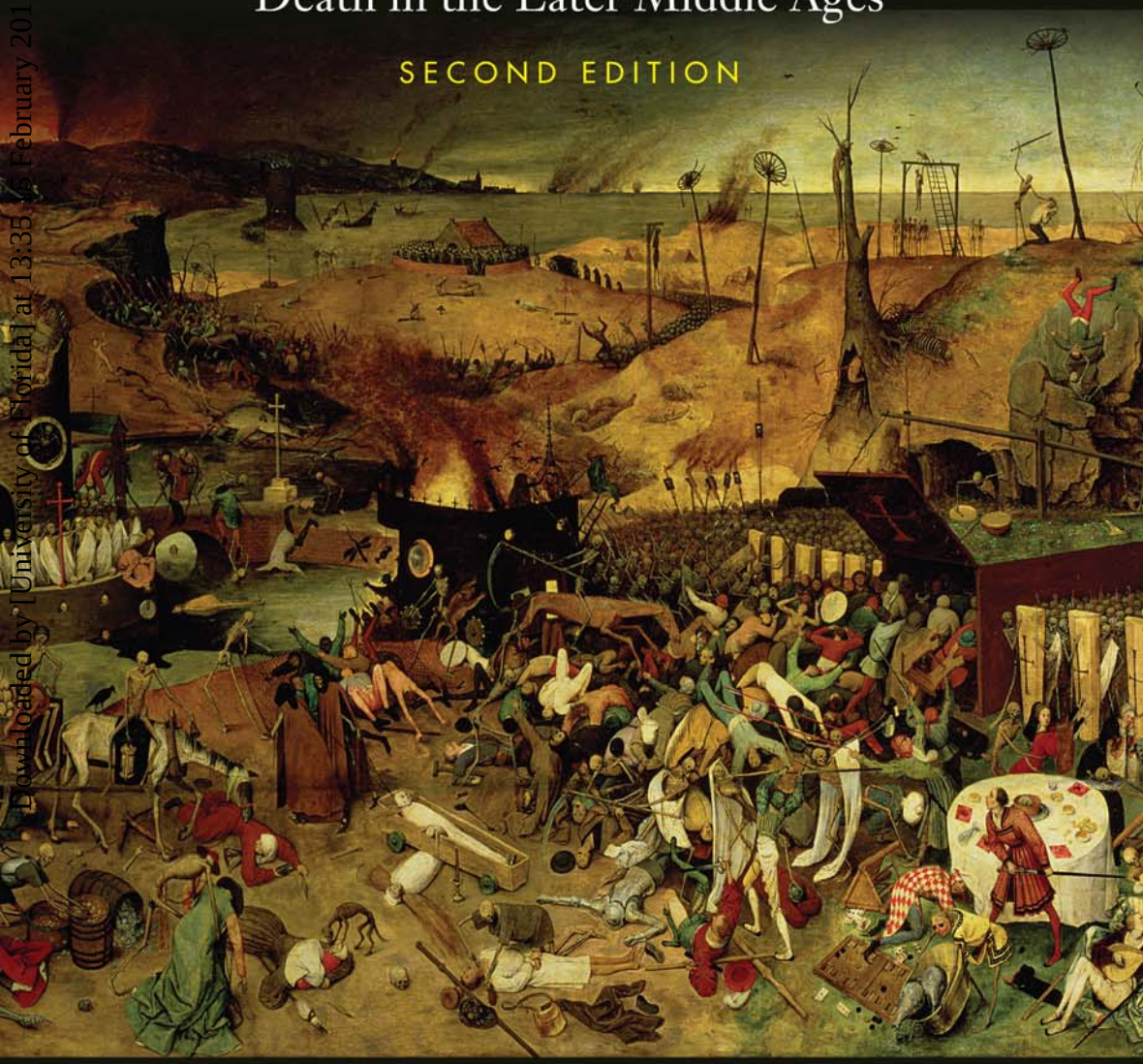
From the Brink of the Apocalypse

Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages

SECOND EDITION



JOHN ABERTH

ROUTLEDGE

FROM THE BRINK OF THE APOCALYPSE

Praise for the first edition:

> Aberth wears his very considerable and up-to-date scholarship lightly and his study of a series of complex and somber calamities is made remarkably vivid.
>
> Barrie Dobson, Honorary Professor of History, University of York.

> Thorough, balanced, and courteous in tone, this survey of the social, political, and moral landscape of the late Middle Ages inspires confidence even when it invites disagreement.
>
> *The New York Review of Books*

The later Middle Ages was a period of unparalleled chaos and misery – in the form of famine, war, plague, and death. At times, it must have seemed as if the end of the world was truly at hand. And yet, as John Aberth reveals in this lively work, late medieval Europeans' cultural assumptions uniquely equipped them to face up positively to the huge problems that they faced.

Relying on rich literary, historical, and material sources, the book brings this period and its beliefs and attitudes vividly to life. Taking his themes from the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, John Aberth describes how the lives of ordinary people were transformed by a series of crises, including the Great Famine, the Black Death and the Hundred Years War. Yet, he also shows how prayers, chronicles, poetry, and especially commemorative art reveal an optimistic people, whose belief in the apocalypse somehow gave them the ability to transcend the woes they faced on this earth.

This second edition is brought fully up to date with recent scholarship, and the scope of the book is broadened to include many more examples from mainland Europe. The new edition features fully revised sections on famine, war, and plague, as well as a new epitaph. The book draws some bold new conclusions and raises important questions, which will be fascinating reading for all students and general readers with an interest in medieval history.

John Aberth lives and teaches in Vermont. He is the author of five books, including *The First Horseman: Disease in Human History* (2007), *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348–1350* (2005), and *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film* (2003).

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Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages

Second edition

John Aberth

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FOR LAURA,

Chiare fresche et dolci acque, ove le belle
membre pose colei che sola a me par donna.

(Clear, fresh sweet waters,
where she, who seems to me
the only one among earth's
daughters, hath laid her dainty limbs)

Petrach

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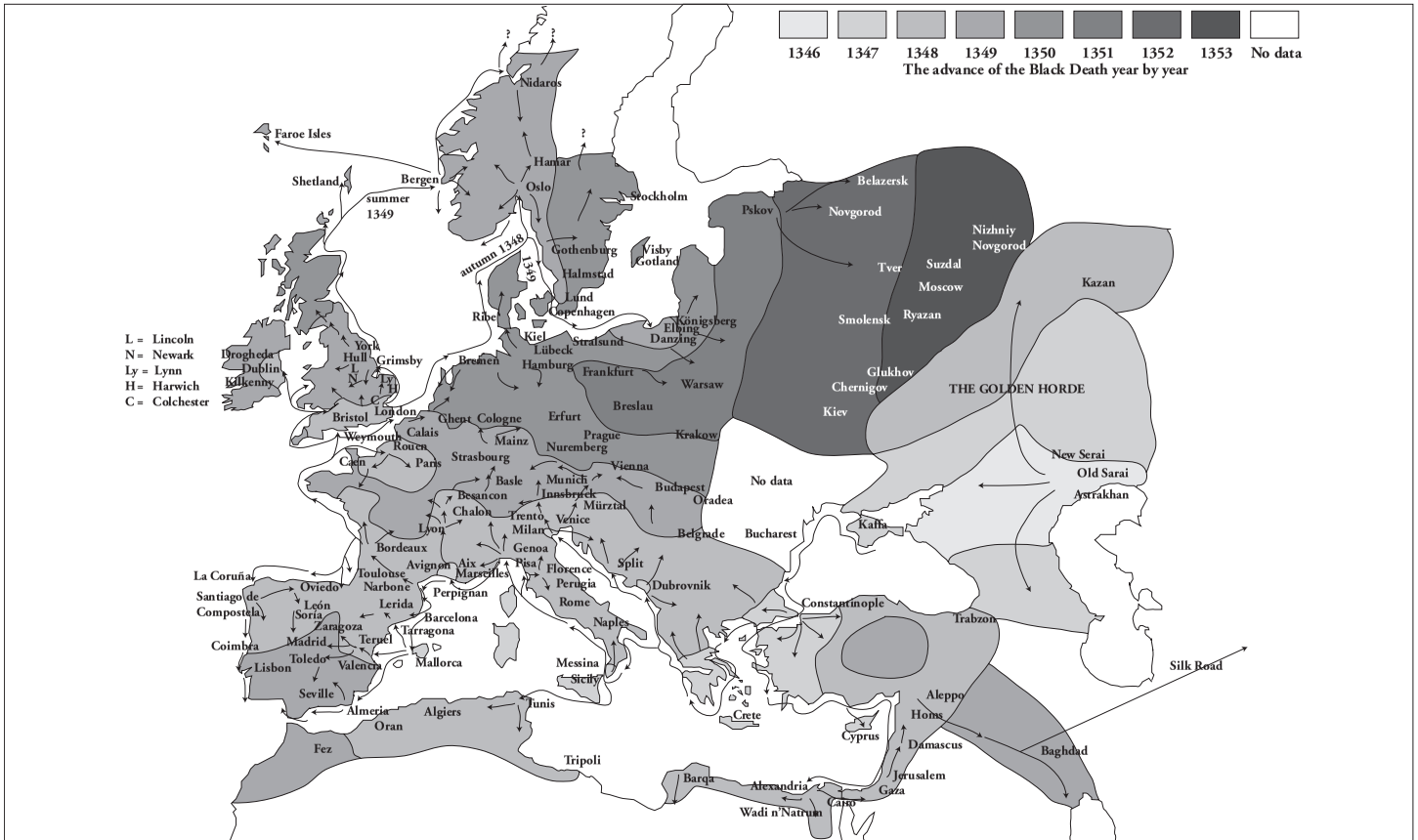
CHRONOLOGY

1302	Battle of Courtrai, in which Fleming militia from Bruges, Ghent, and Ypres defeat the French army of King Philip IV
1309	Pope Clement V moves the papal see from Rome to Avignon, beginning the "Babylonian Captivity"
1314	Battle of Bannockburn, in which Robert the Bruce of Scotland defeats the English army of King Edward II
1315	Battle of Mortgarten, in which the Swiss Confederation defeats the army of Duke Leopold I of Austria
1315–22	Great Famine throughout the British Isles and Northern Europe
1337	Outbreak of the Hundred Years War between England and France; King Philip VI of France confiscates the English duchy of Aquitaine in retaliation for Edward III's harboring of a condemned Frenchman, Robert of Artois.
1340	King Edward III of England formally assumes the title of king of France. Naval battle of Sluys, in which the English are victorious
1346–47	Battle of Crécy, in which the English army led by King Edward III defeats the French led by King Philip VI. After a year-long siege, the port of Calais falls to the English
1347–53	First outbreak of the Black Death throughout Europe; an average 50 percent of Europe's population dies from the disease
1356	Battle of Poitiers, in which the English army led by Edward the Black Prince defeats the French and takes prisoner King John II
1358	Revolt of the Jacquerie in France
1360	Treaty of Brétigny between England and France; Edward III agrees to renounce his claim to the French throne and release John II in return for an enlarged duchy of Aquitaine held in full sovereignty and 3 million gold crowns, or £500,000
1360–63	Second outbreak of plague in England and throughout Europe
1367	Battle of Nájera in Spain, in which Edward the Black Prince, allied with King Pedro the Cruel of Castile, defeats a Franco-Castilian army led by Henry of Trastámara
1369	Third outbreak of plague in England; resumption of war between England and France
1370	Famine in England

1371–74	Outbreak of plague in Italy
1374–79	Fourth outbreak of plague in England
1377	Pope Gregory XI moves the papal see back to Rome from Avignon, ending the "Babylonian Captivity"
1378	Great Schism breaks out between Pope Urban VI at Rome and Clement VII at Avignon, after the death of Pope Gregory XI in Rome. Revolt of the Ciompi in Florence
1381	Peasants' Revolt in England
1381–84	Outbreak of plague in Italy
1388–90	Outbreak of plague in Italy
1390–93	Fifth outbreak of plague in England
1396	Truce to last 28 years declared between England and France at Ardres near Calais; Battle of Nicopolis, in which a crusading army of French and Hungarians is defeated by the Ottoman sultan, Bayazid I
1398–1400	Outbreak of plague in Italy
1400	Outbreak of plague in England
1407	Outbreak of plague in England
1409	Council of Pisa fails to resolve the Schism, adding a third pope, Alexander V, to Gregory XII in Rome and Benedict XIII in Avignon
1413	Outbreak of plague in England
1414–18	Council of Constance ends the Great Schism, with the election of Martin V. The Bohemian reformer, Jan Huss, is burned at the stake
1415	Battle of Agincourt, in which an English army led by Henry V defeats the French
1419	Outbreak of the Hussite Wars in Bohemia
1420	Treaty of Troyes between England and France; Henry V of England is made regent and heir to the French throne. Outbreak of plague in England
1423	Outbreak of epidemic disease, perhaps plague, in England
1426–29	Outbreaks of epidemic disease, perhaps plague, in England
1429	Joan of Arc raises the English siege of Orléans in France and defeats the English army at battle of Patay. Charles VII is formally crowned king of France at Reims
1431	After a five-month trial, Joan of Arc is burned at the stake in Rouen
1433-35	Outbreaks of plague and famine in England
1434	Battle of Lipany, in which the radical Hussites are defeated, bringing an end to the Hussite Wars
1437–41	Outbreak of famine throughout Europe
1453	Battle of Castillon, in which the English are defeated by France, bringing an end to the Hundred Years War; Constantinople is besieged and taken by Ottoman sultan, Mehmed II
1455	Outbreak of the War of the Roses, a civil war in England between followers of Henry VI (Lancastrians or "Red Rose") and those of Richard, duke of York (Yorkists or "White Rose")
1463–64	Outbreaks of plague in England
1467	Outbreak of plague in England

1473	Outbreak of the "flux," probably dysentery, in England
1475	Outbreak of the "French pox," perhaps gonorrhea, among the English soldiers of King Edward IV in France
1477	Battle of Nancy, in which Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, is defeated and killed by the Swiss Confederation and the forces of René, duke of Lorraine
1479–80	A particularly severe outbreak of plague in England
1485	Battle of Bosworth, in which Richard III of England is defeated by his rival, Henry Tudor, bringing to a close the War of the Roses; outbreak of the "sweat" in London and East Anglia
1492	Fall of Granada, last Moorish city in Spain, to Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile; voyage of Christopher Columbus to America
1494	Charles VIII of France invades Italy in pursuit of French claims to the kingdom of Naples



The path of the Black Death over Europe (adapted from Ole Benedictow, *The Black Death, 1346–1353: The Complete History*, Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2005, with kind permission of Ole Benedictow).

The trade routes of medieval Europe (Adapted from J. P. McKay, B. D. Hill and J. Buckler, *A History ofWestern Society*, Volume I, eighth edition, Houghton Mifflin, 2006, p. 354, Copyright © Bedford/St.Martin's. Used with permission of the publisher.)

The counties of England as they existed during the Middle Ages

France after the Treaty of Brétigny, 1360

France on the eve of the victories of Joan of Arc, 1429

NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION

It's been nearly a decade now since I wrote this book on the apocalyptic crises of the late Middle Ages. That period of history in Europe (the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) has always exerted a peculiar fascination over me. It is perhaps inevitable that every civilization devised by humans will, at some point in its history, face a fearsome challenge (or a series of them) that constitutes a point of no return, when its very survival is at stake. Either the endangered society or culture will overcome the obstacles to its existence and carry on, albeit no doubt in altered form, or it will simply succumb to the oncoming storm and thence fade away into the dim memory of history. Some examples from the medieval period that readily come to mind include the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the Maya civilization in Central America between the eighth and tenth centuries, Great Zimbabwe in South Africa during the fifteenth century, and the Aztec and Inca empires in the early decades of the sixteenth century. In every case, the civilization in question declined and fell, and even though some point to cultural transitions that carried over into succeeding civilizations, there can be no doubt that the development of a distinctive society came to a conclusive end. However, I have chosen to study an example—medieval Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—that not only survived its crucible of crises but arguably emerged to become one of the most vibrant and dominant cultures on the world stage. By no means do I dare to suggest thereby that European culture was inherently superior to any other, for Europeans hardly did themselves any credit when they subsequently encountered other regions around the globe. I am merely curious to know how they were able to achieve such a remarkable feat. Though this book may not provide all the answers to that question, I think it does help us to understand a little better what Europeans were facing back then.

