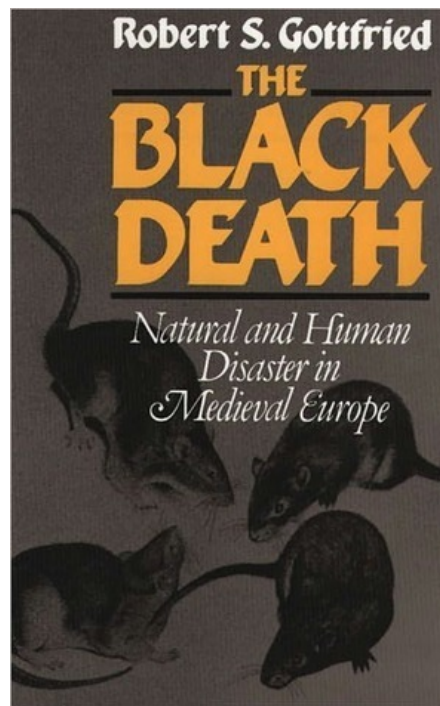




The Black Death: Natural and Human Disater in Medieval Europe

Robert Steven Gottfried

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A fascinating work of detective history, *The Black Death* traces the causes and far-reaching consequences of this infamous outbreak of plague that spread across the continent of Europe from 1347 to 1351. Drawing on sources as diverse as monastic manuscripts and dendrochronological studies (which measure growth rings in trees), historian Robert S. Gottfried demonstrates how a bacillus transmitted by rat fleas brought on an ecological reign of terror—killing one European in three, wiping out entire villages and towns, and rocking the foundation of medieval society and civilization.

The Black Death: Natural and Human Disater in Medieval Europe Details

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From Reader Review The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe for online ebook

Victoria says

A solid overview of the impact of the Black Death on the society, politics, economy and culture of Europe into the sixteenth century. Argues that it was sufficiently massive a crisis that it irrevocably altered European society, breaking down older bonds and forms of social organization, the recreation of which ultimately led to the construction of a modern European society. Not entirely convincing in many aspects, but does capture the major demographic, epidemiological, and cultural shifts that occurred as a result of the plague and its recurrences.

Jennifer says

Dry but informative

The information given is dry but interesting. Sometimes more academic than a lay person would want. Many gems of information within the text, better organization would have made it much easier to read.

Doug says

Not that it wasn't a well researched and thorough book, and not that he didn't make a good argument for the centrality of The Black Death as a turning point in Mediterranean history...still the best thing about it was the cover. Interminable statistics, prosaic writing, and some repetitiveness made it a pleasure to finish. If one were a medievalist working on The Black Death, one would want to read this book. No one else should bother.

Roses says

I read this book as a kid and it started a fascination with epidemiology and the social consequences of epidemics that persists to this day. It presents the plague in the context of the economic and social conditions of the time and includes quotes from contemporary sources that convey the devastating effect the plague had. Although it's only 203 pages long the book is a well-researched and comprehensive account of this turning point in history.

Teejay says

While an interesting (if not terribly-jolly) read, this work seems more of a study on the available actuarial tables of the period in question, than a treatise on the plagues/pandemics themselves. As another reviewer commented, there are very few personal stories, and almost no treatment of the medical facts themselves: the etiology of *Y. pestis*, transfer mechanisms, physiological effects, etc. Still, an Excellent treatment of societal

and demographic results. Recommended, if you want a good starter book on the topic.

Wednesday Mourning says

All though a interesting read it focused more on actual figures than personal stories.

It appeared to be a general reader on the subject but ended up being a hard facts books akin to a textbook on the Black Death. After reading several pages of percentages and geographical facts my head was spinning..but I did manage to glean some very interesting facts from it:

The Y.Pestis bacilli naturally lives in some species of rat's stomachs but does not affect other animals unless the flea is 'blocked"..a over abundance of the bacteria in the flea resulted in having to regurgitate the bacteria on their hosts in order for them to feed.

So that was pretty gross...a bunch of fleas puking on humans causing massive death..fun!

I also did not realize that Plague affected animals as well as humans...accept horses...fleas can't smell the smell of horses and therefore they were safe.

And no one suspected the rodents even though most accounts of the onset of plague reffered to the "vermin coming up from underground to die". The most common theory at the time was the odd alignment of the cosmos....i.e. the placement of Venus and Mars resulted in "bad air" coming from space and cuasing death. Odd.

All of the world was affected over a 2 year time killing almost a third of the world's population and as a result causing change in art styles. This part was really fascinating to me, the "Post-Plague" art movement resulted in Death being a major theme of art at the time. Grave stone angels where replaced by statues of decaying corpses and the traditional religious iconography of the virgin Mary/Child was replaced by a desiccated mary covered in toads and snakes(a common post-plague theme) while a dissinterested baby Jesus watches his mother die.

