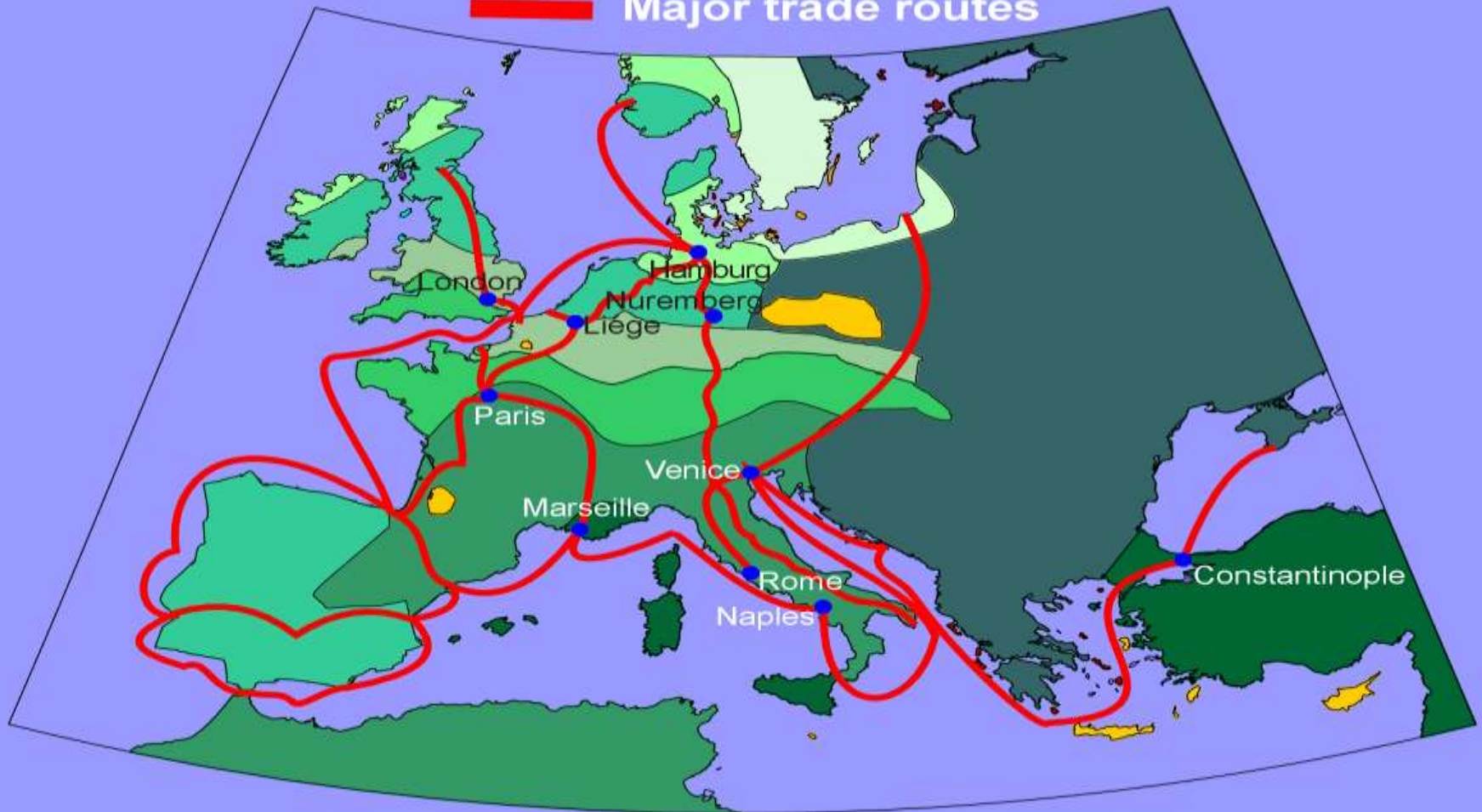
Path of the Plague

The plague traveled on trade routes and caravans. Its path of death was generally from south to north and east to west passing through Italy, France, England, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Finland, and eventually reaching as far as Greenland. If the plague had just stayed in one city, the containment might have spared Europe. Unfortunately, the plague spread when people fled to other cities.