My reasons for updating *From the Brink of the Apocalypse* are threefold. When the book first came out in 2000, marking the second millennium of what is now called the *Common Era*, I intended it mainly as a challenge to the famous work by Johan Huizinga, *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* (translated variously as *The Waning of the Middle Ages* or *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*), which first appeared in Dutch just after the end of the First World War, in 1919. To this day, Huizinga's overall impression of the late Middle Ages as a dark and morbid time in European history, literally a "waning" of its culture, has remained stubbornly planted in the popular consciousness, aided and abetted by latter-day imitators, such as Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror* (1987). However, it has always been my belief that the persuasiveness of Huizinga's arguments has more to do with the style rather than the substance of what he has to say and that the pessimism he espouses in his book relates best of all to his own times,

the so-called "Lost Generation" that had become so disillusioned with civilization in general in the aftermath of World War I. And from a purely practical point of view, it never made sense to me that a society and culture that was supposedly "waning" was, at the very same time, also renewing and reinventing itself as part of the dawning "Renaissance" movement. I believe that Huizinga himself acknowledged this very contradiction, as I indicate in the Epitaph to this book. However, it has since come to my attention—largely through the gracious comments of fellow teachers and scholars—that students and readers remain skeptical of what they regard as my overly optimistic take on the late Middle Ages in Europe and that, to borrow from a Monty Python song, I am improbably trying to persuade them to "always look on the bright side of death." So it is partly in response to doubting Thomases and Huizinga defenders that I have completely rewritten the Epitaph, which will introduce a new concept I have been mulling over in my mind ever since the first edition: that the time of the late Middle Ages was one of "transcendence," rather than mere transformation to the Renaissance, and that late medieval society avoided its Apocalypse because it was able to transcend its crises, rather than simply being transformed by them. However, of this I'll explain more later.

A second reason for wanting to revise the book is one that will be familiar to all authors of new editions: to take into account new scholarship and new ideas that have come out since the previous publication of the work and to rethink some older arguments. I also have decided—again as the result of gracious comments provided by colleagues—to expand the geographical and temporal scope covered in this new edition. Specifically, I try to draw more examples from Europe outside of England and to traverse the fifteenth century as much as the fourteenth. These changes are most evident in the Famine, War, and Plague chapters.

Finally, there is the seismic shift in our own history that has come about since this book was first published. I can still remember the day that I was teaching a World History class in Vermont when the news broke that the Twin Towers in New York City had just been attacked by as-yet unknown terrorists. That day was, of course, September 11, 2001, and a lot more has happened here and around the world since then. These times, I firmly believe, comprise our own "Apocalypse," though not in the way that our leaders have led us to believe. I have yet to be convinced that we are facing a true "War on Terror" to compare with previous great conflicts or that our enemies are as numerous, as omnipresent, and as deadly a threat to our very existence as is so often asserted to be the case. No, I believe the real danger comes from ourselves, in the West's very response to the current challenge posed by global terrorism. Whether democracy, the rule of law, and free expression will survive as a part of our culture in the face of the despicable measures—to include torture, rendition, suspension of habeas corpus, and domestic spying—that have been taken in the name of supplying a seemingly cowed citizenry with the illusion of security remains to be seen. Further, lest we forget, there is the added concern that has snowballed in recent years over the environmental degradation associated with global warming. Though constituting a less imminent threat, perhaps, than terrorism, the long-term apocalyptic scenarios raised by global warming are no less real for that. However one views the present crises we face, one thing on which we can probably all agree is that the relevance of this book and its themes could not be greater than now.

John Aberth,
Roxbury, Vermont, August, 2009

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PROLOGUE

> In the same year [1347] in the month of September, a great mortality and pestilence began … namely that near Greater India in Eastern parts, in a certain province, terrible events and unheard of tempests overwhelmed that whole province for three days. On the first day it rained frogs, serpents, lizards, scorpions and many venomous beasts of that sort. On the second day thunder was heard, and lightning flashes mixed with hailstones of marvelous size fell upon the land, which killed almost all men, from the greatest to the least. On the third day there fell fire together with stinking smoke from the heavens, which consumed all the rest of men and beasts, and burned up all the cities and castles of those parts.
>
> *Chroniques de Flandre*, 1348

Thus Louis Sanctus of Beringen, a musician in the service of Cardinal Giovanni Colonna at the papal court of Avignon, describes the cataclysmic origins of plague in a letter he wrote to his friends back home in Flanders on April 27, 1348, which was then copied into an anonymous Flemish chronicle and also into the chronicle of an Olivetan friar in Prussia. By 1348 this disease, known to contemporaries as the "great mortality" or "pestilence" but which later historians christened the "Black Death," had found its way to Western shores, but probably from Central Asia or southern Russia, not India. Within the next two years it engulfed nearly the whole of Europe, striking down nearly half its population, and returning again and again throughout the rest of the century and into the next. Among the victims was Sanctus' patron, Cardinal Colonna, who died on July 3, 1348.

Even before the plague, however, bad weather and bad harvests had brought devastating hunger to northern Europe during a Great Famine that lasted from 1315 until 1322. Shortly thereafter followed the start of a destructive conflict between England and France, the so-called Hundred Years War, that would rage intermittently from 1337 to 1453. And above all, there loomed the image of Death, ever present and unconquerable, a constant figure in much of the art and literature of the later Middle Ages.

Is it any wonder, then, that late medieval men and women believed that the Apocalypse, the end of the world, would soon come to pass? Sanctus may be forgiven if he describes the origins of the Black Death in language borrowed from the Revelation of St. John. Compare his words, for example, with Apocalypse 8:7, when, after the seventh seal has been opened:

> The first angel sounded the trumpet, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and it was cast upon the earth; and the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

Such apocalyptic language surely came to mind when observers were tasked with describing so great a disaster as the plague. Gabriele de Mussis, an Italian chronicler from Piacenza, announced the advent of the pestilence by evoking St. John's vision of seven angels pouring out seven vials of God's "poison" upon the earth (Apocalypse 15–16). Like Sanctus, Mussis also told of a "thick rain" of serpents and toads in the East, namely in Cathay (China), while in India there were earthquakes and a rain of blood and stones from the sky. Heinrich of Herford, a German chronicler, echoed these Eastern portents by reporting second-hand how in 1345 "fire falling from heaven consumed the land of the Turks for sixteen days; also in this year it rained toads and serpents for several days." Giovanni Villani of Florence heard of a spectacular fire that destroyed everything in its path in Parthia, while some fellow citizens in Anatolia told him how "it rained an immeasurable quantity of vermin, some as big as eight hands, all black and with tails" which stank and killed people with their "venom". There were also earthquakes and lightning in the Black Sea region where plague seems to have been first communicated to Italian merchants by the Mongols, while in Arcadia in Greece, apparently all living things were suddenly turned into marble statues. Similar wonders were recounted by Villani's countrymen, such as Friar Bartolomeo of Ferrara, who passed on merchants' tales of raining worms and serpents that devoured men in Cathay, or else of raining fire in the form of snow that burned up mountains and created a fume so pestilential that it killed men in the space of time it took to count to twelve. An anonymous chronicler from Pistoia told of a thunderbolt striking Amiens, a dragon that devoured everyone in Jerusalem, and a rain of giant eight-legged worms in Tana on the Black Sea that poisoned all in their path with their stench. Another anonymous account, this time from the monastery of Neuberg in Austria, spun similar yarns of a "deadly rain" of serpents and "pestilential worms" in the land where "ginger comes from." Jean de Venette, a Carmelite friar in Paris, wrote that in August 1348 a "bright star" appeared in the west just as the sun was about to set and sent out rays of light over the city. In Messina, Sicily, according to Michele da Piazza, a black dog "carrying a naked sword in its paw" bounded into the midst of a group of citizens just as they were about to form a procession to ward off the Death.

But perhaps the strangest sign of all to herald the plague was that recounted by a monk at Meaux Abbey in Yorkshire, England. "A short time before the pestilence [of 1349] began," he writes, a "human monster" was born in Kingston-on-Hull who was "divided from the navel upwards and both masculine and feminine, and joined in the lower part. When one part ate, drank, slept or spoke, the other could do something else if it wished." The monster (probably a conjoined twin) lived only to eighteen, as one half "died before the other, and the survivor held it in its arms for three days."

Europeans spoke in equally apocalyptic terms about what would come after the plague as what came before. John de Rupescissa, a Franciscan visionary who contracted the disease in 1348, saw the great mortality as prefiguring the coming of the Antichrist. In 1349, William of Blofield, an English Carmelite friar living in Rome, passed on rumors to his colleagues back home that the Antichrist was at the moment "a most beautiful child," age ten, who was "so well educated in all branches of knowledge that no one now living can equal him." In the medieval view of millennial history, Antichrist was the leader of all that was unchristian, who would reign for a brief time before the final victory of God's forces and the Last Judgment at the end of the world. Typically associated with the seven-headed beast of the Apocalypse, the Antichrist was a terrifying figure but, ironically, a source of

comfort as well to medieval Christians because his appearance meant that their tribulations were about to end. According to the famous twelfth-century visionary Joachim of Fiore, Antichrist would usher in a new age, the Age of the Holy Spirit, during which peace would reign after his defeat. Both the friar Jean de Venette in Paris and John of Reading, a monk at Westminster Abbey in London, saw signs of this new age in the fact that children born after the plague had fewer teeth than their elders.

Perhaps the most detailed explanation of what would follow plague during the time of the Antichrist flowed from the quill of John Clynn, a Franciscan friar from Kilkenny, Ireland. Repeating the Cedar of Lebanon prophecy that had been circulating in various forms since the mid-thirteenth century, Clynn predicted that for fifteen years after the plague there would be one world faith (presumably Christian), a time of peace and prosperity, and the rise of a race of men without heads. Alas, Clynn did not survive the pestilence to see if his premonitions would come to pass.

Visions of the Apocalypse thus proliferated during the later Middle Ages. The plague was perhaps the most dramatic, but by no means the only, crisis that convinced men that the end was nigh. During the Great Famine of 1315–22, men from the north of Europe saw heavenly signs, such as comets, showers of scarlet light resembling blood, and a lunar eclipse, all of which betokened disaster. John of Bassigny, a self-proclaimed "prophet" from France, foretold that his country's defeats to the English at the battles of Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356) during the Hundred Years War were but a prelude to a reign of peace before the arrival of the Antichrist.

England too was rife with apocalyptic visions. During the 1380s especially, many Englishmen were so dismayed by a series of disasters—including recurring pestilence, declining fortunes in war, a Peasants' Revolt in 1381, and an earthquake in 1382—that they predicted the year of reckoning to be not far off. An anonymous poet was inspired to trumpet these signs to his audience as "A Warning to Be Ware":

The Rysing of the comuynes in Londe,
The pestilens and the eorthe-quake,
Theose threo thinges, I understonde,
Beo-tokenes the grete vengaunce and wrake
That schulde falle for synnes sake,
As this Clerkes conne de-clare.
Nou may we chese to leve or take,
For warnyng have we to ben ware.

The Rising of the Commons in London,
The pestilence and the earthquake
These three things, I understand,
Betoken the great vengeance and retribution
That should fall on us for our sins,
As this clerk is able to make clear.
Now may we choose to ignore or heed,
This warning we have to beware.

Around 1388 the preacher Thomas Wimbledon delivered a sermon at St. Paul's Cross, London, in which he proclaimed that the end of the world would come in the year 1400. The sermon, whose printed version subsequently received wide distribution, argued that the Antichrist, the enemy of all good Christians, would arrive in twelve years' time, for did not Jesus in the Book of Matthew tell his disciples to look for signs of the Apocalypse in wars, pestilence, and "erthe schakynges"? One Englishman in particular, the prolific theologian John Wycliffe, was so obsessed with the Antichrist that he devoted a great many of his sermons to it, and especially in his later writings, the figure of God's enemy seems everywhere. For Wycliffe, the Antichrist already walked the earth in the shape of the pope and his Church, a profoundly heretical notion that Wycliffe justified by pointing to the worldly behavior of the papacy, which, he argued, was in every way contrary to Christ's original teaching.

Wycliffe's apocalyptic ideas found a more subdued echo in the prose and poetry of his fellow Englishmen, John Gower and William Langland, likewise dating to the last decades of the fourteenth century. In his prose work *Vox Clamantis* (Voice of One Crying), Gower detects signs of the Antichrist in the Roman curia, where gold is more welcome than true Christian feeling, while in the poem *Piers Plowman*, Langland dreams that the doleful state of society, including the Church, will be replaced by a better one after a final reckoning. In the last chapter of the poem, Antichrist appears to reign over the earth and does battle with Conscience, who calls upon "Kynde," or nature, to kill "fol many" of the unbelievers with all kinds of "pokes and pestilences." Visions of the Apocalypse, therefore, were common to late medieval English writers, who related their visions to the crises they and their fellow men faced.

Nevertheless, it is not just our fascination with millennial, or apocalyptic, movements that draws us to the later Middle Ages. Such movements have a continuous history in the annals of Christianity, dating to the original Apocalypse of St. John, written sometime in the last third of the first century A.D. but owing much to even older Jewish traditions. What made the late medieval era unique was a confluence of crises that threatened to make these visions of the Apocalypse become real. At no other time in history did so much variegated misery—famine, war, plague, and death—descend all at once as upon Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. But, as we all know, the world did not end in 1400, or even a hundred years later. Men and women survived, and not only did they endure, but they laid the foundations for that cultural revival we have christened the Renaissance.

The pages that follow reveal how Western society was confronted with a series of epic disasters, yet somehow managed to cope in a world that seemed to be collapsing all around them. Although I focus here on apocalyptic events rather than apocalyptic thoughts, I will borrow a theme from the visions of millennarians through the ages. That theme is twofold: In a time of darkness, suffering, and death, comes the promise of redemption, renewal, and resurrection. The end of the world may be at hand, for reasons only God in his inscrutable design knows, but then a new and better world will take its place. The men and women of the later Middle Ages, in their approach to their accumulating crises, undoubtedly acted within the framework of such beliefs. If we can understand how they acted out this paradox of despair and hope, perhaps we can understand how they found the courage to face the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and, in so doing, "transcended" the Middle Ages to fully emerge into the modern world.

For these reasons, I believe that the later Middle Ages comprise one of the most significant and inspiring epochs of Western history. The story of how late medieval Europeans survived and eventually overcame the crises of the Apocalypse is worth the telling simply for the drama in it. Yet it is also a story that is changing the way we look at the late medieval and early modern periods and whether, in fact, we should distinguish them from each other at all. Recently, scholars have been steadily rejecting the dark view of the later Middle Ages as representing a decline, or "waning," of intellect and culture. Indeed, some have gone so far as to dismiss the notion that there was any general "crisis" mentality throughout Europe at this time. (Though I still would argue that cataclysmic events such as the Black Death, the Great Famine, and the Hundred Years War did comprise extraordinary and unique challenges, regardless of how society responded to them). Instead, a more subtle and far more interesting picture has taken hold, one that sees a transition rather than a decline from the medieval to the modern eras, and even the possibility that no such transition is required in a new periodization of history, where "Old Europe" extends continuously from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries.

