**The Bubonic Plague—the Black Death**

**I. Historic Context**

Although European society made many important advances after the Crusades, its progress had serious setbacks. The 14th century was a particularly difficult time for Europeans. The increased contact with other areas of the world did not only bring more than ideas and products to Mediterranean ports, but also disease. In 1347, a disaster struck the European population. It began when a ship from Genoa in northern Italy docked in the Sicilian port city of Messina. The ship was returning from a trading post in the Black Sea port of Caffa. Many of its crew members and passengers had large black swellings in their armpits and groin. Sores called boils and dark bruises covered their bodies. Others, with more severe types of the illness, burned with fever, coughed and spat up blood. Within a few days, the stricken people died. As the ship lay at anchor, some black rats scurried off it and ran into the city. In this way, the bubonic plague, known as the Black Death, entered Europe.



*. . . The late-medieval depression began well before the coming of the Black Death (1348–1349). The fundamental trends of demographic and economic decline were not set off by the plague, but they were enormously aggravated by it. Carried by fleas that infested black rats, the bubonic plague entered Europe along trade routes from the East and spread with frightening speed. The death toll cannot be determined with any precision. The best estimate would probably be to 1/3 of Europe’s population. In many crowded towns the mortality rate may well have exceeded 50 percent, whereas isolated rural areas tended to be spared.* Source: C. Warren Hollister, Medieval Europe: A Short History, Second Edition, John Wiley & Sons, 1968

*As more and more people left the countryside and moved into towns and cities, waste disposal and public hygiene in the increasingly congested areas became major concerns. Sewage and animal cadavers (animal remains) were thrown into the rivers; butchers let the blood of slaughtered animals flow into the gutters, as did dyers the contaminated water from their vats…For the most part municipal hygiene laws did little to prevent these practices... Some towns tried to restrict the activities of porcine [pig] scavengers, imposing a fine on owners who let their pigs run free...* Source: *What Life Was Like in the Age of Chivalry: Medieval Europe AD 800–1500,* Time-Life Books (adapted)

**According to the documents—MAPS, READINGS—what were the historical circumstances/context surrounding the spread of the Black Death in Western European society?**

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| **HISTORIC CONTEXT/CIRCUMSTANCES** | |
| **WHEN** |  |
| **WHERE** |  |
| **WHO** |  |
| **WHAT** |  |
| **WHY** |  |

**Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Band: \_\_\_\_\_\_**

**DIRECTIONS: You will be broken up into pairs and assigned to read one of the three documents. Actively read the source regarding the effects of the Black Death and summarize the impact the Black Death had on people, places, and societies. Then, in groups of three, share each of your findings.**

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| **DOCUMENTS- EFFECTS OF THE BLACK DEATH** | **HOW DID THE BLACK DEATH IMPACT PEOPLE, PLACES, AND SOCIETIES?** |
| **DOCUMENT 1:** *Physicians could not be found because they had died like the others. And those who could be found wanted vast sums in hand before they entered the house. And when they did enter, they checked the pulse with face turned away. They inspected the urine from a distance and with something odoriferous [to block the smell] under their nose. Child abandoned the father, husband the wife, wife the husband, one brother the other, one sister the other. In all the city there was nothing to do but to carry the dead to a burial. And those who died had neither confessor nor other sacraments. And many died with no one looking after them. . . . At every church, or at most of them, they dug deep trenches, down to the waterline, wide and deep, depending on how large the parish was. And those who were responsible for the dead carried them on their backs in the night in which they died and threw them into the ditch. The next morning, if there were many [bodies] in the trench, they covered them over with dirt. And then more bodies were put on top of them, with a little more dirt over those; they put layer on layer just like one puts layers of cheese in a lasagna.*  **Source**: Adapted from Stefani, Marchione di Coppo. *Cronaca fiorentina. Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, Vol. 30.* , ed. Niccolo Rodolico. Citta di Castello: 1903-13. |  |
| **DOCUMENT 2:** *There was no one who wept for any death, for all awaited death. And so many died that all believed that it was the end of the world. And no medicine or any other defense availed. . . .And it is found that at this time there died in Siena. 36,000 persons twenty years of age or less, and the aged and other people [died], to a total of 52,000 in all in Siena. And in the suburbs of Siena 28,000 persons died; so that in all it is found that in the city and suburbs of Siena 80,000 persons died. Thus at this time Siena and its suburbs has more than 30,000 men [adult males]; and there remained in Siena [alone] less than 10,000 men. And those that survived were like persons distraught and almost without feeling. . .I will not write of the cruelties that would be too painful to those who read them. . . The city of Siena seemed almost uninhabited for almost no one was found in the city. And then, when the pestilence (plague) abated [lessened], all who survived gave themselves over to pleasures: monks, priests, nuns, and lay men and woman all enjoyed themselves, and none worried about spending and gambling. And everyone through himself rich because he has escaped and regained the world, and no one knew how to allow himself to do nothing. . . .1349. After the great pestilence (plague) of the past year each person lived according to his own caprice [impulse], and everyone tended to seek pleasure in eating and drinking, hunting, catching birds, and gaming.*  **Source:** From William Bowsky, ed., *The Black Death, A Turning Point in History?* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston). Reprinted in Norman F. Cantor, ed. *The Medieval Reader* (New York: Harper Pernnial, 1994), 280-281. |  |
| **DOCUMENT 3:** *Jews throughout the world were reviled [hated] and accused in all lands of having caused it [the plague] through the poison which they are said to have put into the water and the wells . . . and for this reason the Jews were burnt all the way from the Mediterranean into Germany, but not in Avignon, for the pope protected them there. Nevertheless they tortured a number of Jews in Berne and Zofingen [Switzerland] who then admitted that they had put poison into many wells, and they also found the poison in the wells. Thereupon they burnt the Jews in many towns. . . . On Saturday - that was St. Valentine’s Day - they burnt The Jews on a wooden platform in their cemetery. There were about two thousand of them. Those who wanted to baptize themselves were spared. Many small children were taken out of the fire and baptized against the will of their fathers and mothers. And everything that was owed to the Jews was cancelled, and the Jews had to surrender all pledges and notes that they had taken for debts. The council, however, took the cash that the Jews possessed and divided it among the working-men proportionately. The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews. If they had been poor and if the feudal lords had not been in debt to them, they would not have been burnt. After this wealth was divided among the artisans some gave their share to the Cathedral or to the Church on the advice of their confessors.*  **Source:** The Cremation of Jews in Strasbourg, Germany on St. Valentine’s Day, February 14, 1349 Adapted from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/1348-jewsblackdeath.html> |  |

