



0. HUMAN DEVASTATION - Story Preface

**1. HUMAN DEVASTATION**

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14th Century image of funeral for plague victims in the town of Tournai, Belgium. From the Chronicles of the Abbot of the Monastery of St. Martin the Righteous. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

It was 1348. Europe was overwhelmed by a pestilence that had already laid waste to Asia. Towns were especially hard hit.

In London, where houses were built side-by-side and rats flourished in the garbage people dumped into the streets, the plague quickly became an epidemic. Even the countryside was not spared. Hundreds of years would pass before Europe recovered from the total population loss.

Giovanni Boccaccio, who lost several family members to the plague's 1348 devastation in Italy, wrote what he observed in the Decameron:

*What I am about to say is incredible to hear, and if I and others had not witnessed it with our own eyes, I should not dare believe it (let alone write about it), no matter how trustworthy a person I might have heard it from.*

What did Boccaccio observe that made him warn us he was not exaggerating?

*This pestilence was so powerful that it was communicated to the healthy by contact with the sick, the way a fire close to dry or oily things will set them aflame. And the evil of the plague went even further: not only did talking to or being around the sick bring infection and a common death, but also touching the clothes of the sick or anything touched or used by them seemed to communicate this very disease in the person involved.*

Before the plague reached Italy (spread by bacteria-carrying ships from the Crimean town of Kaffa), it had wreaked havoc in Asia. The famous Arab historian, Ibn Khaldun, wrote that annihilation followed everywhere in its wake.

*Civilization both in the East and the West was visited by a destructive plague which devastated nations and caused populations to vanish. It swallowed up many of the good things of civilization and wiped them out...Civilization decreased with the decrease of mankind.*

*Cities and buildings were laid waste. Roads and way signs were obliterated, settlements and mansions became empty, dynasties and tribes grew weak. The entire inhabited world changed...It was as if the voice of existence in the world had called out for oblivion and restriction, and the world responded to its call.*

People in England, hearing rumors about a deadly plague, hoped to keep it at bay. Without knowing what it was, or how it was transmitted, any hopes to keep it on the continent were short-lived. It entered the country through the port of Weymouth.

Geoffrey le Baker, an Oxford cleric, tells us that even "the young and strong" were cut down:

*But at last it attacked Gloucester, yea and Oxford and London, and finally the whole of England so violently that scarce one in ten of either sex was left alive. As the graveyards did not suffice, fields were chosen for the burial of the dead...A countless number of common people and a host of monks and nuns and clerics as well, known to God alone, passed away.*

*It was the young and strong that the plague chiefly attacked...This great pestilence, which began at Bristol on 15th August and in London about 29th September, raged for a whole year in England so terribly that it cleared many country villages entirely of every human being.*

No matter the chronicler's country, the extent of human devastation was the same.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/HUMAN-DEVASTATION-Black-Death>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/HUMAN-DEVASTATION-Black-Death>

## Media Stream



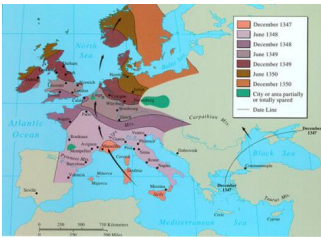
### Black Death Victims - Funeral at Tournai, Belgium

Image of the funeral of plague victims - in Tournai, Belgium - source described above. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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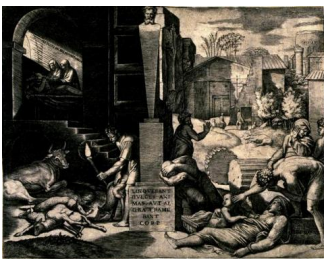


### Spread of the Plague by Region and Year - 14th Century

Image online, courtesy Boston University, School of Public Health.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Spread-of-the-Plague-by-Region-and-Year-14th-Century>



### People Overwhelmed by Disease

Image, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Engraving (1515-16) by Marcantonio Raimondi.

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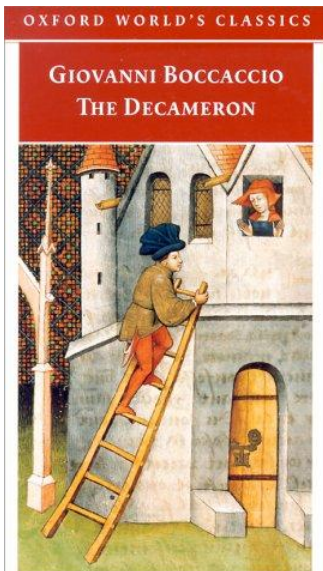


### Giovanni Boccaccio

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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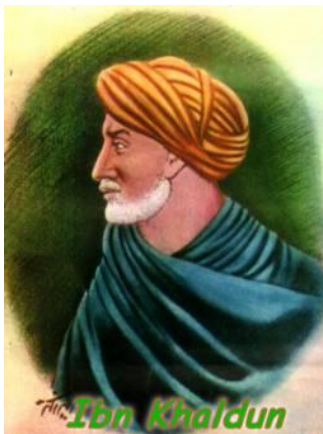
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### The Decameron - by Giovanni Boccaccio

Image of book cover, courtesy Amazon.com.

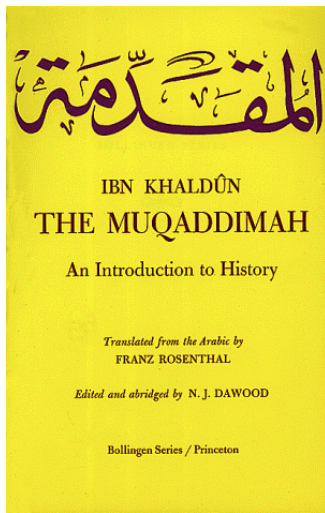
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### Ibn Khaldun

Image online, courtesy liberal-international.org website.

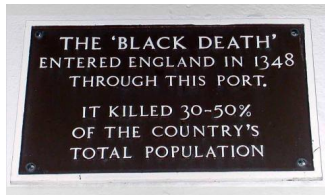
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### The Muquaddimah

Image online, courtesy the [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) website.

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### Black Death Entered Britain Through the Port of Weymouth

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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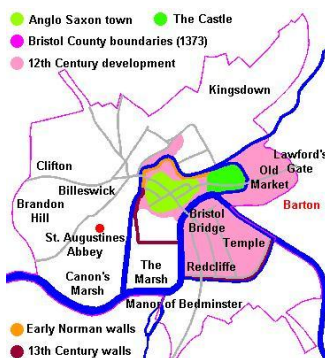


### Location of Weymouth Where Black Death Entered England

Map online, courtesy Saarland University (Saarbrücken, Germany).

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### Bristol Area in the 13th Century

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Medieval Drawing of People with Plague

From *Omne Bonum*

England (London); 1360-1375

British Library; Record Number: c6541-07; Shelfmark: Royal 6 E. VI; Page Folio Number: f.301

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Medieval-Drawing-of-People-with-Plague>





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