There is much that this age can teach us. With the arrival of the second millennium, apocalyptic studies again have become fashionable. Our world continues to see its share of famines, wars, and plagues. Nonetheless, some of us like to think that we can conquer death, and our age seems obsessed with cheating the Fourth Rider on his pale horse. While we in the modern West seek the holy grail of longer and healthier lives and literally run from death, our medieval ancestors embraced it, confident that it was the gateway to higher things. This, then, is the story of men and women who faced a daunting and fearful series of crises but faced them squarely, carrying on with their lives and proving remarkable resilient in the process. It is the story of a people who gazed into the abyss of the Apocalypse and then pulled back from the brink.

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FAMINE

When God saw that the world was so over proud,
He sent a dearth on earth, and made it full hard.
A bushel of wheat was at four shillings or more,
Of which men might have had a quarter before....
And then they turned pale who had laughed so loud,
And they became all docile who before were so proud.
A man's heart might bleed for to hear the cry
Of poor men who called out, "Alas! For hunger I die...!"

Poem on the Evil Times of Edward II, c. 1327

Famine, the third horseman to ride forth in Chapter Six of the Book of Revelation, was nonetheless the first major catastrophe to strike Europeans at the start of the fourteenth century. It is an apocalyptic messenger that connives to wreak its misery repeatedly upon mankind while its victims stand by, seemingly powerless to act. Cold, wet downpours or dry, hot droughts destroy crops and kill off livestock. Yet the truth is, humans can also make or greatly amplify famines, particularly when the horsemen of war and plague ride side-by-side with the scales-wielding figure on his black horse.

The greatest famines in history have taught us this most bitter lesson. In our own day, a combination of drought, disease, armed conflict, and poor economic policies have put millions at risk of starvation throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Between 1958 and 1961, the collectivization program of Mao Zedong during the so-called "Great Leap Forward" in Communist China starved approximately 30 million of its own citizens, while in the 1920s and 1930s, a similar effort under Josef Stalin in the Soviet Union did the same to as many as 10 million peasants in the Ukraine. Both tragedies would seem to qualify as "purely man-made" famines, which the historian Robert Conquest alleges was deliberate state policy in Russia. Further, between 1845 and 1849, Ireland suffered from a potato famine that killed off approximately a million persons, largely owing to diseases such as typhus fever that ran rampant in the overcrowded conditions created by masses of people seeking relief from their "great hunger." Ironically, the very belief that humans do not have a role to play in famine—as was the policy of the British government in response to Ireland's plight—is itself held responsible for helping to create one, for which England's prime minister apologized in 1997.

The Third Horseman, Famine. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London)

The people of the Middle Ages, conversely, are believed to have been more at the mercy of nature than are modern humans. Our story begins at a time when Europe is believed to have entered a dramatically worsening climate that was to last for the next several centuries. In contrast to our present crisis of "global warming," the world's weather actually began to cool down, which had its own disastrous consequences for human subsistence. Nonetheless, even medieval man had a hand to play in manufacturing famine, particularly when it coincided with the second horseman of war. In turn, famine is believed by some to predispose a population to disease, although, as we will see, there is considerable debate on this point. However, before we explore the complex interrelationships between famine, war, and plague, let us look at how a Little Ice Age left a Great Famine in its wake.

The Little Ice Age

Rain rain go away,
Come again another day.
Little Johnny wants to play;
Rain, rain, go to Spain,
Never show your face again!

This English nursery rhyme, probably dating to the reign of Elizabeth I in the sixteenth century, nonetheless could easily have been sung by England's denizens in 1315. For in that year, the rains indeed came and never went away, but most assuredly, much more was at stake than simply being able to play. Throughout northern Europe, agricultural harvests

and, by implication, people's very ability to eat and survive were at stake. Chronicles from England, Ireland, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, France, and Germany all testify to the bad weather, some claiming 100 days or more of continuous rain. Indeed, so great was the deluge of rain from spring to fall that hardly any wheat could be harvested or stored in barns, seed rotted in the ground, and "in many places the hay lay so long under water that it could neither be mown nor gathered." What grain was harvested had first to be dried out in ovens before being baked into bread, nor did it have its usual nutritious value because "it did not have the nourishment from the heat of the summer sun."

The next year, 1316, was apparently just as bad. So much rain fell in England, according to one record, that "in one year there could not be found seven days of good weather," with the result that in 1316, "little grain grew that year, nearly all of it having perished." In Germany, the rain fell when the seed was planted, when it sprouted, and then when it came time for the harvest. Four hundred and fifty villages, along with their men and cattle, were reported to be washed away by an overflowing river in Saxony, while entire populations in Austria, Poland, Hungary, and Meissen were threatened by the deluge. "This inundation of water covered fields and valleys," reports this Austrian chronicler, and "destroyed hay and standing corn [grain]." Chroniclers in Belgium claimed that it rained nonstop from June 24 until August or harvest-time, such that "the inside of granaries stood nearly empty of flour." The rains let up somewhat beginning in 1317, but northern Europe continued to be buffeted down to 1322 with very severe winters and storms and floods in coastal areas such as eastern England, Normandy, and Flanders. During the winters of 1315–16 and 1321–22, the Baltic Sea froze over, trapping ships in the ice, but the worst winter of all was apparently that of 1317–18. According to the *Poem on the Evil Times of Edward II*:

The Little Ice Age: *A Winter Landscape with Bird Trap*, by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, c. 1565. Note the frozen river, solid enough for playing an early version of curling. (Private collection / Johnny Van Haeften Ltd., London / The Bridgeman Art Library.)

Tho com ther another sorwe that spradde over al the lond;
A thusent winter ther bifore com nevere non so strong.
To binde alle the mene men in mourning and in care,
The orf deiede al bidene, and maden the lond al bare, so faste,
Com nevere wrecche into Engelond that made men more agaste.

Came there another sorrow that spread over all the land;
A winter that was stronger than a thousand that came before.
To bind all the many men in mourning and in care,
The cattle died all forthwith, and made the land all bare, so fast,
Came never a wretch into England that made men more aghast.

It was in this year that the Moldava River in present-day Romania was said to be frozen over without interruption from the end of November to the end of March, so that one could "walk over it daily, as if one's foot was passing over dry land."

The effect of all this bad weather for so many years in succession was, of course, to prevent any kind of recovery. Families were presented with stark choices: either starve now and save seed grain for future planting, or eat now but starve later when no seed grain was left to produce another crop. Medieval peasants already farmed at nearly a subsistence level even in normal times, harvesting perhaps three to four grains of wheat for every one sown. However, when the heavy rains came in 1315 and 1316, even this meager harvest was cut by a third or a half, to little better than two grains of wheat for one sown, according to the manorial records of the estates of the bishop of Winchester in southern England. This was barely enough to cover the investment of seed planted in the ground, but some areas on the periphery of Europe may have fared even worse. Bolton Priory, located near the border between England and Scotland, recorded yields during the Great Famine that were below 1:1 (in other words, not even enough to justify planting the seed at all).

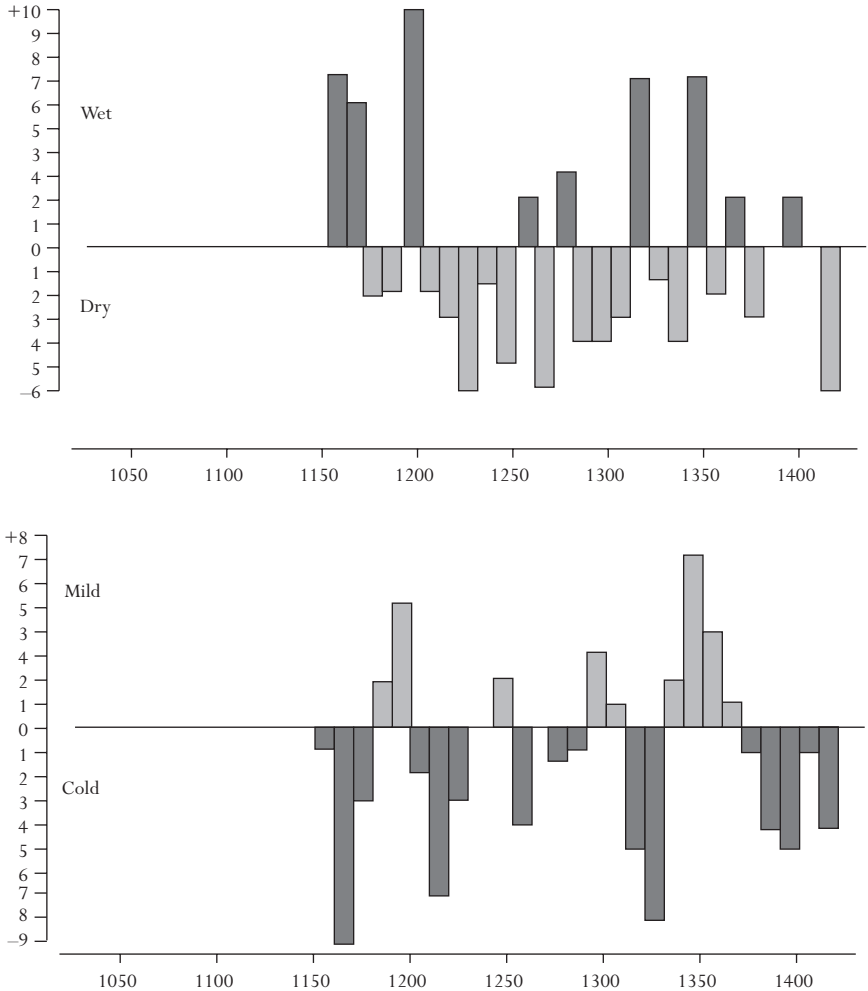
What was happening? Europe at this time was entering a "Little Ice Age," an extended period of cooler temperatures and unsettled weather that extended from about 1300 to 1850. Glaciers advanced rather than retreated, many northern farms and settlements had to be abandoned, such as those in Greenland, and rivers and seas froze over, impeding the traffic of humans but giving winter passage to wolves. In fact, it was not until the last decades of the twentieth century, when the impact of man-made carbon emissions finally began making themselves felt, that average temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere significantly surpassed the highs that once were reached during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, part of the "Great Warming," or Medieval Warm Period, that stretched from 800 to 1300. (There are indeed some who continue to deny the current crisis of global warming by pointing to the Medieval Warm Period, but at no point in the Middle Ages did temperatures surpass those of the twentieth century, nor has it yet been proven that the Medieval Warm Period was a global phenomenon.) What must have seemed especially cruel to anyone with a long memory in 1315 is the sudden reversal in weather fortunes, going from a calmer, milder climate—which may have extended right up until 1311—to a colder, more unpredictable one. For not only was the weather getting colder, on average, it also was swinging more wildly from one temperature extreme to the other.

The evidence that a Little Ice Age occurred just in time to cause a Great Famine is compelling. Enough information has been collected by now from various sources to be able

to track historical trends in the weather. Originally, climate historians reconstructed past weather patterns mainly from documentary data, such as descriptions in chronicles and annals, records of grain yields and prices, the timing of grape harvests, and even, when we are lucky enough to have them survive, the detailed observations of weather journals, the earliest of which dates to the end of the fourteenth century. Of these, direct statements about the weather in written accounts are by far the most preferable, as grain yields or grape harvests may be affected by other factors besides climate, such as markets for the product, available labor, and so on. One major study of medieval climate, for example, uses hundreds of narrative sources from France, Germany, and northern Italy (but not England) to construct a weather pattern that spans the years 1000 to 1425. Using an index based on the number of months within a 10-year period in which the winter is mentioned in the chronicles as generally mild or harsh and the summers as either rainy or dry, some impressive-looking graphs can be plotted based on 50-year averages of the decennial indices (see next page). As one can see, the early decades of the fourteenth century, corresponding with the years of the Great Famine from 1315 to 1322, were indeed exceptionally rainy but not unprecedented; in fact, the second half of the twelfth century was perhaps quite a bit wetter. However, when contrasted with the very dry weather reported for almost the whole of the thirteenth century and even the first decade of the fourteenth, the sudden wet weather in 1315 must have come as a shock. These same early decades of the fourteenth century also saw some very cold winters but nothing that was unusual for the past two centuries. Indeed, the weather was warm only at the end of the twelfth and in the middle and last decades of the thirteenth centuries, according to the chronicles, and even this was surpassed by the warm spell in the middle of the fourteenth century.

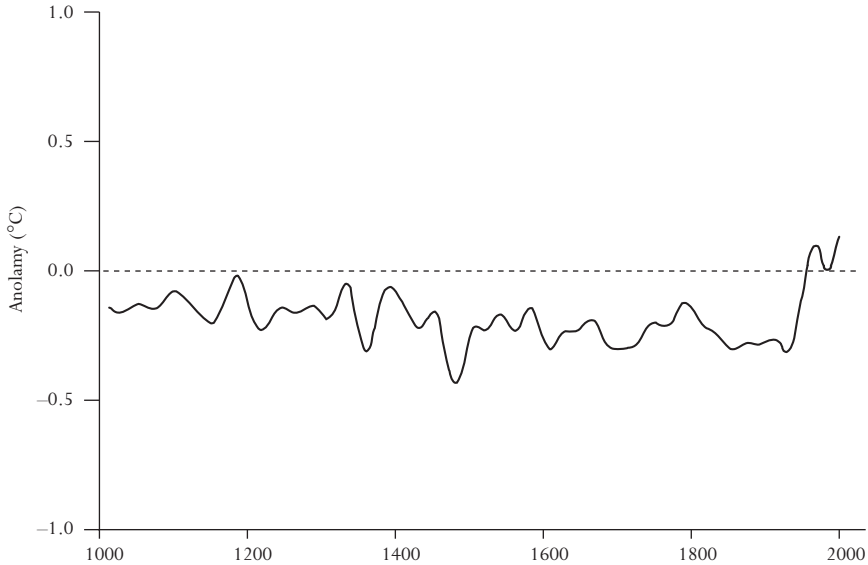
In fact, one would hardly know from these graphs that anything unusual like a Little Ice Age was happening in the climes of early-fourteenth-century Europe. Documentary data are, therefore, limited in the kind of information they can provide about the weather of the past. They are perhaps at their best in giving anecdotal testimony within a circumscribed time and place: to understand why a famine suddenly occurred in 1315, for example, it is invaluable to have contemporary accounts of what the skies were doing back then. However, narrative sources are evidently less able to accurately track long-term trends in climate change. This is because documentary data, even when manipulated in ingenious ways, are still impressionistic and imprecise records of medieval climate. With few exceptions, chroniclers give us rather nebulous, subjective impressions about the weather, which assume meaning only in a comparative context. So though what our ancestors had to say about the weather is certainly worth quoting, it does not tell us the entire story.

Instead, climatologists have turned to field data, which are now sophisticated enough to have enabled them to reconstruct temperatures in the northern hemisphere going back 1,000 years or even longer. As instrument readings are available only from about 1850, climatologists have had to resort to "proxy records," such as measurements of tree ring widths on ancient oak trees from Ireland and Germany and isotope variations in ice cores extracted from the Greenland ice cap and the Antarctic. A graph based on such field data clearly points to the advent of a Little Ice Age in 1300 that had escaped the aforementioned documentary data (see p. 13). A sharp downturn in temperatures seems to have occurred during the early fourteenth century, corresponding to the years of the Great Famine, followed by another, even colder dip in the 1430s, when another general famine swept



Two graphs measuring wetness and temperature in medieval Europe based on chronicle accounts. (From P. Alexandre, *Le Climat en Europe au Moyen Age* (LEcole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, *Recherches d'Histoire et de Sciences Sociales,* 24, 1987). © Editions de lEHESS. Reproduced with kind permission of Editions de lEHESS and Pierre Alexandre.)

through Europe. The 1430s also were at the peak of very wet weather that extended through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, according to various measurements taken from a peat bog near Carlisle in the northwest of England. What is more, field data can more precisely illustrate the dramatic swings in climate that late medieval Europeans had to contend with. For example, dendrochronological evidence from Ireland indicates that rainfalls were 7 to 10 percent wetter than normal between 1315 and 1318 (indicated by wide growth tree rings), followed by seasons that were 10 to 22 percent drier during the 1320s (narrow rings). Thus, between 1318 and 1324, the medieval Irish farmer had to cope with a climate that swung by as much as 30 percent from one extreme to the other.



