

“And there was in those days death without sorrow, marriage without affection, self-imposed penance, want without poverty and flight without escape. How many who fled from the face of pestilence were already infected and did not escape the slaughter.”

John of Reading

Europe in the 1340s

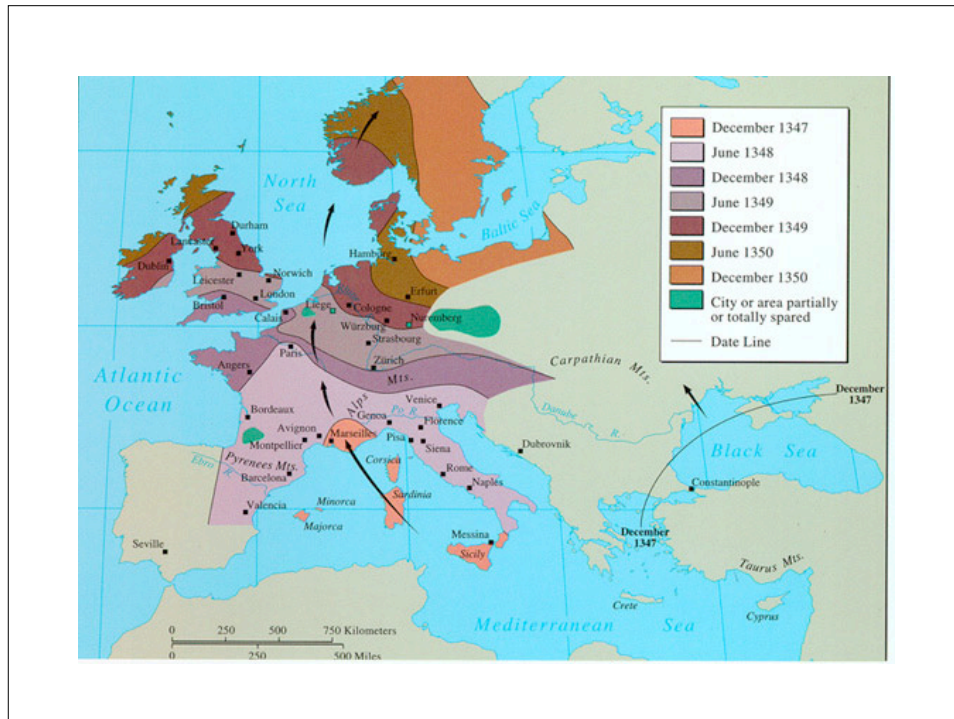
- The “Little Ice Age”
The Great Famine 1318–22
- High population, limited land, but still most people lived on the land, not in towns.
- Growing trade with the East

The Nature of the Black Death

- Bubonic – buboes, 40-50% mortality
- Pneumonic – lungs, 90% mortality
 - Primary – spread by air
 - Secondary – spread to lungs from lymph nodes
- Septicemic – bloodstream, 100% mortality
 - Primary – begins in the blood system
 - Secondary – spreads from the lymph nodes

The Spread of the Plague

- East Asia, spreading Westward to **Kaffa** on the Black Sea
- October 1347 – Genovese from Kaffa reached Messina
- From Italy along the Mediterranean
- From the Mediterranean Northwards
 - France, Spring 1348
 - England, Fall 1348
 - Russia, 1351
- People could see the plague coming and tried to flee, but only carried the disease with them



What Caused the Plague?

- Punishment from God
- Poisoning of the wells
- *Paris Consilium 1348*
 - celestial: conjunction of planets
 - terrestrial: noxious gases released by earthquakes
- *Yersinia pestis*
 - Carried by fleas on black rats



Hardly anyone dared to have anything to do with the sick. They fled from the things left by the dead, which had once been precious but were now poisonous to health. People who one day had been full of happiness, on the next were found dead. Some were tormented by boils which broke out suddenly in various parts of the body, and were so hard and dry that when they were lanced hardly any liquid flowed out. Many of these people escaped, by lancing the boils or by long suffering. Other victims had little black pustules scattered over the skin of the whole body. Of these people very few, indeed hardly any, recovered life and health.

Geoffrey le Baker

Results

- 40–50% of all population died
 - Estimates are very controversial
 - Lowest estimate 15%, Highest 65%
- All of Europe, both town and country hit
 - Venice – 75% died
 - Other closed communities badly hit, e.g. monasteries
 - Meaux Abbey – 80% of all monks died
- All levels of society hit
 - Princess Joan of England
 - Many priests

“[This] mortality devoured such a multitude of both sexes that no one could be found to carry the bodies of the dead to burial, but men and women carried the bodies of their own little ones to church on their shoulders and threw them into mass graves, from which arose such a stink that it was barely possible for anyone to go past a churchyard.”

Historia Roffensis

Consequences

- Socioeconomic
 - **Populations** continued to decline
 - Now plenty of land but shortage of laborers
 - Landlords competed for labor
 - Raised expectations, social upheaval
 - Recession and rapid inflation
 - New taxes to make up for lost income
 - Popular rebellions:
 - Jacquerie** (France),
 - Peasants Revolt** (England)

In the following autumn a reaper was not to be had for a lower wage than 8d, with his meals; a mower for not less than 10d, with meals. Wherefore many crops wasted in the fields for lack of harvesters [...]

After the aforesaid pestilence, many building, great and small, fell into ruins in every city, borough, and village for lack of inhabitants, likewise many villages and hamlets became desolate, not a house being left in them, all having died who dwelt there; and it was probable that many such villages would never be inhabited.

Henry Knighton

- **Religious**
 - Lack of faith in the church
 - Support for marginal groups, e.g. flagellants, lollards
 - Support for secular groups instead of the church
 - Obsession with the suffering of Christ
- **Attitudes to minorities**
 - Pogroms against the jews and lepers
- **Psychological**
 - The end of the world
 - obsession with death
 - deep pessimism
 - survivor guilt
 - transience of life



On all sides is sorrow; everywhere is fear. I would, my brother, that I had never been born, or, at least, had died before these times. How will posterity believe that there has been a time when without the lightnings of heaven or the fires of earth, without wars or other visible slaughter, not this or that part of the earth, but well-nigh the whole globe, has remained without inhabitants [...]

Oh happy people of the future, who have not known these miseries and perchance will class our testimony with the fables. We have, indeed, deserved these [punishments] and even greater; but our forefathers also have deserved them, and may our posterity not also merit the same..

Petrarch