I would LOVE to get my hands on a Post-Plague art book.

I go in search of that now...

Mohamed halaweish says

From the first while I speculated from the title that's this book gonna cover a stories and assets the consequent result of Black Death but the historical records and and the scientific methodology appeared brilliant and how the death statices among any population section or from the transaction oscillation or from any source give idea about the past condition . Although the vastness of numbers and record bored me some how , I rated the book 5 star for this methodology and the division of the impact of Black Death on major aspects of life .

Kate says

If you can plow through the statistics and the geography, this is a fascinating description of all the factors surrounding the recurrent plague epidemics of 1347-late 1400s.

Jeff says

Well written historical account of the plagues that swept Europe and Asia throughout the 13th, 14th & 15th centuries and how these plagues impacted socio-economics as well as medicine. The author has no doubt invested years of research into the subject.

Jessica Malice says

I started reading this because it was on my bookshelf. Whence did it come there? I think I must have gotten it from a Lifeline Bookfest years ago.

Anyway I read it until about chapter 5, at which point the (what I figured to be) outdated research (it being published in 1983) started bugging me enough to find a more modern book. I began reading The Black Death which, as it was referenced more often than any other lay black death history, I surmised must be better.

Well I am only halfway through Ziegler's book and so far it is basically a listing of manner of entry into a port, then the estimated mortality, literally country by country. Not particularly thrilling reading. So I went back to this book which, while it has similar chapters, is written in a more engaging style.

It covers the etiology first up, and explores and compares other infectious diseases of the time. As well as the country-by-country and city-by-city listing of heinously dull figures (ok, got it, anywhere between 15-60% died taking the grossly exaggerated records into account and looking at other records of the time like differences in taxes received and where newly trained clergy were sent to take the place of OK GOT IT - DO WE NEED THIS REITERATED FOR EVERY GOSH DARNED CITY REALLY).

It examines theories of the time which was cool. Smitings from God, obvs, but also astrology - the most advanced science of the time - and how a conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter and some other planet (my memory ain't great) altered the humours of Earth. How they tried to treat it (uh we have no idea. Burn junk that smells nice to counteract the evil airs coming from space?) Then finally we look at changes in society - medical practices, socio-political structures, commerce, agriculture and art - and how these were directly linked to the black death and its recurring pandemics over the next 400 years. This was more what I was after and it was good, but it was done in a pretty broad and general way and I would have liked more detail and specific examples, particularly into the medical aspect.

I couldn't help but draw comparisons between pre-plague overpopulation and current times, and how the plague saved the environment and at the end of the day made everyone richer in many ways. Traumatized, but we're over that by now and the world's probably heaps better as a result. I'm not saying I want everyone to suffer horribly... I'm just saying it's time for a new plague.

My favourite part was that pretty much the only creature impervious to plague was horses. because they are magic.

D Cox says

Geography and statistics one other reviewer wrote and I agree. This is a good source of factual information on the plague's origin and advance and impact on Europe. It's not a collection of anecdotes and human

stories. I knew nothing at all about 14c plague and I now feel very well informed. An educating easy to read book.

Bill says

If you have any fantasies about life in the middle ages this book will end them. Life was hard and short and then came the plague which killed half the population of Europe. The plus side is in the long term it allowed the modern world to come together as the old medieval society could no longer function but it seems like a damned hard way to do it.

Kevin A. says

A broad overview of the effects of the plague on 14th and 15th century Europe. (Gottfried makes mention of Egypt, the "people of the Steppes," and the Ottomans, but mostly this is England, France, Germany and Italy.)

It's almost impossible to conceive of an epidemic where a society would lose 15-40% of its population in a matter of weeks and months, and the plague kept periodically reappearing until the 17th century. Europe, which was teetering on the edge of overpopulation, didn't recover its previous population for 150 years.

This is a thoughtful and scholarly (if not especially gripping) account of environmental crisis, but one wonders if the scientific advances of the past 30 years wouldn't lead to a re-evaluation of the era.

Susan Olesen says

Dull and scholarly, it nonetheless presents some fascinating ideas on how the Black Death and subsequent depopulation changed the face of history, economically, medically, philosophically, and politically. If you can get through the dullness, the material really was quite interesting, and made me think and reexamine many things. Not your average beach read, but if you're into the topic for whatever reason, it's worth your while.

Anne Holmes says

A very interesting book.

I enjoyed this book very much and it treats the subject in much greater depth than others I have read on the subject.