Graph tracking climate change based on field data, such as tree-ring measurements, ice-core records, and, after c. 1850, instrument readings. (From Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History* (Basic Books, 2000) Reproduced by permission of Basic Books, a member of Perseus Books Group.)

What caused this transition from Medieval Warm Period to Little Ice Age is believed to be thermohaline circulation, more popularly known as the Great Ocean Conveyor Belt. Powered by two major "downwelling" sites off the coasts of Iceland and Greenland, where arctic air cools and condenses surface seawater into a denser, more salt-laden form that then sinks down into deep ocean basins, the Great Ocean Conveyor Belt acts as a kind of heat pump for Europe, bringing up warm ocean water from the south. Should for some reason the pump slow down or fail, the warm North Atlantic currents will weaken, meaning much colder temperatures for Europe, and vice-versa. The switch between warm and cold cycles seems to be triggered by complex interactions between atmospheric and oceanic conditions, which in turn are perhaps caused by changes in the earth's orbit and axis or in the sun's radiation.

Climate history, thus, has come a long way from its pioneering days before popular awareness of global warming and the impact of climate change. Once upon a time, exogenous variables such as the climate—which act externally upon a society rather than from within—were generally dismissed as true agents of historical change. Perhaps this is because historians are generally uncomfortable with the idea that our fates could be in the hands of arbitrary and unpredictable factors independent of the human will or achievement, as if this would be a throwback to a more primitive time when humans sought answers in the gods or the stars. Even a pioneer in climate history such as the French medieval historian, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, ultimately concluded in 1967 that "the human consequences of climate seem to be slight, perhaps negligible, and certainly difficult to detect." His skepticism was echoed by the Cambridge medieval historian, Michael Moissey

Postan, who instead championed an endogenous, neo-Malthusian approach to Europe's early-fourteenth-century agrarian crisis. The dilemma famously posed by the English clergyman Thomas Malthus is his *Essay on the Principle of Population* of 1798—that any given population, by the exponential nature of its rate of increase, would inevitably outgrow its food supply to the point that famine conditions were reached—seemed particularly appropriate to the Middle Ages, when farming productivity lagged far behind that of the Agricultural Revolution of Malthus's own day. Indeed, the more that medieval farmers tried to increase their agricultural output, according to Postan, the more certain they were to be less productive, owing to their inability to effectively fertilize the land, their overcropping or too-intensive cultivation of good soil, and their reliance on assarting, or cultivating poor, marginal soils beyond the traditional demesne. The grim turning point, Postan believed, came around 1300: until then, the land had continued to support population growth, although far less robustly as the thirteenth century came to a close. After that, Malthusian checks, such as famine, war, and plague, were ready to take effect.

It makes inherent sense that a society like that of the Middle Ages, which, even in the best of times, was still able to feed itself only at a subsistence level, should be more prone to suffering from famines. However, by itself, the Malthusian dilemma is not a very satisfactory explanation of why a famine occurs when it does. This is particularly true after the mid-fourteenth century, when famines and plagues continued to occur despite the fact that medieval population had already endured enormous demographic losses from the Black Death and, to a much lesser degree, from the Great Famine. If famine and plague indeed acted as "positive checks" to population growth that, as Malthus explained, were needed to bring it back into balance with its available food supply, there should be no reason why population should not have recovered and increased again in the late Middle Ages, but in fact this was not to happen until at least after 1450. Moreover, if medieval European population had indeed outgrown its food supply by 1300, why didn't the Black Death happen sooner or the Great Famine be more lethal than it was?

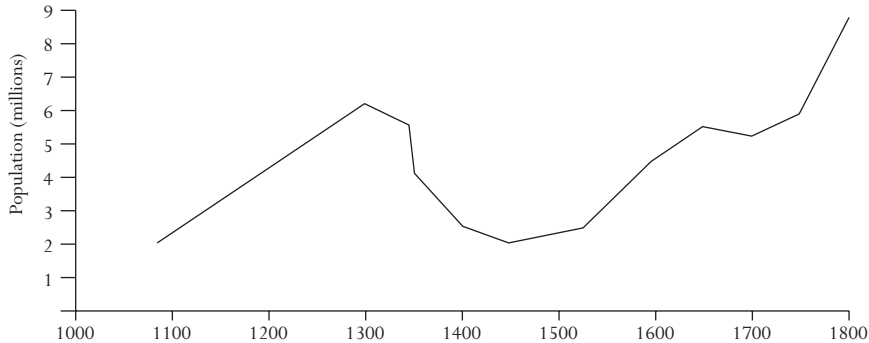
Yet it is not for this reason alone that the so-called "Postan Thesis" has come under increasing attack from historians in recent years. Critics have charged that Postan may have underestimated the productive capacity of late medieval agriculture, for example, or that his definition of marginal or waste land was too restricted to soil productivity. Marxist scholars would prefer to blame class conflict, not population, for Europe's late medieval "crisis of feudalism," though it is hard to see how one endogenous variable can simply be exchanged for another. There is even the possibility that late medieval Catholics were able to avoid a Malthusian crisis through family planning: contraceptives and abortifacients, in the form of natural plant extracts taken orally or as a suppository, were widely known to many respected medieval medical authorities, including the beatified nun, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179). Malthus himself was skeptical that his fellow humans could ever willingly adopt such "preventative checks" to population growth, and it is not known to what degree the common people of the Middle Ages knew of, let alone were willing to use, such methods. Aside from Jewish doctors and suspected witches, people were rarely prosecuted in the medieval courts for practicing abortion, nor are there even any laws on the books relating to the practice, although Church penitentials do mention abortion as among the sins for which penances must be prescribed. Conversely, medieval theology, strictly speaking, did not admit of the crime of abortion until 40 days after conception,

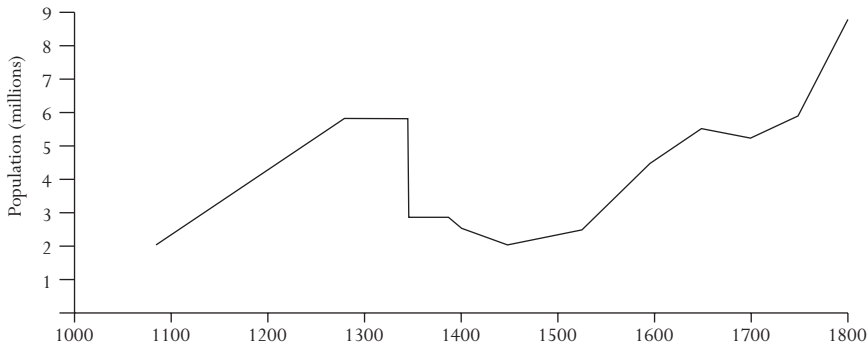
when the soul was believed to finally enter the male fetus. (Female fetuses had to wait 80 days for personhood, although the gender of the prospective child could not possibly be known to medieval parents.) In this respect, some would say, the medieval Church was rather more enlightened than its modern counterpart.

To add the final nail to the coffin of Malthus' ghost, any fluctuating changes in population that might provide evidence of unsustainable demographic growth are virtually unknowable for the Middle Ages. Even in the case of the best-documented country in medieval Europe, England, only two points on a population graph are plottable on a national scale with any degree of certainty: 1086, the year of the Domesday survey, and 1377, when a country-wide poll tax was instituted. (England's population increased only from around 2 million to 2.75 to 3 million persons after nearly two centuries.) What happened in between is a mystery, one that is complicated, of course, by the occurrence of perhaps the greatest demographic disaster in the history of humankind, the Black Death of 1348–1350. Though there are any number of local English studies that give us snapshots of population trends in certain decades, the resulting evidence is very contradictory, so that to fashion a national trend out of such "aggregates" is an extremely hazardous enterprise, as Postan was the first to admit. Though some historians (and climatologists) are still willing to plot population graphs that show a Malthusian decline setting in at 1300, an equally viable chart could show a demographic "deadlock" holding population steady for 50–100 years before the sudden, catastrophic arrival of the Black Death (see next page). In short, any claim as to what population was doing in Europe during most of the late Middle Ages is almost pure guesswork.

So it would seem that the exogenous variable of climate change has, finally and forever, toppled Malthus from his throne. The painstaking detective work of the climatologist Hubert Lamb, who was among the first to point to a Little Ice Age beginning in Europe during the late Middle Ages after an extensive warm period, may at last be vindicated. Yet Lamb, no less than Postan, was committed to the idea of a population decline in Europe beginning in 1300; he simply substituted one kind of explanation for another. There is much at stake in this debate for, as we see in the third chapter, the idea that famine is simply part of a greater "crisis" in population, whether it be Malthusian or climate-based, also is applied to plague, which substantially affects how historians view the impact of the Black Death upon late medieval society.

However, it is also true that too much can be made of the impact that independent agents such as the climate have had upon human history, which, after all, could be said to be mainly in the hands of humans themselves. As Shakespeare has Cassius say to his fellow conspirator in trying to persuade him to assassinate Julius Caesar, "the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves." More prosaically, the historian Mark Bailey has reminded us that exogenous factors are in fact intimately connected with, and inseparable from, endogenous variables, for the phenomenon of climate change is only known, felt, and acquires meaning in history when it interacts with the human capacity "to respond and adapt to those changes." Indeed, we know all too well today that the weather is no longer independent of human behavior but that our patterns of energy consumption, in particular, can have tragic consequences for both the skies and ourselves. Though people in the Middle Ages did not yet have the technological capacity to effect climate change on the scale of global warming, this does not mean they did not believe they had the power to do so.





Two possible scenarios for population movement in England between the Domesday survey of 1086 and the poll tax of 1377. The lower graph assumes a deadlocked population at least 50 years prior to the Black Death and then a 50 percent reduction in c. 1349. (Upper graph from Judith Bennett, *A Medieval Life: Cecilia Penifader of Brigstock* (McGraw-Hill College, 1976). Reproduced with permission of The McGraw-Hill Companies.)

The Great Famine

The famine that struck northern Europe between the years 1315 and 1322 was easily the most severe subsistence crisis of the late Middle Ages—and perhaps in all of medieval history. It was by no means an isolated incident, as more localized famines continued to strike in England and France about once a decade throughout the rest of the fourteenth century. Writing at the time of the second greatest famine of the century, in 1370, the English poet William Langland, in his great allegorical poem, *Piers Plowman*, has the figure of "Hunger" assault "Waster" by wringing his belly, buffeting his cheeks, and in general beating his body until he is half-dead. Another general famine was to hit Europe between 1437 and 1441, this time striking both southern and northern regions, both east and west, but the Great Famine of the early fourteenth century seems to hold a unique place in the collective European memory. A century and four score years later, the Bavarian chronicler Veit Arnpeck still remembered the "great famine and dearth" that began in 1315. Chroniclers in Flanders and Brabant writing in 1315 and 1316 were fond of bragging that their mortality from the famine was "unseen in living memory" or "unseen and unheard-of by anyone then living," and others vied with one another in their superlatives to describe the death toll: "no

lack of death," "most atrocious and most savage mortality," a "tearful death," a "lamentable death," "an innumerable multitude" of dead, and perhaps most wisely, an "inexpressible mortality of people."

Clearly, the Great Famine, unprecedented as it was, made an impression upon contemporaries. Yet little did they know who were writing then of what was to come just a few decades later, in the form of the Black Death, whose mortalities engulfed those during the famine. Rather more down-to-earth statistics of exactly how many were dying from the dearth are available from Flanders and England. In the towns of Bruges and Ypres in present-day Belgium, a remarkable series of week-by-week accounts were kept by the town fathers of the number of cadavers they were paying to have cleared from the streets. Between the beginning of May and the end of October of the year 1316, Bruges and Ypres lost 5 and 10 percent, respectively, of their total populations. Although statistics do not survive, similar measures seem to have been taken in other Belgian towns such as Tournai and Louvain, and in Trier in Germany. However, a mortality rate of 10 percent in 1316 is argued for Tournai on the basis of testamentary evidence. More rural-based records, such as are available in England, point to similar or slightly higher percentages. The record of heriots, or death taxes, paid by peasants on various manors in Hampshire, Berkshire, and Somerset to the bishop of Winchester indicate that his serfs were dying at a rate of around 10 percent between 1316 and 1318. At various manors in Essex and at the manor of Halesowen in Worcestershire, tithing lists and court rolls record a mortality rate of 15 percent.

These deaths were perhaps two to three times what might be expected in a normal, non-famine year, but it is still quite likely that Europe's pre-plague population was able to quickly recover from any demographic setback imposed by the famine. In fact, on the manor of Halesowen, which had one of the highest mortality rates from the famine ever recorded, marriage rates, which can be tracked by the payment of merchet, or marriage taxes, due from peasants to their lord, increased very dramatically in the decades after the famine, during the 1320s, 1330s, and 1340s. If we presume that marriages in the Middle Ages meant in turn the production of more children, the substantially higher "replacement rate" of these decades should have allowed Halesowen to fully regain the numbers it had had at the start of the fourteenth century. Moreover, evidence from the estates of Canterbury Priory in southeast England point to medieval farmers making an agricultural recovery at this same time, and the more and better food available would presumably stimulate population growth. All this makes it hard to fit the Great Famine into a long-term population decline for Europe in the first half of the fourteenth century, as some die-hard Malthusians still try to do.

The simple fact is that it is quite hard to starve to death from eating absolutely nothing. Those who have tried, or who have been cruelly forced to do so, have found it to be a long and painful process. It took Bobby Sands, a member of the Irish Republican Army who decided to go on hunger strike in 1981 to protest his internment conditions in a British-controlled prison, 66 days, or just more than 2 months, to die, by which time he was largely deaf, blind, dumb, and almost incapable of any movement. More detailed observations that were made of starvation victims in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942 and during the Potato Famine in Ireland in 1845–49 found that extreme hunger caused people to drastically lose height and weight, appear shrunken and old, acquire a "dirty brown" hue and "papery"

quality to the skin, have unnatural hair growth, and psychologically to become lethargic, depressed, and, understandably, obsessed with food. Eventually, the bodily organs simply cease to function.

However, usually victims of a famine get something to eat, just not the right things to eat. They then suffer from vitamin deficiencies or diarrhea and other intestinal disorders, and historians quite rightly categorize any resulting deaths as also caused by famine. John de Trokelowe, a chronicler from St. Albans Abbey in England, testifies that during the Great Famine of the early fourteenth century, people indeed died of food-related disorders, which suggest starvation. According to Trokelowe:

> A dysentery-type illness, contracted on account of spoiled food, emasculated nearly everyone, from which followed acute fever or a throat ailment. And so men, poisoned from spoiled food, succumbed, as did beasts and cattle, [who] fell down dead from a poisonous rottenness of the grass. Nor does anyone remember so much dearth and famine to have prevailed in the past, nor so much mortality to have attended it.

Gilles li Muisis of Tournai in Flanders reports that in 1316, men's "bodies began to weaken, and infirmities arise due to the intemperateness of the air and a true famine." An Irish annalist's mention of "strange diseases" in connection with famine in 1315 is also suggestive.

