

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Great Plague

Nearly half of the people of Europe died during the fourteenth century in a great plague. A plague is a widespread illness. The plague paved a path of destruction that played no favorites, killing both the powerful and weak, the young as well as the old. The plague was later called "the Black Death" because of the black spots that formed on the skin of diseased people.

The sickness apparently began in Central Asia. In 1347, Italian merchant ships returned from the Black Sea, one of the links along the trade route between Europe and China. The ships were dirty and infested with rats. Fleas living on the blood of infected rats carried the disease, and transferred it to the seamen. Many of the sailors were already dying of the plague as the infected ships returned to port, and within days of an infected ship's arrival, the disease spread from the port cities to the surrounding countryside. The plague reached Spain, France,

England and Russia within three years.

Although it is impossible to calculate exactly how many people died from the plague, evidence suggests that it claimed the lives of as many as 25 million Europeans.

By the time of the plague, many European people were weakened by a slight drop in temperature later called the Little Ice Age. A shorter growing season and affected food production, weakening many people in overcrowded cities as a medical disaster loomed.

The first sign of the plague was often an ache in the limbs. The lymph nodes would then swell. The lymph nodes are glands found in the neck, armpits, and groin. The swelling continued for three or four days until the lymph nodes burst. The illness is often called Bubonic Plague. *Buboes* is a Greek word that refers to swollen glands.

The swiftness of the disease, the enormous pain and the grotesque appearance of its victims served to make the plague especially terrifying.

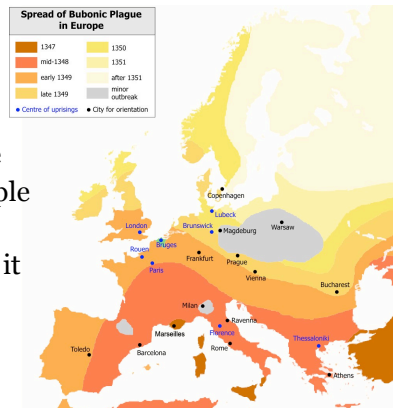
Death from the plague was horrible, but swift. The Italian writer Boccaccio said victims often "ate lunch with their friends, and ate dinner with their ancestors in paradise."

Europeans were susceptible to disease because many people lived in crowded surroundings in an era when the role of personal hygiene in the spread of disease was not understood. -The Europeans often ate stale or diseased meat because refrigeration had not yet been invented. Fourteenth century medicine in Europe was primitive and unable to remedy an illness that modern technology might have cured. Bad medical advice also advanced the plague. People were advised to not bathe because open skin pores might let in the disease. The devastation of the plague led to advances in medicine. Cities began to build hospitals and enforce standards for sanitation.

Some Europeans believed the plague was a sign from God. Groups known as flagellants tried to atone for the sins of the world by inflicting punishments upon themselves. The flagellants also had a tendency to persecute Jews and even clergymen who spoke out against them. Eccentric and unusual people were often charged with witchcraft and sorcery. Jews were often blamed for causing the disease leading to many Jewish massacres. Pope Clement VI condemned the flagellants and the killing of Jews, but the hysteria continued to reappear in times of plague.

The Great Plague transformed European society. Entire villages were sickened, forcing the few remaining survivors to move to cities to find work. Labor shortages caused by the death toll led to increased wages. Feudal lands were often converted to grazing because grazing required less labor than farming. The need for a public response to the health crisis led to a weakening of feudalism and the development of more modern government in many places.

The Great Plague continued to affect cities from time to time for hundreds of years. It still exists and is common among rodents. We now have a cure for the disease, but occasionally people in isolated places still die from Bubonic Plague.



*This is a higher order learning question. You will earn credit for any reasonable answer.

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Fill in the Blanks

Europe was ravaged in the f_u_t_e_th century by the B_a_k D_a_h, a great s_c_n_ss that killed nearly h__f of the people on the *c_n_i_e_t. The plague was transported by d_r_y, rat infested s_____ that traveled between C_n_r_l Asia and I_a_y. The plague first appeared in Europe in 13____, but spread as far as E_g_a_d and R_s_ia by 1351.

The sickness was called the B_b_n_c Plague because it infected glands called l_m_h n_d_s. *Bubos* is a Greek work that refers to s_o_l_n glands. Within three or four days of *i_f_c_i_n, a victim's lymph nodes would s_e_l and b_r_t. Plague victims often suffered a quick but agonizing death.

The Great Plague persisted because of the poor s_n_t_ry conditions in European cities. People often ate s_a_e or d_s_a_ed meat and personal h_g_e_e was a priority for most people. A group of religious people called f_a_e_l_n_s believed the p_a_ue was a sign from God and tried to atone for the sins of the world by inflicting p_n_s_m_n_s on t_e_s_l_es and others.

The Great Plague still e_i_ts and is common among r_d_n_s, but we now have a c_____ and the s_c_n_ss exists only in i_o_a_ed places.

Answer in complete sentences

1. Why was the Great Bubonic Plague also known as the Black Death?

2. What does Bubonic refer to?

3. Explain what Boccaccio meant when he said victims often “ate lunch with their friends, and ate dinner with their ancestors in paradise.”

4. Why were the flagellants troublesome for many European cities suffering from the plague?

5. Explain how the Great Plague transformed Europe/

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