



0. LIFE GOES ON - Story Preface

1. HUMAN DEVASTATION

2. WHAT IS BUBONIC PLAGUE?

3. WHAT IS BLACK DEATH?

4. WHERE DID IT ORIGINATE?

5. MEDIEVAL EUROPEANS

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8. SOCIETY BREAKS DOWN

9. SCAPEGOATS

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11. WAS IT JUST THE RATS?

Imago Mortis ("Dance of Death")—part of the German-language *Nuremberg Chronicle*'s 1493 printed edition—folio CCLXI recto. The illustration was likely created by Michael Wolgemut. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Europe was already in turmoil before the Black Death killed so many people. As it spread - like a deadly, destructive wildfire across the continent - the plague was not the first (although it was the worst) catastrophe of the 14th century.

A cooler, wetter climate had caused lower crop yields just as the population was increasing. Not all economic and social changes in the second half of the 14th century can therefore be attributed to the epidemic.

But some changes appear directly related. Ever-present death, as an artistic theme, was virtually non-existent at the beginning of the 14th century. Artists like Giotto (1267-1337) created magnificent, colorful works evoking feelings of encouragement and confidence. Religious ideas combined with everyday life to present hope for mankind.

By the beginning of the 15th century, however, people and institutions commissioned paintings with a different message.

Artists created versions of danse macabre, the "dance of death." In these works, haunting skeletons mingle with people. Viewing them, one gets the sense that life at its best is never far from life at its worst. Or, put differently, the merrymaking of today is never far from the worries of tomorrow.

Before the Black Death devastated the work force, peasant rebellions would have been brutally quashed. After the contagion passed, fewer workers meant greater ability to state grievances. There just weren't enough people to work the land. Peasant uprisings, while crushed, left their mark and led to Europe's first class of independent farmers.

People also began to view the Church differently. They asked questions clerics could not answer. Why did this pestilence come upon us? If it is God's punishment (as many of the common folk believed), what did we do wrong?

Preexisting Church dogma eventually gave way to scientific and intellectual thinking. Some historians believe the Church's weakening authority in the wake of the pestilence paved the way for later reformers. Others, like the late David Herlihy, believed the pestilence helped to Christianize Europe.

When the most virulent outbreak of Bubonic Plague subsided, it did not die out completely. Throughout the last half of the 14th century, and into the 17th century, Black Death killed people. The eruptions were more local than widespread, however.

The last great epidemic occurred in England during 1664-65. Daniel Defoe, in *A Journal of the Plague Year*, describes its horrifying effects. (Follow this link to an on-line version of his book.)

Applying today's scientific methods, scholars try to determine whether plague was the only contagion spreading throughout Europe and Asia during the 14th century. If not, what do new interpretations mean for the future?

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/LIFE-GOES-ON-Black-Death>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/LIFE-GOES-ON-Black-Death>

Media Stream



Dance of Death - Imago Mortis from Nuremberg Chronicle

Imago Mortis ("Dance of Death") - part of the German-language *Nuremberg Chronicle*'s 1493 printed edition, folio CCLXI recto. The illustration was likely created by Michael Wolgemut. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Dance-of-Death-Imago-Mortis-from-Nuremberg-Chronicle>



Giotto

Portrait of Giotto, maintained at the Louvre.

From *The Five Masters of the Florentine Renaissance* (or Fathers of Perspective): Giotto, Uccello, Donatello, Manetti, Brunelleschi. Tempera on wood. Louvre.

It is believed the entire work was started by Uccello but was later finished by someone else.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Giotto>



Giotto Frescoes - Stunning Works in Padua

Image online, courtesy the Web Gallery of Art.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Giotto-Frescoes-Stunning-Works-in-Padua>



Scenes from a Shepherd's Life

Image online, courtesy the [Web Gallery of Art](http://www.webgalleryofart.com) website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Scenes-from-a-Shepherd-s-Life>



Hope for Mankind - Sharing with Each Other

Fresco - Upper Church, San Francesco, Assisi, Italy.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Hope-for-Mankind-Sharing-with-Each-Other>



Danse Macabre

Bernt Notke's Danse Macabre in Tallinn, Estonia.