Aside from digestive complaints and vitamin deficiencies, another disease closely associated with famine conditions, and perhaps alluded to in some annals, is ergotism, also known in the Middle Ages as St. Anthony's Fire. This is caused by ingesting the ergot fungus, which grows especially well on damp grain whose resistance has been reduced by a previous harsh winter, exactly the kind of conditions that prevailed during the Great Famine. The fungus may either attack the central nervous system, inducing convulsive ergotism, or target the muscles, inducing painful spasms that then cut off circulation of blood to the extremities, which become gangrenous and fall off. In both cases, a painful death quickly ensues. If it was any consolation to the victims, the disease also induced mind-bending hallucinations similar to those from LSD, an ergot derivative.

In normal times, the overwhelmingly favorite food of the average medieval peasant, judging from maintenance agreements entered into by elderly tenants with their heirs to support them in their "retirement years," was bread, made from wheat or more usually a mixture of grains that included (or substituted) barley, oats, rye, peas, or beans. Porridge was also made, typically with oats, barley, or pulses. This was washed down with well water or ale, if available. Better-off peasants supplemented their meals with milk, cheese, fruits and vegetables, and meat, such as mutton, beef and, most often, pork. However, during the first half of the fourteenth century at least, most people in Europe lived on a grain-based diet. Therefore, any evidence that grain yields were down or prices were high might well indicate a subsistence crisis being faced by a population that was so singularly dependent on one source of food.

Such evidence is more than forthcoming during the years of the Great Famine. In France, the best guess is that cereal prices increased by as much as 800 percent in the first three years of the famine, from 1315 to 1317. That a "dearness of grain" occurred in these years is amply testified by French chroniclers, who circulated a celebratory ditty in 1318

that praised God, "He who is willing to fight on our behalf," for beating down the prices in that year even before the harvest was in. In Antwerp in the Low Countries, the price of wheat increased by 320 percent, according to one chronicler, in just more than a 7-month period, from November 1315 to June 1316. German chroniclers kept the memory of unprecedented inflation alive after more than a century had passed since 1315. In England, we have more precise evidence available from the manorial accounts of the southern estates of the bishop of Winchester and the abbey of Westminster. These show that the wheat harvest in 1316 was 40 percent below normal, the lowest on record in nearly a century and a half, from 1271 to 1410. Hardly better were harvests for 1315 and 1321, at more than a third below normal. The price that wheat fetched on the market during the second decade of the fourteenth century reflects these yields, rising 44 percent above the average for the previous decade. Yields for barley and oats were also down in 1316, at a third below normal, whereas a "shopping basket" of consumables, including barley, peas, beef, mutton, bacon, cheese, wool, and salt, rose by more than 100 percent in 1315 and remained nearly as high the following year. A series of animal murrains—diseases that mainly affected sheep and cattle and which were probably brought on by the poor pasturage or fodder available during exceptionally bad weather—seem to have kept the price of meat as high as grain during the years of the famine, at least according to the chroniclers.

The powers that be in the Middle Ages had limited means of intervening in a food shortage crisis, and their policies were always conducted on an ad hoc basis. Following ancient precedent, municipal governments or national monarchies attempted to import grain (where this was to be had) to those communities that were most in need as the famine became more severe in 1316 and 1317. The Flemish towns of Bruges, Ypres, and Tournai all turned to this expediency but faced numerous obstacles, including a war with France, who imposed an embargo until October 1316, harvest shortfalls in areas that usually provided grain exports, competition with other towns and governments for the excess grain, and the ever-present threat of piracy. As indicated by its lower mortality rate during the famine, Bruges seems to have had more success in this regard than its rivals, apparently owing to its longer tradition of solving food crises by resorting to seaborne imports and its employment of a battle fleet, manned by conscription of members of the town guilds, to escort the galleys carrying the precious cargo. Bruges was also careful in its distribution of the grain once it arrived, deciding to suspend the free market and sell the grain only to licensed bakers at or below cost, and the bakers were then required to make bread available to the populace at reasonable prices. Rather less successful was the attempt by the English king, Edward II, to supply the strategically important border outpost of Berwick-upon-Tweed, which was being hard pressed both by famine and war with the Scots. In this case, piracy disrupted cargo after cargo from reaching the starving garrison as they made their way through the straits of Dover and up the North Sea along England's eastern coast. Attacks came not only from Scottish marauders but also from English pirates and even freebooters from as far away as the Low Countries and the Hanseatic League in northern Germany. In the end, Berwick was betrayed by its own desperate citizens to Scotland's would-be king, Robert the Bruce, in April 1318.

Another policy adopted by authorities during the Great Famine was to try to regulate the market for foodstuffs within the country. England was the first to attempt this when an ordinance was passed by Parliament in January 1315 that fixed the price of slaughter

Famine ("Fames") points to her hungry mouth as she looks up to a figure of Death astride a winged beast of the Apocalypse. An illumination made at Erfurt, Germany, during the fourteenth century. (Courtesy Stiftung Weimarer Klassik, Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek.)

animals, such as a hay-fed ox at 16 shillings, a cow at 12 shillings, and a pig at just over 3 shillings. (Grain prices were not regulated because the first bad harvest did not emerge until the summer of that year.) This measure seems to have had little effect, for it was repealed by Parliament a year later, in January 1316. According to the English chroniclers, the legislation actually did more harm than good, as the butchers of London preferred to defy the ordinance and be imprisoned rather than submit to its low prices. As a result, "the common people experienced a great shortage of such commodities and complained a great deal." Chroniclers drew the lesson that price-fixing was "against reason" because "the price of everything will be in accordance with the fruitfulness of the harvest, not the will of men," and during times of famine, "it is better to buy dear than to find in case of need that there is nothing to be had." Nevertheless, in 1317, Parliament was to try again, this time regulating the price of a product that was more closely tied to the grain harvest and was perhaps dearer to the heart of its citizens: beer.

Governments also were determined to root out speculators who were believed to be hoarding grain and other necessities in order to corner the market, drive up prices, and then sell at enormously profitable margins. Like the efforts to import grain, this was an age-old concern of authorities during subsistence crises, going back to ancient times. Like back then, it went hand in hand with sometimes ugly attempts to find scapegoats for the famine. King Louis X of France, in an ordinance issued on September 25, 1315, railed against the "avaricious cupidity" of hoarders of salt, whom he accused of being "incapable of kindness, not knowing compassion, and devoid of charity" in their pursuit of "ever more lucre." Warning that anyone who conceals commodities "is cursed among the people," Louis ordered his officials in Paris, Rouen, and anywhere else wherein salt was known to be hoarded to investigate who were behind the "monopolies, or illicit compacts, deceits, and frauds" and punish them with confiscation of all their goods and any other penalties that may serve "as an example to others." These officials also were given authority to search merchants' homes, huts, ships, granaries, and other receptacles and, if they found salt, to warn the hoarders to offer it for sale at suitable prices within eight days or face confiscation. The clear implication here was that if the crown did not act, the murmuring mob would.

King Edward II of England adopted a very similar stance in April 1316, in a letter addressed to Richard de Kellawe, bishop of Durham. Like his counterpart in France, Edward blamed the "unaccustomed dearth of grain in these days" in a land that had formerly known such abundance on not just the intemperate weather but, ultimately, on the sins committed by his subjects. Specifically, he alleged that many in his realm were hoarding "an immoderate amount" of grain in their granges and refusing to sell it to profit from higher prices later, as a result of which, "the poor and beggars of our said realm … are daily dying from famine and starvation." Yet of all the "ways and means" the king could command to head off this crisis, the best Edward could come up with was a rather lame effort to have the bishop's clergy exhort the hoarders "with efficacious words" to offer their surplus grain for sale, although the crown did hold out the possibility of applying another "suitable remedy for the sustenance of our people" should an "onrushing necessity" compel them to do so. However, Edward also imitated Louis in holding out the implied threat of the retribution of the mob, for one of the justifications for his actions, he said, was "in order that the cause of so great ruin and death among the people may not be imputed to those having grain and refusing to sell it."

Whether the French and English royal commands were in any way effective, or indeed if hoarding was taking place at all and was actually behind the high food prices, is almost impossible to tell. Perhaps it didn't really matter to their authors, whose main concern was to be seen to be doing something in the face of a crisis over which they had little control and in turn to head off any potential unrest by their subjects. This would have been a high priority to both monarchs in light of recent events. In Edward's case, he had faced a revolt from his barons over his favoritism toward Piers Gaveston in 1311–12, quickly followed by the disastrous defeat to the Scots at Bannockburn in June 1314. Nor did it help that his government's previous attempt to head off the famine, by fixing the price of meat, had to be abandoned just months earlier. In Louis's case, he also had an uneasy relationship with his leading nobles, compounded by accusations of adultery he leveled against his own wife, Marguerite, that culminated with her death in suspicious circumstances in August 1315. (The king remarried just five days later.) Edward even seems to have launched a propaganda

initiative, in the form of a "Joseph cycle" of miniatures painted in the Queen Mary's Psalter, in which the king's handling of the famine crisis was implicitly compared to that of the wise pharaoh of Genesis 41, who had put Joseph in charge of Egypt's granaries after being foretold in a dream of what was to come. However, in neither England nor France did such efforts ward off a final reckoning and revolt.

Private individuals and institutions in the Middle Ages might be expected to lend a helping hand to their social inferiors in times of famine, both because it was considered their moral duty to do so and because it was in their own best interests to avoid civil unrest. This was especially expected of monastic houses, part of whose *raison d'être* was a charitable mission to succor the poor, going back to the early history of Christianity. The cooking pot of "marvelous great size" that abbot William Eylard of Aduard Abbey in the Netherlands had made in 1315 to daily serve up pottages or legumes to beggars and the poor became the stuff of legend, but other almshouses seem to have matched this effort by constructing special ovens or furnaces to bake bread for those in need. If the collective complaint of the Cistercian monasteries in France are to be believed, their treasuries were depleted during the great "hunger and dearth" because "many more persons than in prosperous times" flocked to them for alms and shelter.

Yet this generosity was also severely circumscribed by the hard fact that the Great Famine cut across almost all social lines in the sufferings it doled out. Gillis li Muisis testified that by 1316 in Tournai, "men as well as women from among the powerful, the middling and the lowly, old and young, rich and poor, died daily in such great numbers that the air was almost wholly corrupted" by their stench. William Procurator, a chronicler from Egmond Abbey in Holland, reported that by its second year, the famine was "so bitter that all piety and all charity is neglected, very few alms are distributed." Not even family members were apparently immune from such brutal economies of scale, as "parents do not wish to assist their children, nor children their parents, in their [hour of] greatest need, even though they have an abundance of the necessities of life to give." In England, John de Trokelowe claimed that "while this famine prevailed, great lords as well as religious [houses] cut back their courts, withdrew their accustomed alms, and reduced their households." In Ireland as well, food became so expensive in Dublin in 1317 that "many heads of families, and those who sustained many men, became beggars, and many perished from famine." Higher mortalities, perhaps to be blamed on the famine, are indeed recorded in some instances among the well-to-do. In the diocese of Hereford in England, the deaths of clergy, who might be expected to be better fed than their parishioners, more than doubled in 1316 compared to the previous year, whereas in the diocese of Winchester, the six months between December 1317 and May 1318 recorded more deaths—29—than was usually posted in an entire year (Table 1, p. 276). England also recorded a 25 percent increase in mortality during the first five years of the famine in the records of inquisitions post mortem, which enrolled the deaths of major landowners upon the succession of their heirs. Between 1315 and 1319, 24 male and female heads of various religious houses in Belgium lost their lives, more than in any similar period prior to the Black Death.

Other hard evidence, such as records of manorial balance sheets, seems to indicate that most lay and ecclesiastical lords were truly hard pressed by the combination of higher costs of living and sharp declines in their rental income (revealed in the accounts by the depressingly familiar litany of *nihil* or "nothing"), which obviously reflected even

grimmer realities lower down the social scale. Households thus faced the stark choice of either drastically cutting back expenditures or finding ways to raise cash, such as by selling off assets, renting out more of the demesne land, issuing annuities or yearly pensions to subscribers, or by borrowing and going into debt. Bolton Priory in the north of England tried nearly all these expedients during the famine, going so far as reducing its household by two-thirds and its alms giving by as much as 90 percent. However, this did not save the canons from finally going bankrupt by 1320 and having to temporarily abandon the site, as happened to a number of other religious houses along the Anglo-Scottish border, where the impact of famine was amplified by the ravages of war. In general, then, Europe's elite was not in a position to be overly generous during the famine, particularly as it carried on year after dreary year.

Given these circumstances, the social responses of the common folk, the rural peasantry and urban proletariat that made up the vast majority of medieval population and that undoubtedly suffered the most from famine, fell into patterns that emerged already in the early Middle Ages whenever subsistence crises struck, which they did within the borders of the former Roman Empire about once every three years from the fourth to the mid-eighth centuries. Such popular reactions included rioting, thievery, flight and vagabondage, religious prayers and processions and, above all, consumption of alternative foodstuffs. Ample evidence of all these can be found during the Great Famine of 1315–22.

Rioting during famines mainly seems to have been an urban phenomenon, a tradition again going back to ancient times. During the years of the Great Famine, a string of unrest, centered largely around rivalries between city factions, erupted in Magdeburg in central Germany; the towns of Verdun, Metz, and Provins in northeastern France; and in Bruges in Belgium. Perhaps the most violent incident, however, took place in Douai, at the time part of the county of Flanders, where alleged grain hoards were attacked and their owners threatened with beheading, whereas the two women held responsible for starting the mischief had their tongues cut out and then were perpetually banished from the town. Significantly, this riot occurred rather late in the famine, in October 1322, despite the fact that harvests were beginning to recover their former bounty and in spite of a "bourse common" or municipal fund set up in 1316 to succor those most destitute. Thus it is not clear if discontent over high grain prices or a shortage of bread was really behind what revolts did occur there during the Great Famine. During famines that occurred throughout Italy in 1327–30, alleged to be the worst in that country's late medieval history, towns such as Florence and Siena managed to avoid rioting by means of a compassionate yet prudent policy of fixed grain prices, importation of grain, doles to the poor, and tolerance of beggars. As we have seen, similar policies, particularly with regard to importing grain, were adopted by Flemish towns during the Great Famine. Perhaps these communities were well versed in what they could expect should they fail to succor the most destitute during times of dearth. Their success in this regard seems indicated by the fact that, according to one survey, food riots made up less than one percent of all revolts recorded in Italy, France, and Flanders from the thirteenth to the early fifteenth centuries.

It is only to be expected that when faced with desperate circumstances, to either steal or starve, humans will opt for the choice that preserves their lives. There are some indications that crime was on the upswing during the Great Famine. One scholar who made a study of gaol delivery rolls—which record sessions held by traveling royal judges who would

"deliver" or render judgment on the occupants held in local county gaols—in eight counties in England during the first half of the fourteenth century found a threefold increase in criminal indictments between 1315 and 1319, by far the highest average ever recorded between 1300 and 1348. The French crown in March 1317 issued an ordinance to the *bailli* of Meaux to stamp out highway robbery in his district, having heard a report not long ago that in the county of Champagne and especially at Meaux, many "malfactors" were "robbing merchants and other people, such that the whole countryside was so unsafe that no one dared come and go without being robbed." The English chronicler John de Trokelowe tied the rising tide of crime to the reductions in charity and household expenditure that were being taken by religious houses and "great lords" during the famine: "Those thus removed from the courts," he claimed, who were "accustomed to lead a delicate life, did not know how to work by the sweat of their brow [and] were too ashamed to beg, but nevertheless, overcome by want for food and drink, they thirsted for the goods of others, intent on murder and rapine."

