

Voices in the Shadow of Death: The Lost Narratives of the Bubonic Plague and Covid-19

Warm Up: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXFjjwGIVsw>

While watching the video compare your experiences during Covid-19 with those of other teenagers.

BHH *Reading*

When you read think about what is...

 **...in the Book** What's this book about?
Who's telling the story?
What does the author want me to know?

 **...in your Head** What surprised me?
What does the author think I already know?
What challenged, changed or confirmed my thinking?
What did I notice?

 **...in your Heart** What did I learn about me?
How will this help me to be better?
How did this make me feel?

Book

Head

Heart

Historical Context

The Bubonic Plague or “Black Death” came out of the eastern Mediterranean along shipping routes, reaching Italy in the spring of 1348. By the time the epidemic was abating in 1351, between 25% and 50% of Europe’s population had died. The epidemic is believed to have started in China and made its way west across Asia to the Black Sea. One theory is that it entered Europe when a group of Tartars used catapults to hurl the dead bodies of infected soldiers over the walls of a Genoian trading outpost that was under siege. Because people had no defense against the disease and no understanding of how it spread, it brought panic as well as illness and death. Lepers, as well as Jews and other ethnic and religious minorities, were accused of spreading the plague and thousands of people were executed.



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Directions: You will analyze documents about the Black Death and the modern Covid-19 pandemic and analyze the following questions:

- Summarize the sources and their events taking place in the documents.
- Who is controlling the narrative?
- Who's voice(s) are not being represented or heard?
- What misinformation/rumors not grounded in scientific thought are traveling alongside the spread of the pandemics?

Document#1

The author of this account, Henrich Truchess von Diessenhoven, was a canon of Constance who had been a chaplain of Pope John XXII (d.1334.)

“The Persecution of the Jews began in November 1348, and the first outbreak in Germany was at Sölden, where all the Jews were burnt on the strength of a rumor that they had poisoned wells and rivers, as was afterwards confirmed by their own confessions and also by the confessions of Chrstians whom they had corrupted and who had been induced by the Jews to carry out the deed. And some of the Jews who were newly baptised said the same. Some of they remained in the faith but some others relapsed, and when these were placed upon the wheel they confessed that they had themselves sprinkled poison or poisoned rivers. And thus no doubt remained of their deceitfulness which had now been revealed. Within the revolution of one year, that is from All Saints 1348 until Michaelmas 1349 all the Jews between Cologne and Austria were burnt and killed for this crime, young men and maidens and the old along with the rest. And blessed be God who confounded the ungodly who were plotting the extinction of his church, not realising that it is founded on a sure rock and who, in trying to overturn it, crushed themselves to death and were damned for ever.”

“The Persecutions of the Jews”, Henrich Truchess, (ed) Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death*, p. 208.

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Response:	Response:	Response:.

Document#2

Andre Benezzeit, burgess of Narbonne and deputy of Aymer, Vicomte of Narbonne, to the jurés of Gerona.

“We have received your letters in which, as prudent men wishing to avoid future danger, you asked us to inform you by letter about the mortality of people which God has allowed to start Romania and which which has reached the region around Avignon, Narbonne and Carcassonne, whether or not it has been caused by potions or poisons placed in various places by many people, if people have been arrested for this and have confessed; if they were

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subsequently punished and if so, how; and at whose instigation these things are said to have been done. Concerning these matters we now inform you that in Narbonne Carcassone, Grasse and the places roundabout there has been throughout Lent, and still is, such a great mortality that the common opinion is that it has killed a quarter of the inhabitants. And by the scent of the said potion or poison many beggars and mendicants of the various countries were found and arrested for the crime in Narbonne and elsewhere, carrying (as they said and it appeared) powdered substances which they were putting into rivers, houses, churches, and foodstuffs to kill people. Some of them have confessed as much of their own free will, others under torture. They are sticking to their confessions, admitting that they were given the potions in various places by people whose identities and names they say they do not know. But since they were given money to scatter the deadly potions, the most likely explanation is that these things were done on behalf of the enemies of France, although it is still not possible to be absolutely sure. Anyway, those who confessed in Narbonne were torn by red hot pincers, disembowelled, their hands cut off, and then burnt. Justice was done on four in Narbonne, five in Carcassonne, two in Grasse, and many others have been arrested for the same offence.”

“Accusations of Well=Poisoning Against the Poor; Narbonne 17 April 1348”, Jaime Villanueva, (ed) Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death*, pp. 222-23.

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Document#3

Geoffrey de Meaux was an astrologer who had been associated with the French court earlier in the fourteenth century. The astrological measurements even in this treatise, however, relate to Oxford, which suggests that it was composed (or at least rewritten) there. Unlike the three astrologers mentioned in 57 de Meaux wrote this commentary on the 1345 conjunctions after the outbreak of plague, and accordingly stresses the malign role of Saturn and Mars rather than the possible contribution of Jupiter.

“I have been asked by some of my friends to write something about the cause of this general pestilence, showing its natural cause, and why it affected so many countries, and why it affected some countries more than others, and why within those countries it affected some cities and towns more than others, and why in one town it affected on street, and even one house, more than another, and why it affected nobles and gentry less than other people, and how long it will last....Ptolemy in chapter 4 of the third book of his Qudripartitum cites Plato and Aristotle in support of the contention that God first created the heavens and the stars, and endowed them with the power to rule all earthly matters, and because of this it can be said everything which befalls us happens at the will of God; for it is God himself who moves the heavens and whatever is within them...Now that the basics have been discussed, you can consider the reasons for such a great mortality in so many countries, and how the illness came through the influence of the stars.Ptolemy in chapter 5 of the second part of the Quadripartitum says; the important things are the strengths and powers of the hour, the conjunctions and oppositions, eclipses of the sun and moon, and the places the planets cross at that hour.”

“The Astrological Causes of the Plague”, Geoggrey de Meaux, (ed) Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death*, pp. 167-172.

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Document#4

This and the following text come from the sermons preached by the Bishop of Rochester, Thomas Brinton, in 1375. Brinton, a Benedictine monk, was one of the great preachers of his day and was not afraid to berate his contemporaries...The extract is from a sermon preached on 21 January 1375. This was before the major outbreak of plague that year, but plague is one of the afflictions which Brinton lists as the due punishment for the sins of contemporaries.

“Let us look at what is happening now. We are not strong or fortunate in war. We are not stable in faith. We are not honourable in the eyes of the world - on the contrary, we are of all men the falsest, and in consequence are not loved by God. It is undoubtedly for that reason that there exists in the kingdom of England so marked a diminution of fruitfulness, so cruel a pestilence, so much injustice, so many illegitimate children - for there is on every side so much lechery and adultery that few men are contented with their own wives, but each man lusts after the wife of his neighbour, or keeps a stinking concubine in addition to his wife, however beautiful and honest she might be; behaviour which merits a horrible and wretched death...”

“The Sins of the English”, Thomas Brinton, (ed) Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death*, pp. 137-143.

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Document #5

[Sources believe coronavirus outbreak originated in Wuhan lab as part of China's efforts to compete with US](#)

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Document #6

[Asian Americans in San Francisco are dying at alarming rates from COVID-19: Racism is to blame](#)

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Document #7

[Undocumented in the Pandemic: 'Nowhere Else to Go'](#)

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Document #8

[Between Borders](#)

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