**Homework: Answer the Stimulus Multiple Choice questions.**

**Q1*. This disease had implanted so great a terror in the hearts of men and women that brothers abandoned brothers, uncles, their nephews…But even worse, fathers and mothers refused to nurse and care for their own children****.”*

**This quotation shows that**

1. the onset of the plague strengthened the commercial transaction and the social fabric of communities
2. one of the symptoms of the plague was a pink rash on the skin.
3. many people acted courageously during the plague
4. the plague destroyed family ties

**Q2. . . .The impact of the pandemic on Christian Europe is fairly well known since the Black Death has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention. This interest has led to a misconception of the Black Death as primarily a European phenomenon. Regrettably, the Black Death in the Orient has not attracted a comparable interest, but this neglect should not be interpreted as an indication of its lack of historical significance. The famous fourteenth-century Muslim historian, Ibn Khaldun, who lost his parents and a number of his teachers during the Black Death in Tunis, recognized the import of the pandemic for Islamic civilization: . . .**

**— Michael W. Dols, Viator (adapted)**

**Which statement expresses the author’s argument regarding misconceptions related to the Black Death?**

1. Primary sources have been difficult to find.
2. Testimonies about the Black Death are unreliable
3. The causes of the Black Death are not understood by historians
4. Historical study has focused more on one region rather than on others.

**How did the Black Death affect the people, places and societies—8 sentence minimum?**

In your response, be sure to

* Topic sentence with a thesis/claim (positive/negative)
* Evidence and examples- minimum of 2 (3 for a score of a 5)
* Analysis
* Link-Closing sentence

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| **EXCELLENT (5)**   * Clearly identifies 3 or more examples regarding the impact of the Black Death on people, places and societies. * Evidence and examples presented pertain to task in great detail and support thesis. * Develops a thoughtful and in-depth argument about it impacts people or how they have been affected. * Is more analytical or descriptive * Meets sentence requirement. | **GOOD (4-3.5)**   * Identifies the impact of the Black Death (minimum of 2) on people, places and societies. * Evidence and examples presented pertain to task with sufficient detail, support thesis. * Develops an argument in some detail about how the E.I. affected people. * Is more descriptive than analytical. * Meets sentence requirement. | **SATISFACTORY (3-1)**   * Identifies the effects of the Black Death (minimum of 1 accurate) may include minor inaccuracies or inaccurately identifies one. * Evidence and examples are used, but there are minimal details and/or does not clearly support the position taken. * Argument is not clearly explained on in depth about how the E.I. affected people. * Lacks analysis; provides only description. * Does not meet sentence requirement or may meet sentence requirement, but does not fully develop the task. | **UNSATISFACTORY (0)**   * Fails to develop the task or may only refer to the issue in a general way; OR includes no relevant facts, examples, or details; OR includes only evidence copies from the documents; OR includes only entire documents copied; OR is illegible; OR is a blank paper. |