Vagabondage, or itinerant begging, likewise posed a problem to authorities trying to maintain order during the famine. The practice was often associated in authorities' minds with theft, as was the case when Keepers of the Peace were commissioned to hold sessions in Kent, England, in 1316–17, which found that 70 percent of the crimes it investigated involved the stealing of foodstuffs or livestock. As far back as the early Middle Ages, people took to the road during famines under two main circumstances: Either they were migrating from rural homes to urban centers where they hoped to beg for their food or they wandered out from towns and cities into the open countryside—to mountains, plains, and woods—in a last-ditch attempt to find anything to eat. Both seemed to apply to the waves of vagabonds that German chroniclers alleged were massing outside towns such as Magdeburg in central Germany in 1316 and at the gates of northern towns along the Baltic, such as Lübeck, in 1317. The Lübeck annalist claims that owing to the "intolerable famine" that swept from France to Saxony,

> many villages stood desolate, because men either died from hunger or gave up the rest of their possessions [to go] to foreign regions, an infinite number of whom made for the maritime parts of Saxony and Slavic lands, begging in cities and towns, especially in the city of Lübeck, where alms were given out again and again by a devoted people. Nevertheless, many, already conquered by famine when they took nourishment, expired.

One theory—based on the pattern of past migrations during times of shortage, such as in 1264—holds that these beggars did not just stop at the cities to become refugees but kept going east, out into the hinterlands of eastern Germany and western Poland, where they hoped to be resettled on grants of land wrested from pagan/Slavic natives as part of an attempt to colonize these frontier regions. Local town authorities also may have encouraged the alarming numbers of vagabonds that appeared at their doorstep to move on, in the hope of avoiding the unrest that was usually associated with them. However, there seems little hard evidence of wide-scale abandonment of western European villages during the famine, as the Lübeck chronicler claims.

Elsewhere, the fate of wandering beggars seems to have been a harsh one, which necessitated in many towns special measures of mass burial to dispose of all the bodies. Gilles li Muisis, abbot of St. Martin in Tournai, claimed that, in 1316, "so many poor beggars were dying in the street, on dung-heaps and everywhere" that the town council put people on their payroll to carry the dead bodies out into the surrounding countryside and bury them there, an account that is made more believable when one remembers that other Flemish towns such as Bruges and Ypres actually recorded the number of dead so disposed. John Hocsemius of Liège reports that in 1315, when he was staying in Louvain, apparently studying at the university there, two or three times every day as many as six to eight dead bodies would be carried away from the town's hospital (where only the utterly destitute and homeless beggars would go to die) to be buried in a "newly-made cemetery outside the town." The stench of this grim procession as it passed by his house in town was such that "I conducted myself to a house in the suburbs next to the fields." In this same year, William Procurator of St. Egmond Abbey in Holland writes that "very many paupers, wandering through the byways and lanes, going in no particular direction, [impelled] by the misery of famine, died in various places." The next year, he noted that such was "the horror and necessity of the present agony, that a pauper, when he died from famine and could be seen lying in the streets, was [nonetheless] reckoned in various men's eyes as not much more than a rabid dog." A chronicler from Trier in Germany claims that, in 1315, "the dead bodies of many paupers, infected by famine and pestilence, were found in the public streets, and in many cities, great, communal pits were consecrated in the cemetery and wages [to be paid to people] were established so that the bodies might be taken away to be buried." Likewise a chronicler from Erfurt, Germany, said that, in 1316, so many perished from hunger that "innumerable dead bodies were seen lying in the public streets, in the cities, in the towns, [and] in the villages." The citizens of his hometown of Erfurt, "moved by [feelings of] mercy, had five great pits made before the city, where innumerable cadavers were thrown in daily." An Austrian chronicler also noted that year how "so much death prevailed that in many villages and cities deep pits were made, which covered over all together the bodies of the dead as if they were [animal] carcasses."

Further incidents showcasing the suffering of itinerant beggars during the famine in 1316 were reported in the Low Countries. A chronicler from the abbey of St. Truiden in Belgium recalled how "the common and poor people were oppressed by so great a famine that the hungry, wandering through villages, expired [after] falling supine on the ground." John de Beka, a chronicler from Holland, noted in this year that "beggars without number would loiter in the fields, woods, or scrub, and their bodies were consigned to burial in these country places without the usual last rites." Unlike modern travelers, medieval people, even in the best of times, did not take to the road with a sense of exhilarated anticipation of adventure. Rather, to leave the safety and comfort of family, friends, and community networks to face a potentially faceless, nameless death in a strange land was the last act of a desperate man.

Back home, communities led by the Church organized prayers and processions to entreat God for better weather. Supernatural explanations for atmospheric disturbances of course go back to perhaps the very beginnings of human civilization, as did the notion that appeasing or supplicating the god in question gave humans some means of indirect control over the elements. Late medieval ecclesiastics were well aware of the ancient precedents for

Deaths from famine along a country lane, from Jean de Wavrin's *Chroniques d'Angleterre* (*Chronicles of England*), c. 1470–80. Note that the dead include men, women, and children. Like the group in the background, they seem to have been traveling in search of food. Meanwhile, the dead finally arrive at their destination as coffins are borne into the town. (Ms. Royal 15 E. IV fol.187 British Library, London, UK / © British Library Board. All rights reserved / The Bridgeman Art Library).

their appeals to a higher power to change the skies: In 1416, Henry Chichele, archbishop of Canterbury, used the example of the Roman Emperor, Theodosius, calling down the Bora, a strong north wind, to turn back the javelins of his enemies at the battle of the Frigid River in 394 CE to inspire his parishioners to shake off their "tepid devotion" during one round of processions for the "serenity of the air," among other concerns. Ironically, at around the very same time that this inspiring Christian example at Frigid River was taking place, the people of Gaza in Palestine were stubbornly clinging to a pagan cult to Marnas, a god to whom they prayed to bring rain during a famine in late 395.

During the Great Famine itself, on July 8, 1316, Chichele's predecessor, Walter Reynolds, called for processions throughout the southern province every Wednesday and Friday of the week to pray for "a suitable serenity of the air." The usual indulgence of 40 days' remission of penance was offered to encourage people to take part. Reynolds opened his letter to his fellow bishops with the standard explanation that miseries such as pestilence and famine were sent down by a God "provoked to anger on account of [man's] wickedness and sin." The result of so much bad behavior, according to Reynolds, was an intemperate climate producing a famine so miserable that the people, formerly used to abundance, "are compelled to wretchedly beg, being in want of sustenance and lacking food, and no small part of the populace is crucified by the affliction of famine to the point that, O woe! they have died." Nevertheless, despite their unworthiness, the faithful could expect that the Lord, moved by their tearful prayers, and "who is known to be the consoler of the

melancholy … may mercifully bestow upon his afflicted people a welcome remedy causing the famine and other miseries that have lasted so long to utterly cease."

That contemporaries sincerely believed they could change the weather through such efforts is attested by a chronicler from Malmesbury Abbey, who asserts: "I firmly believe that unless the English Church had interceded for us, we should have perished [from the famine] long ago." Various chroniclers claim to have witnessed the Church's processions during the famine. A London chronicler wrote that, in 1315, the city's churchmen, to avert the famine, processed in bare feet every Friday and carried on display the host and other relics. In Paris and elsewhere in northern France, similar processions occurred in which the participants, except for women (and presumably the clergy who led them), were not only barefoot but completely nude, likewise carrying holy relics. Prayers and parading of relics also occurred in the region of Xanten on Germany's western border with France. Prayer-unions to spiritually intercede with God on behalf of the community were established during the famine among several Benedictine houses in Meaux and Sens, near Paris, and in Hainault in present-day Belgium.

However, undoubtedly the most visceral, elemental concern of victims on the edge of starvation during a famine is where to get their next meal. Since ancient times, people's choices of what to eat when their normal diet was not to be had have fallen into four general categories: (1) alternative plants not usually consumed by humans, such as acorns, grasses, leaves, weeds, nettles, and the like; (2) alternative animal meats, such as horses, camels, dogs, cats, rats and mice, reptiles, insects, and the like, but also the rotting or diseased carcasses of otherwise more palatable domestic creatures; (3) natural and processed "non-foods," such as tree bark, twigs and shrubs, leather hides and shoes, dirt, even animal and human shit and urine; and (4) cannibalism, or the eating of the most taboo of foods, the flesh of fellow humans. All these categories seem to have been sampled in the "strange" or "peculiar" diets resorted to during the Great Famine. The Dutch chronicler John de Beka could barely bring himself to note how in 1316 "many paupers gnawed on the raw carcasses of cattle like dogs, and ate the uncooked grass of meadows like cows"; what he seems to have found repulsive was not so much the food being consumed but that his fellow men during the famine were behaving no better than brute beasts. Similarly, another observer in Holland, William Procurator, heard it from "truthful" sources that "at this time [1316] the men of a certain village, hard-pressed by the very great need of their hunger, fed on frogs extracted from swamps, also on the flesh of dogs." He considered even more truthful the report that "some paupers went to [where there were] abandoned carcasses of cattle, and there in the manner of dogs gulped down the raw flesh torn off with their teeth."

The high prices of usual grains such as wheat in 1315 and 1316 apparently forced many people to substitute other ingredients in their bread, according to the Flemish and French chroniclers Gilles li Muisis and Jean de Saint-Victor. In Tournai, people "mixed beans, barley, vetches, and [other] grains, however much could be had, making and eating bread from this," whereas in Paris, bakers extended their bread with "many disgusting ingredients—the dregs of wine, pig droppings, and several other things." Another Belgian chronicler noted how bread in 1316 "was so little nourishing that men, when they got up from [the dining] table, were immediately hungry [again]." An Austrian chronicler reported that in 1317, "wheat and rye bread was rare" owing to the very poor harvest of these grains

in that year but that instead the people "commonly ate barley and oat bread," as the summer yield of these crops was "moderately" sufficient.

Meanwhile, in England, the defenders of the northern town of Berwick, which was besieged at the time not only by famine but also by Scots from across the border, were reduced in February 1316 to boiling and eating the flesh off any horse that died in the town, "not letting the foot touch it till they have had what they will." In the rest of England, according to John de Trokelowe and other chroniclers, people likewise began eating horses, when they could afford them, as well as dogs, cats, mice, pigeon-dung, "and other unclean things." An author from Bridlington Priory in Yorkshire claims that people even ate the bodies of dead animals but only up until lunchtime (midday), after which the meat began to stink and had to be buried. The fact that dogs and ravens who feasted on carrion swelled up then and there and died turned some off of such repasts, according to Trokelowe.

The most controversial alternative food of all, of course, was the human kind. Cannibalism historically has been of two varieties: either ritual cannibalism, which has been practiced by certain societies, such as the Aztec, on a regular basis regardless of food availability, and survival cannibalism, done by those who normally eschew such consumption but who find themselves in circumstances of direst necessity. Even this latter category can be further divided into two categories: eating of dead humans, known as necrophagy, and eating of men freshly killed for that purpose. Apparently both types occurred in Rome and Spain in the course of famines there between 408–10 that coincided with invasions by the Visigoths. It was even alleged that "the mother did not spare the babe at her breast." A case of serial cannibalism was alleged during the famine of 646–47 in Syria, when a man who was said to live alone in a cave was crucified for killing and eating 11 children and a deacon. Meanwhile, the female companion of a mother and three others were burned at the stake for cooking and eating her baby child.

These sorts of allegations crop up again during the Great Famine. One Irish annal claims that, during the three and a half years of the famine from 1315 to 1318, "people used to eat one another, without doubt, throughout Erin," and another says that in Ulster at the height of the famine in 1317, the Scots and Irish there "were so destroyed by hunger that they extracted bodies of the dead from cemeteries and dug out the flesh from their skulls and ate it; and women ate their children out of hunger." Likewise, in England, it was reported that in 1316, "poor people stole children and ate them," and John de Trokelowe claimed that in the same year, "men and women furtively ate their children and even strangers in many places … also incarcerated thieves recently coming among each other devoured themselves at the moment when they were half alive." In the Baltic States of Livonia and Estonia, it was alleged that some "due to their extreme hunger devoured their own children, and some of the famished entered tombs while still alive … so that they might remain there and make an end to their sufferings." In Poland and Silesia in 1317, it was reported that "in many places parents devoured their children and children their parents [after] slaying them; also, many ate the flesh from cadavers suspended [on gibbets]."

For long, scholars have debated how to treat such remarkable claims. It has been noted that the theme of cannibalism, and in particular that of mothers devouring their own children, can be found in biblical prophetic passages, such as Deuteronomy 28:53–57, where it is speculated that it serves as a metaphor for the cyclical process of humans returning to God and the earth from whence they came, much like a child returning to

its mother's womb (in this case as a tomb). More prosaically, however, these passages serve as a reminder to God's chosen people, the Hebrews, of the punishments that lie in store should they disobey or turn away from God, when they will suffer at the hands of their enemies who will besiege them and therefore cause such cannibal-inducing famines. Europeans during the Great Famine were well aware of such biblical parallels, for this seems to be the source for the common explanation during the Middle Ages for disasters such as famine, war, and plague, as a divine chastisement for human wickedness and sin. William Procurator of Holland explained the advent of the famine in August 1315 as due to the fact that "[God's] omnipotent justice, wishing to reproach the human race and in addition castigate it for its very many sins, began to send down upon the land the sorrow of famine and a true famine in all cases, by which the world is reproved." Both he and his countryman, John de Beka, cited Lamentations 4:10 to evoke the "present malediction" or "miserable calamity" of the famine in 1316. The only difference in their plight from that of the prophet Jeremiah, they said, was that in their case, "the hands of women did not boil their own sons, and, urged on by famine, did not eat their flesh." Though these authors clearly denied that cannibalism occurred among their contemporaries during the Great Famine, neither did they rule it out as a possibility, as they did say that in all other respects, their experience was not dissimilar to what is recounted in the bible.

In terms of historical writing, however, the pattern was set as far back as the Roman era, when Flavius Josephus, a Jewish Roman citizen and survivor of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 66–70 CE, related a story of how a mother, one Mary of Bethezuba, driven to desperation by the confiscation of her goods for the war effort and by her own hunger, roasted her infant son and half ate it before hiding the rest, justifying this on the grounds that she was sparing the child from future suffering and would serve as a rebuke to her oppressors. Josephus cited "many witnesses" of the incident "lest I should be suspected of monstrous fabrication," and he claimed that the "abomination" rang through the whole city and sent a shiver through the populace, "as though they had done it to themselves." Yet one can't help but be reminded of another attested incident of cannibalism, this one told to King Ahab of Israel (874–53 BCE) by a woman during the siege of Samaria, as told in 2 Kings 6:26–29. The woman alleged that she had made a pact with another mother to cook and eat first her own child and then the other's, but when the time came, the other mother had hidden her son. Whatever the source of his inspiration, Josephus's cannibalism story then became almost a literary device employed by subsequent authors whenever they wished to emphasize the suffering of subjects in similar straits. With regard to cannibalism stories during the Great Famine, one historian writing in 1930 was prepared to take accounts such as Trokelowe's at face value, but a more recent scholar, writing in 1996, was more skeptical, explaining away the Irish version, for example, as a confused interpretation of a graveyard robbery. Still a third, writing in 1973, was prepared to at least credit cannibalism with attesting to the "stark horror" that famine conditions could instill in its sufferers, even if the act itself had never really occurred. Clearly, some stories of cannibalism in history are the product of pure fantasy: what are we to make of the report that the inhabitants of Picardy in northern France during the revolt of the Fronde between 1648 and 1653 ate "their own arms and hands," after which they "died in despair?" Yet, we know from modern accounts, such as that of the Uruguayan rugby team who crash-landed in the Andes in 1972 and were forced to eat their dead frozen comrades to remain alive, that such cannibalism stories can, on occasion, be true. According to those who

have actually tried it, human flesh tastes something like pork. However, even if such stories are not true, the consequences they have can be real enough.