St Nicholas Church is now the site of Niguliste Museum.

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Peasant Uprisings Crushed

Image, courtesy BnF.

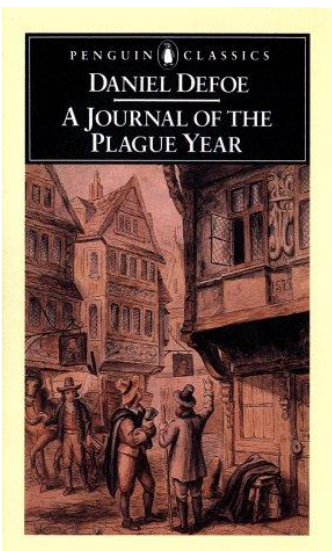
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Peasant Uprisings

Image, courtesy BnF.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Peasant-Uprisings>

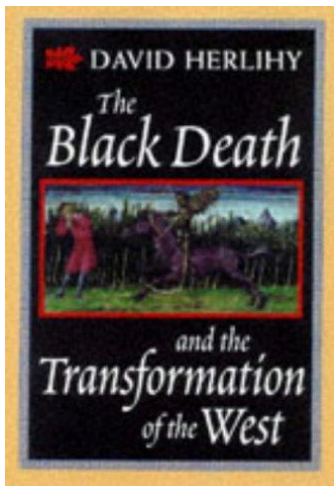


Daniel Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year

Book cover image, courtesy Amazon.com

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Daniel-Defoe-A-Journal-of-the-Plague-Year>



Transformation of the West, Post-Black Death

Book cover image, courtesy Amazon.com.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Transformation-of-the-West-Post-Black-Death>



LIFE GOES ON

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The Black Death - What Was It?

Clip from "[The Plague](#)," produced by the History Channel. Released by A&E Home Video in 2006.

Total run time: 100 minutes. Clip online, courtesy the History Channel.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Black-Death-What-Was-It->



The Black Death - Where Did It Originate?

Clip from "[The Plague](#)," produced by the History Channel. Released by A&E Home Video in 2006.

Total run time: 100 minutes. Clip online, courtesy the History Channel.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Black-Death-Where-Did-It-Originate->

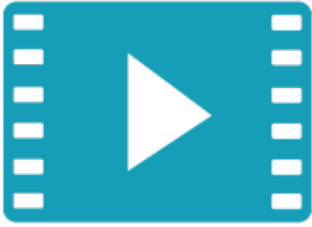


The Black Death - Biological Warfare

Clip from "[The Plague](#)," produced by the History Channel. Released by A&E Home Video in 2006.

Total run time: 100 minutes. Clip online, courtesy the History Channel.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Black-Death-Biological-Warfare>



The Black Death - Arrives in Western Europe

Clip from "[The Plague](#)," produced by the History Channel. Released by A&E Home Video in 2006.

Total run time: 100 minutes. Clip online, courtesy the History Channel.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Black-Death-Arrives-in-Western-Europe>



The Black Death - Scientific Evidence of Plague

Clip from "[The Plague](#)," produced by the History Channel. Released by A&E Home Video in 2006.

Total run time: 100 minutes. Clip online, courtesy the History Channel.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Black-Death-Scientific-Evidence-of-Plague>



The Black Death - Saving Lives by Fleeing Town

Clip from "[The Plague](#)," produced by the History Channel. Released by A&E Home Video in 2006.

Total run time: 100 minutes. Clip online, courtesy the History Channel.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Black-Death-Saving-Lives-by-Fleeing-Town>



The Black Death - Burying the Dead

Clip from "[The Plague](#)," produced by the History Channel. Released by A&E Home Video in 2006.

Total run time: 100 minutes. Clip online, courtesy the History Channel.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Black-Death-Burying-the-Dead>



The Black Death - Fighting Back

Clip from "[The Plague](#)," produced by the History Channel. Released by A&E Home Video in 2006.

Total run time: 100 minutes. Clip online, courtesy the History Channel.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Black-Death-Fighting-Back>