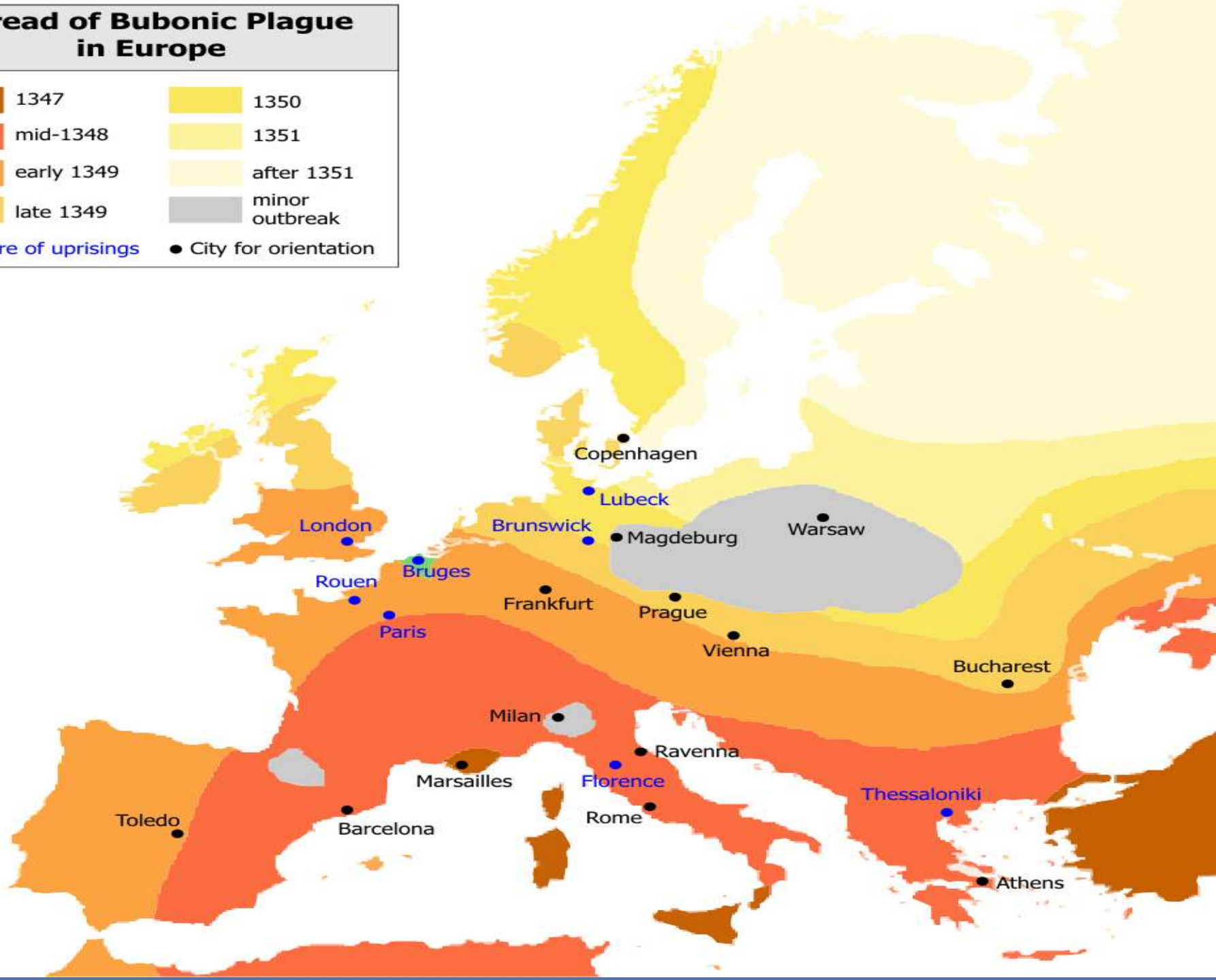
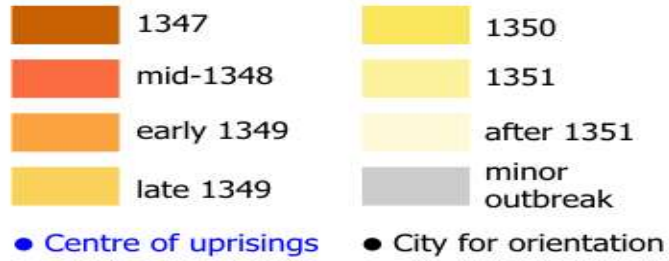
The Spread of the Black Death

December 1347	June 1349	December 1350
June 1348	December 1349	After 1351
December 1348	June 1350	Areas partially or totally spared

Major trade routes




Spread of Bubonic Plague in Europe





Efforts to Stop the Plague

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



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

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.