The Great Famine may not have had a long-lasting and significant impact upon late medieval population in terms of the mortalities it directly caused, but there remains the possibility that famine did contribute to the rising incidence of disease, particularly plague, which did have such an impact, a connection that we will discuss shortly. Yet there is another, cultural aspect to famine that has been barely considered until now, which would give it an importance far beyond the immediate sufferings in its wake. Famine's unique combination of contexts, including its associations with wild and unpredictable weather, with shortages of grain and deaths of livestock, with appeals to the supernatural and evil hoarders as scapegoats and, above all, with cannibalism and other "strange diets," all lent themselves remarkably well to accusations of witchcraft and diabolism that rose to almost a fever pitch as the Middles Ages came to a close and that flourished well beyond it. Did famine help bring about the witchcraft trials that first began in late medieval Europe?

Even when witches were not charged with having directly caused a specific famine event known to have occurred in the late Middle Ages, this was hardly necessary to secure their conviction and execution. It was enough to say that the witch had magically produced hail, snow, thunderstorms, or some other weather incident and had destroyed crops or caused the death of domestic animals. It is true that accusations of weather magic occur relatively rarely in the most reliable records of witch trials throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; this is usually explained as a function of the fact that weather magic lent itself less easily to the personal, one-to-one vendettas between neighbors that most often resulted in witchcraft accusations, as weather-related incidents affected everyone in a community. However, even if they were less prevalent than other types of magic, it has been argued by scholars of the witch-hunt, such as Wolfgang Behringer, that accusations of weather *maleficia* played a "decisive role" in the development of the witch trials, because they demonstrated to Europeans that witchcraft was a crime that threatened the *entire* Christian community, not just one individual. This then made witchcraft an especially urgent and serious crime to prosecute, more so than almost any other. It was also a charge that appealed especially well to the learned elite, the clerical and lay judges, who presided over the witch trials and who were more inclined than the populace at large to see the devil at work everywhere in human affairs, seeking to effect as much mischief as possible through his agents, the witches. On the other side of the coin, communities that were convinced they were being harmed as a whole were much more effective in lobbying for action to be taken against suspected witches than were lone victims of a real or imagined curse.

It can hardly be a coincidence that just seven years after the height of the famine in Ireland in 1317, when people were rumored to be stealing into cemeteries to eat dead bodies and scooping out skulls, that a very similar charge was leveled against the first victim burnt at the stake for witchcraft in Ireland, which took place at Kilkenny on November 3, 1324. Petronilla of Meath, a maid servant to Lady Alice Kyteler, was whipped into confessing that she and her mistress had made magical potions mixed "in a pot with the brains and clothes of a boy who had died without baptism and with the head of a robber who had been decapitated." Just two years later, in 1326 at Agen in southwestern France, two clerics and a layman were charged with invoking demons to produce hail and thunderstorms to kill men. Apparently two of the accused were actually caught in the act of attempting to steal

Weather magic: witches brewing a rainstorm, using a rooster and a snake. (Woodcut illustration from Ulrich Molitor, *On Witches*, published in 1487. Courtesy Granger Collection, New York.)

the heads and limbs of condemned criminals hanging on the town gallows, which they needed for their rituals.

Around the turn of the next century, a Swiss judge, Peter von Greyerz, tried several cases in the Simme valley of the canton of Bern that included magically induced food shortages, incidents of bad weather, and cannibalism, which he then related to the Dominican theologian, Johannes Nider, for inclusion in his treatise, *Formicarius* (*The Ant-Heap*), published during the 1430s. Greyerz charged that a man called Stadelin "had by means of [raising] hailstorms inflicted a very severe famine upon the land and by means of many lightning strikes had laid it waste." After the fourth tightening of the chords that were stretching him on the rack, Stadelin finally confessed: "I easily procure hailstorms, but I am unable to cause harm at will, only upon those who are bereft of God's help." When Greyerz demanded "how he was able to cause hailstorms and tempests," the "criminal" replied that he did so with the aid of demons whom he summoned "in a field." Stadelin also admitted that he and another witch named "Hoppo," who had first taught him his craft, could, "whenever it pleased them," take "a third part of the manure, hay, or grain or whatever else

[they wanted] from a neighbor's field, and, with no one seeing them, bring it over to their own," and they could also "procure the most immense hailstorms and harmful winds, along with lightning." Among other *maleficia* Stadelin was tortured into confessing was that he aborted the fetuses of humans and sheep, and Greyerz persuaded yet another witch to tell how she and her accomplices procured the death of infants in the cradle and the family bed (where in fact they were accidentally smothered by their own parents), then dug up their bodies from the grave, cooked them 'til the flesh fell off the bone, made an unguent from the solids, and drank the liquid that remained.

Just as another general famine was hitting Europe in the late 1430s, an old man named Pierre Vallin was tried and condemned by the Inquisition at La Tour-du-Pin in southeastern France for weather magic, cannibalism, and infanticide. The accused confessed under torture that 63 years earlier he raised storms by beating the water of a brook with a stick, had sacrificed his own six-month-old daughter to the devil, and ate children at Sabbaths to which he flew. At the trial of an accused witch, Anna Vögtlin, who was burned at the stake in Büren, Germany, on June 16, 1447, it was alleged that the devil and his minions "have a hatred" for "the fruits of the land everywhere" which seemed to rival that of the Church's sacraments.

Over the course of the next two decades, between 1448 and 1467, a cluster of weather-related trials occurred mainly in Switzerland and surrounding regions. At Metz and surrounding towns in the Lorraine in 1456, unseasonably cold weather, including a killing frost that ruined the best wine-grape harvest anticipated in 40 years, led to the trial of a dozen men and women after "many" began to say "that this came about through the diabolical art of sorcerers and sorceresses." On the testimony of a 16-year-old boy who claimed to be present "many times" at their rites, the accused were arrested, of whom one was called *le vieuz sainct* or the "old holy man" and was said to be "one of the masters" of the sect. Perhaps he was a sacrificial victim, for he seems to have been the only one burnt at the stake, after he confessed that he and his companions caused the frost by throwing a "mixture made by the art of the devil" into a nearby spring. Over the border and to the north in Cologne, a woman from Metz was also executed as part of this alleged conspiracy. Similar charges cropped up again in Metz in 1481, when heavy summer rains caused a failure in the wheat and wine harvest and a famine that allegedly lasted almost two years. According to the journal of Jehan Aubrion, bourgeois of Metz:

> It rained the whole month of June, and all the flowers and fruit from the trees fell [to the ground], and there was no fruit. And such were the times that, on the eighth of July, one still didn't see any grape flowers [on the vines], which was a thing strange. And people presumed that the sorceresses did this, and as a result, many were arrested.

Nine women were subsequently burned at the stake, and two were found strangled in their prison. Once again in 1488, a witch hunt occurred at Metz, which Aubrion put down to the strange climate, for in that year he said that "the weather was always rainy and dangerously stormy and it thundered marvelously, and one didn't know two days go by but that a storm didn't come, and it was always necessary to ring the bells night and day." No wonder, then, that "people began to murmur loudly against the sorceresses." This time 31 women and 4 men were tried, of whom 29 were burned.

The subsequent history of the witch hunt during the early modern era between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries was to see witchcraft prosecutions closely follow the seasonal rhythms of the Little Ice Age, and many trials coincided with known agrarian crises and weather incidents. I believe that famine played a crucial role in the genesis of accusations of weather magic, and perhaps of witchcraft in general. Famine had long accustomed churchmen to a belief that the elements could be manipulated through appeals to the supernatural, and it was but a short step from inferring divine to demonic aids. Famine also convinced authorities that certain individuals, in this case hoarders of grain, were out to harm the community for the sake of their own nefarious ends, much as witches were accused of doing. However, above all, famine, well before the witch trials, gave rise to rumors of grave robbing, cannibalism, and infanticide, which were to become the most sensational and repulsive aspects of the accusations of witchcraft. Famine thus left a tragic legacy for Europeans, long after the wretchedness of men's "great hunger" had faded from memory.

Famine and war

There is perhaps no more potent weapon of war than famine. Since the early Middle Ages, the most desperate expedients resorted to during a famine, such as cannibalism, often arise when food shortages are imposed by sieges. Apparently, the inhabitants of Rome were nearly driven to eating human flesh during Alaric the Visigoth's two sieges of the city in 408–09, and the citizens of Piacenza, also in Italy, were said to have actually resorted to cannibalism, according to the Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea, during its siege by another Gothic chieftain, Totila, in 545–46. Conversely, it was the besiegers, rather than the besieged, who were stricken by famine when the Arabs attempted to take the Byzantine capital of Constantinople in 718. When their supply lines through the narrow straits of the Bosphorus were cut off by the Greeks, the Arab army was alleged to be reduced to eating not only their horses, donkeys, and camels but also "non-foods" such as tree bark, sandals, pitch, stones, and human excrement, and some even ate the flesh of their dead comrades. There was thus a long legacy to the military and political purposes to which famine may have been put during the early fourteenth century.

It was mainly in the border regions and "frontier" areas of Europe that the twin impacts of famine and war made themselves felt between 1315 and 1322. Flanders faced a nearly complete blockade at the hands of the French and their allies by the autumn of 1315, just when the heavy rains were ruining the harvests for that year. King Louis X of France, determined to bring the county to heel to his authority, prepared to invade from the south in early September, just as his ally, Count William of Hainault, was laying waste to the countryside along the River Scheldt on Flanders's eastern border. However, the rains proved just as detrimental to the progress of Louis's troops as it was to the scythes of Flemish farmers, for horses sank up to their saddle-girths and men up to their knees in the mud, and bivouacking and provisioning the army became nearly impossible under downpours so heavy that, according to Gilles li Muisis, "no one could endure it out of doors." However, even though the French king was forced to retreat on September 13, 1315, he kept in place until the following autumn an embargo that, as we have seen, made it difficult for Flemish towns to find provisions elsewhere for their citizens as the famine deepened.

Ireland likewise suffered invasion just as the famine began in 1315. Though the Scottish invader Edward Bruce, Robert the Bruce's brother, portrayed his campaign in Ireland as a blow for pan-Celtic solidarity against a common English oppressor, the Irish annalists blamed him no less than the weather for Ireland's sufferings during the famine. On his march from Carrickfergus to Dundalk along Ireland's northeastern coast in the summer of 1315, Edward and his forces laid waste to the countryside and then, once they arrived in Dundalk, an important supply port for the English, they razed the town and slaughtered its inhabitants. Louth and other towns further south toward Dublin were next to suffer from this scorched earth policy. Shortly before the castle at Carrickfergus capitulated to the Scots in the autumn of 1316, its garrison was reduced to eating animal hides and, apparently, 8 of its 30 Scottish prisoners it had captured the previous summer. During the second winter campaign of 1317, the Scots, now led by Robert the Bruce and Edward, raided a second time within striking distance of Dublin and then in the spring devastated the countryside between Cashel and Nenagh to the southwest. However, even in Ulster, the province closest to Scotland that seemed to serve as Edward's home base throughout his three years in Ireland, the land around Coleraine in 1315 was left a desert, with neither "corn nor crop" left standing but all "fired and burnt" after the passing of both the Scottish and Anglo-Irish armies. Meanwhile, the native Irish chieftains also made war on each other, so that at Glenn Fathraim in Connacht "they killed many thousand cows and sheep and horses" and "stripped women and ruined children and lowly folk, and never within the memory of man were so many cattle fruitlessly destroyed in one place."

However, just as the French had fared in Flanders, so too the Scots seem to have suffered just as much as, if not more than, the natives from the famine conditions that prevailed during their invasion. Making what some have characterized as an insane decision to campaign during the winter months of 1316 and 1317, Edward Bruce condemned his army to hunger, cold, and death. In February 1316 at Offaly, the Scots were said to have "suffered from so great a famine that many of them died from hunger" whereas others were "so weakened both from hunger and exertion that many of them died." Then in April 1317 in Meath, the Scots, according to even their own chroniclers, once again "nearly perished with hunger and fatigue, and many were left there dead." When they finally retreated back to their home base in Ulster, they allegedly began resorting to cannibalism, "each one eating the other" and some "malefactors" even extracting dead bodies from their graves and scooping out their skulls for food. When Edward Bruce met his end at the battle of Fochart on October 14, 1318, thus bringing to a close his ill-fated attempt to conquer Ireland, many of the Irish, even among his allies, seem to have greeted his death with relief. The *Annals of Connacht* claim that he was "the common ruin of the Galls and Gaels of Ireland" and asserted that

> never was there a better deed done for the Irish than this [his death], since the beginning of the world … For in this Bruce's time, for three years and a half, falsehood and famine and homicide filled the country, and undoubtedly men ate each other in Ireland.

The most complete picture, however, of how famine and war were able to intersect to utterly devastate a region comes from the border area between England and Scotland.

Between 1311 and 1327, Scottish armies crossed into England numerous times to spread havoc and destruction on the hapless populations of the northern counties of Cumbria, Northumberland, Durham, and Yorkshire. These attacks had a strategic purpose: to force the English king, Edward II, to officially recognize his would-be Scottish counterpart, Robert the Bruce, which was not finally done until the Treaty of Edinburgh/Northampton of 1328, after Edward had been deposed and murdered the previous year. The Scottish raids astutely combined economic devastation that lessened a country's ability to wage war with a political challenge to the reigning monarch as the protector of his people. Moreover, the Scots may have deliberately timed their raids to coincide with the famine. The first of them took place in August and September 1311, just as harvest time was approaching and the grain would have been ripe enough to burn. Thereafter, a Scottish raid coincided with nearly every year of the Great Famine, sometimes occurring late in the autumn after the grain had been stored in barns and could be easily destroyed.

Chronicle accounts serve as some of our best sources for how the people living on the border at this time were affected by this dual onslaught of famine and war. Yet one must be cautious in using this evidence, for a national bias can be detected on both sides of the struggle. The Scotsman John of Fordun, for example, portrays the "havoc with fire and sword" unleashed by "King Robert" on the border as "God's righteous judgment" upon "the faithless English nation." Meanwhile, an anonymous English chronicler from Lanercost Priory in Cumbria complains that the Scots burned and looted even when they had hostages for their tribute, and he characterizes their raids as attacks on defenseless men and women, who were forced to hide themselves in the woods.

However, even if exaggerated, the chroniclers' testimony still makes for an impressive record of how famine and war can achieve a synergistic level of destruction. An author from Meaux Abbey in Yorkshire, after recounting raids throughout the north in that year in which villages were burned and resisters put to the sword, claims that Northumberland was to remain a wasteland for 15 years, "deserted by men and wild and domestic beasts" and where no one dared stay "except in some castle or walled village." In Cumbria as well, the Lanercost chronicler confirms that during raids in 1314 and 1319, the Scots pursued a policy of manufactured starvation, either by "trampling down the crops by themselves and their beasts as much as they could" or by burning the harvest "when the crop had been stored in barns … both the corn upon which the people depended for sustenance during that year and the houses wherein they had been able to take refuge." A chronicler from Bridlington Priory in Yorkshire, reflecting in 1322 on the Scottish invasions, draws an explicit connection between the raids and famine. He says that when the enemy invades the north of England, they bring with them "a true famine, so that many villeins of those parts, who possessed a very full abundance of sheep and cattle on their farms and among their goods, now are compelled to go through the countryside, begging." Nor were the Scots the only ones scorching English earth. Natives of Northumberland known as *schavaldores*, literally "robbers," joined in the orgy of destruction, according to Thomas Walsingham's *Historia Anglicana* (*English History*), which he bases on an earlier source. Beginning in the year 1317 and continuing for nearly four years thereafter, gangs of these freebooters

> robbed rustics in their homes and their neighbors in the fields, releasing their oxen from wagons and plows and killing them for their food. Indeed they left nothing

> behind in the villages that seemed suitable as food, for bread, grain, cows, sheep, pigs, and other kinds of meat, capons and chickens, cheese and oats, they plundered for themselves.