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

Plague Doctors

A plague doctor's duties were often limited to visiting victims to verify whether they had been afflicted or not. Surviving records of contracts drawn up between cities and plague doctors often gave the plague doctor enormous latitude and heavy financial compensation, given the risk of death involved for the plague doctor himself. Most plague doctors were essentially volunteers, as qualified doctors had (usually) already fled, knowing they



Plague Doctors

- **A wide-brimmed black hat worn close to the head.** At the time, this hat would have been identified a person as a doctor and may have also been used as partial shielding from infection.
- **A primitive gas mask in the shape of a bird's beak.** The beak of the mask was often filled with strongly aromatic herbs and spices to overpower the miasmas or "bad air" which was also thought to carry the plague. The mask also included red glass eyepieces, which were thought to make the wearer impervious to evil.
- **A long, black overcoat.** The overcoat worn by the plague doctor was tucked in behind the beak mask at the neckline to minimize skin exposure. It extended to the feet, and was often coated head to toe in suet or wax. The coating of wax likely served as protection against respiratory droplet contamination.

Plague Doctors



Plague Doctors



Monks in the Black Plague

Many people also turned to the monasteries where the well educated and always helpful monks would try to care for the sick.

This in turn infected monks and they began to die off as well.



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.








Consequences of The Black Death

How did the Black Death effect European civilization? It not only affected Europe's population and also its economy as well. Changes in the size of civilization led to changes in trade, the church, music and art, and many other things.



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.



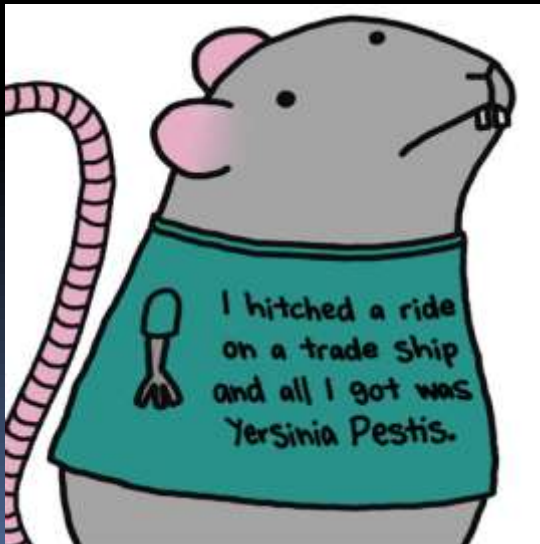
Bored? Go throw some stones at the crazy person to help stop the plague.



Black Death



European Tour
1347 - 1351





Art

The damage to art is irreparable. Carving was changed. Coffins had pictures of corpses on the lid, usually showing a very flattering likeness of the body inside wearing their best clothes. Some of these dated around 1400 showed bodies with about half of their flesh and shredded garments. A few of the sculptures showed worms and snails munching on the diseased. Painting was effected too. There are a number of paintings containing people socializing with skeletons. Artists abandoned old ways of painting things idolized by the Christian religion. They were so depressed by the death that surrounded them that they began to paint pictures of sad and dead people.


Macabre Art from the Middle Ages





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.






Economy

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.

The Church

Many people could not comprehend why God was punishing them.

They sought answers that the Church could not provide.

Many people turned their back on the Church.

As a result of death in the church, written language was almost lost and whole churches were



Jews and the Black Plague

Because Jews were less susceptible to the Black Plague than their neighbors (likely the result of Jewish ritual regarding personal hygiene), Jews were accused of poisoning Christian wells, were thought to be the source of the plague. As this image illustrates, Jews were expelled, tortured and murdered for the supposed



Jews and the Black Plague

Jews are seen burning in hell in a medieval German manuscript. The devil is on the right. The inscription on the cauldron reads "Juda," or Jews.



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!



Did You Know?

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 to laborious.

We all fall down: dead.