Recently, scholars have been trying to measure as quantitatively as possible the damage that was done along the border by wartime raiding during the famine. One of the most important of these border studies is that of the estates of Bolton Priory in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Bolton suffered from at least two raids, one in 1318 during the spring, when loss of grain storehouses would have been catastrophic, and again in 1319 at the end of September, when the newly harvested grain had just been stored in barns. Total output of oats, by far the most important crop, was 27 percent lower in 1317 than in the previous year, a reflection not of poor production in that year but of the Scots' destruction in the following spring, when the harvest was finally tallied. No grain output was recorded in 1319, because even the account roll for that year was lost to the Scots. From 1320 to 1324, oat production averaged about a third of what it had been before the famine, and the total output of all grain was more than 60 percent lower, on average, than during the 14 years prior to 1315. Indeed, it was during these years that the Bolton canons were forced to disperse to the hospitality of other houses, and we know that during part of this time some were forced to take refuge in Skipton Castle, undoubtedly owing to fear of the Scots.

Perhaps Bolton, having a relatively large farming estate, would have presented a natural target for raiding parties, but did the common people in general suffer in a measure proportionate to that of Bolton? Other records available to us suggest that they did. The best window we have onto what happened to the peasantry living along the border during the Scottish raids are taxation reassessments ordered by the archbishop of York. These reviews of parish valuations were conducted precisely to assess the damage wrought by the Scots. The first revaluation was completed in July 1317 at the behest of Archbishop William Melton to gauge the effects of a Scottish raid in the summer of 1316 that had come down the eastern part of the archdiocese through Durham and back up in the west along the coast of Cumbria. By far the most severe damage had been done in the west, where 25 parishes had their original valuations reduced by 50 percent or more.

Successive raids were to prove even more destructive. In the spring of 1318, the Scots conducted a deeper raid into the heart of Yorkshire. In that county alone, a second reassessment conducted the same year reveals that no fewer than 77 parishes had their tax valuations cut by more than half. In the diocese of Carlisle, all parishes were devastated, as were all the parishes in the deanery of Copeland in Cumbria (part of the diocese of York). In 1319, the Scots raided deep into Yorkshire yet again. Although this time no taxation reassessment survives, the lay subsidy of an eighteenth part of movable goods that Edward II attempted to collect in that year had to be waived for 49 villages in the North Riding of Yorkshire and for 46 villages in the West Riding. In 1322, it was the turn of the East Riding to experience widespread damage from the Scots: a taxation reassessment conducted there five years later in 1327 revealed that 55 parishes were worth less than half their value in more peaceful times. However, perhaps the most dramatic testimony to the devastating effect the Scottish raids had on the peasantry of northern England comes from the town of Easingwold, nestled in the forest of Galtres

Strange diets: marginal illustration of a man defecating into a bowl, which is then presented to a woman to be served up, it seems, at a meal. From an early fourteenth-century Flemish book of hours. (Reproduced with kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.)

near York. Raided in 1319 and 1322, the tenants of Easingwold were the subjects of a royal inquest of 1326 into their ability to pay rents that had been confiscated from their usual lord, the earl of Lancaster. At least 31 tenants were reported to have been killed outright by the Scots, one of whom burned to death in his own house; 17 had their homes and lands "burnt and destroyed"; and 7 more were driven into exile by the poverty that the raids had imposed. If only more such investigations had been conducted or survived, no doubt many more Easingwolds would come to light.

All this evidence has been presented in some detail because it clearly demonstrates that when war was deliberately timed with a famine, not even the horseman of plague could be more effective in sweeping away whole communities from the face of the earth. Nor was the Great Famine by any means the only time that armies pursued a strategy designed to coincide with the harvest: in 1396, for example, the Italian city of Perugia fitted out its soldiers with both scythes and swords so that they could reap the enemy's grain on the march. However, if ever there was a time and a place wherein one could believe that people did indeed resort to strange diets and even to cannibalism or else literally starved themselves to death, it was here on the border during the Great Famine. The sufferings that ensued must have been truly horrific and can hardly be conveyed by mere words or statistics. At the very least, they serve as a reminder that the horsemen of famine and war can never be allowed to ride together, for we know in our own times, when starvation became state policy in the Ukraine and Biafra during the twentieth century, that the death of millions can be the result.

Famine and plague

Aside from the cultural implications of its social responses, the other way in which the Great Famine may have had a lasting impact upon late medieval Europe is by making its population more susceptible to disease, in particular the Black Death that first struck in 1347–1353 and many times thereafter. However, it should be pointed out here that

although many might think of the relationship between famine and disease as going only in one direction, it is certainly true that plague could precede famine, as the old Greek proverb says, *loimos meta limon* (pestilence, then famine). This was well borne out during the First Pandemic of plague of c. 541–750 CE. A study of the seasonal incidence of the pandemic on the eastern side of the Mediterranean in Syria, Iraq, Asia Minor, and Thrace has found that the disease typically peaked during the months of April and August, exactly when peasants in the countryside should have been sowing their crops and then harvesting them. The implications for agricultural production and, in turn, famine are obvious. Witnesses to the plague of 542 in Constantinople, such as Procopius of Caesarea and John of Ephesus, testify that commerce in the city simply ceased as a result of the epidemic, so that food became scarce in the capital and death came to some victims "sooner than it should have come by reason of the lack of the necessities of life." John of Ephesus, who traveled from Syria to Constantinople at the height of the plague, also attests to a desolate countryside, wherein pasture animals wandered about aimlessly and overripe fields of grain stood waiting for someone to harvest them. One of the last occurrences of the disease during the First Pandemic, in Syria and Iraq in 745, left in its wake a famine that reduced people to eating animal dung, drinking raisin pulp, making bread from acorns and tree bark, and boiling down sheep and goat hides for meat and broth.

Because the Second Pandemic of plague during the late Middle Ages followed roughly similar seasonal patterns to the first, one would expect that plague-induced famines would continue. Certainly, the testimony of some chroniclers of the Black Death is suggestive. William Dene of Rochester in England claimed that a third of England "remained uncultivated" owing to a shortage of laborers, whereas his countryman, Henry Knighton of Leicester, described how in the wake of the plague "sheep and cattle roamed unchecked through the fields and through the standing corn" and for lack of shepherds to watch them "died in uncountable numbers in the fields and in by-ways and hedges throughout the whole country." Owing to the high wages demanded by laborers, he also claimed that "many crops rotted unharvested in the fields," although there also "was so great an abundance of all types of grain that no one cared." Richard Fitzralph, archbishop of Armagh in Ireland, made similar observations in a sermon preached at Avignon in 1349. In Italy, Agnolo di Tura of Siena observed that "farms and agricultural lands are left without people to work them," and Matteo Villani, who continued his brother Giovanni's chronicle of the city of Florence after his death in 1348, noted how to everyone's surprise high grain prices and a severe dearth succeeded the Black Death, in spite of the fact that famine had already struck the city in 1347 a year before the plague. In the judgment of the noted French historian, Jean-Noël Biraben, plagues were more likely to directly induce famines owing not only to interruptions of the harvest but also to disruptions in trade and travel and other disorders that regularly accompanied epidemics in Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Conversely, famines played only a secondary role in dissemination of plague as the result of movements of people and grain during times of dearth. Though he admitted that famine did immediately precede plague in some instances, such as 1347–48, 1372–74, 1383, and 1410, the relationship could actually be quite complicated. As an example, Biraben points to a succession of famines and plagues that occurred in eastern Europe between 1421 and 1424: whereas at first famine preceded plague, this was then followed by another dearth, succeeded by yet another epidemic of plague. Local chroniclers

clearly attributed the second epidemic to a collapse in the harvest, which in turn had been caused by the first epidemic, but this itself was seen to have arisen independently of the first famine. A little later, plague reappeared in Europe in 1438 and 1439, right in the midst of a general famine.

During the Great Famine of 1315–22, contemporaries were clearly attuned to the connections to be made between famine and plague, for over and over again in the chronicles, the terms pestilence (*pestilentia*), plague (*plaga* or *pestis*), and mortality (*mortalitas*) are mentioned in the same breath as famine (*fames*), dearth (*caristia*), and sterility (*sterilitas*). Indeed, it is almost impossible to know from these accounts whether people during a famine died of true starvation or from opportunistic diseases. A drop in conceptions—ranging from 32 to 64 percent—that was recorded in some parishes during a famine that afflicted the northwest of England in 1587–88 suggests that malnourishment due to starvation or strange diets caused amenorrhea or miscarriages in a significant proportion of the female population. Conversely, burial records reveal that the rising death toll during this famine—doubling, tripling, or even quadrupling compared to previous years—took place during the winter months, which suggests that typhus or perhaps pneumonic plague played a major role. Of the one million deaths from the potato famine in Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century, only 10 percent, or 100,000, are believed to have been caused directly by starvation, the rest resulting mostly from typhus fever.

As mentioned earlier, famine, largely through the strange diets it often forces its victims to consume, can directly bring on a disease as the result of malnutrition. These can include stomach disorders such as diarrhea and dysentery, ergotism that results from eating moldy grain, anthrax that is sometimes caused by eating tainted meat, and maladies brought on by vitamin deficiencies, such as scurvy, a disease attacking the gums (caused by a lack of vitamin C); xerophthalmia, resulting in blindness (lack of vitamin A); and pellagra, a disease causing dementia (lack of niacin). Some of these ills can be fatal. Children and the very young are especially susceptible to famine malnourishment, because it impedes their normal growth patterns and thus leads to long-term morbidity. However, famine also can indirectly cause deaths through the social impacts it has, such as when beggars and vagabonds massed before cities in search of food, who then would be more susceptible to "crowd" diseases such as typhus fever, tuberculosis, smallpox, and influenza.

Plague doctors during the late Middle Ages seem to have clearly grasped these concepts. From the first outbreak of the Black Death, they noted how famine could contribute to disease by forcing the poor, especially, to consume foodstuffs to which they were unaccustomed or that had gone bad. The Moorish physician, Ibn Khātima, in an appendix to the second part of the first section of his plague treatise written in February 1349, observed: "In some countries bad diseases and decaying fever result from famine, when people are coerced to eat unfamiliar food or grain which is familiar but spoiled." These famine-related diseases, he added, accompanied "changes in the air," or bad weather, and were termed "epidemics, since they are deadly." He gave a specific example from his hometown of Almería on the coast of southern Spain, "when during a famine and high prices, people ate old grain, cereals, and barley. Death came mostly to little and poor people." Also from this time, in 1348, the medical faculty of the University of Paris in their *Consultation* and the Perugian doctor, Gentile da Foligno, in his *Long Consilium*, likewise noted that plague could accompany famine, which the Paris masters attributed to "a corruption

of water and food," whereas Foligno blamed this on people suffering "blockage" in their bodies after overstuffing themselves on food newly available once the dearth was over. The well-traveled, fifteenth-century physician from the Burgundy region of France, Theobaldus Loneti, seemed to subscribe to both of these opinions when he commented that corrupt humors often came from eating "corrupt food," and too much of it, after a famine. Also in the fifteenth century, a Master Primus of Görlitz, professor of medicine at the University of Paris, wrote in his plague treatise that "paupers, who consume bad food and who [live] more off the land in which sterility and famine are found, die more [from plague]," and Dr. Hartmann Schedel listed famine or hunger as one of "five things that dispose a man and make him prone to incurring the plague." (The others were exertion, fruit, women, and remaining stationary—*fames*, *fastigia*, *fructus*, *femina*, *status*.) Like his fellow German colleague in Paris, Schedel also noted that "poor people always die first" in a plague, which he ascribed to their eating of "coarser foods" and greater "interactions with [other] men" and failure to "take precautions against foul smells."

However, the real debate over the putative connection between famine and plague centers around whether the Great Famine during the years 1315–22 contributed substantially to higher incidences of the Black Death some three decades later between 1347 and 1353. This is a complex issue with many possible points of view. However, to boil the arguments down to their essentials, some scholars believe that there is basically no connection between famine and plague—or most other infectious diseases for that matter—and that other autonomous factors such as climate or the occurrence of mutations and recombinant strains in microorganisms have had more of an impact on disease. It is even argued here that a little hunger may help ward off disease, as invading microorganisms need nutrients to survive and reproduce just as much as host cells do. In support of this position it is first of all pointed out that, historically speaking, populations that were better fed, such as the secular and ecclesiastical upper classes, did not always escape more lightly from epidemics, as one would expect if disease mortality was dependent on nutrition. For example, at Christ Church Priory in Canterbury, England, the monks enjoyed what have been called "gargantuan quantities of nutritious food and drink" that included white bread, a variety of fish, beef, pork, poultry, milk, cheese, eggs, fruit, spices, and other delicacies. Indeed, if the Christ Church monks suffered at all in their diet, it was a result of overeating rather than undernourishment. Yet these monks experienced during the course of the fifteenth century at least 27 major outbreaks of disease that included plague, tuberculosis, a mysterious disease known as the "sweat," dropsy—a neurological disease—and strangury, an affliction of the urinary tract. On average, the monks of Christ Church could expect to live fewer than 23 years from birth, one of the lowest life expectancies ever recorded. An analysis of life spans of another group that lived well, the secular peerage in England between 1350 and 1500, yields life expectancies that are little better than those for the Canterbury monks. At age 20, for example, a secular peer could expect to live on average another 10 years, as opposed to 8 for a denizen of Christ Church. In fact, the British upper classes were not to substantially improve their life expectancy relative to that of the general population until the mid-eighteenth century.

A second, related objection to the proposed interdependence between dearth and disease is that epidemics, particularly plague, have proven their virulence even in times of plenty. Grain yields in England improved substantially after the Great Famine and

were in fact slightly above average in 1348 on the eve of the Black Death. Prices also remained low during the plague, despite a sharp drop in productivity, indicating that the population did not suffer from want as it was being roughly halved by the disease. Any attempt to establish that children—the segment of the population who suffered the most from malnourishment—were more vulnerable to plague some 30 years after the Great Famine is likewise inconclusive. Those in their infancy between 1315 and 1322, and thus in their late twenties and early thirties during the Black Death, seem to have been no more susceptible, indeed usually less so, than other age groups. When a severe famine affected southern Europe in 1347 on the eve of the Black Death, mortality ranged from just under 5 percent in Florence to 17 percent in Pamplona in northeastern Spain. Yet when plague invaded Spain and Italy the following year, in 1348, their mortality, estimated at anywhere from 42 to 65 percent, was well within the range of England's, at 45 to 62.5 percent, where the famine did not hold sway. Nor did the rising living standards supposedly enjoyed by the peasantry in the aftermath of the first outbreak of plague keep them from dying in subsequent epidemics, which apparently targeted children most especially.

Though all this may seem pretty conclusive, there is yet another way in which famine may have impacted a disease such as plague. Even if there is absolutely no connection between nutrition and infectious disease mortality, as critics insist on biological and historical grounds, we do know from modern studies in the Third World that persistent malnourishment, such as occurs during a famine, goes hand in hand with certain non-infectious, and often non-fatal, diseases, such as those caused by vitamin deficiencies. This "synergistic package" between famines and chronic infections seems to occur overwhelmingly among the poor, who are thus said to suffer from a "hidden hunger" that is often overlooked by those studying the link between hunger and disease. In effect, the chronic ills from which people suffer during a famine serve as "background noise" that goes mostly unnoticed by observers looking for more spectacular diseases such as plague. The viciousness of "hidden hunger" thus lies not in higher mortalities comparable to plague but in a chronic morbidity. The incidence of this hidden morbidity was probably much higher during the Great Famine than the rather low, 10- to 15-percent figures recorded for its mortality.

Even though they are comparatively mild, famine-related illnesses nevertheless can *directly* contribute to more fatal, virulent diseases such as plague, a process known as pathocenosis. Rather than a direct, famine–disease link, instead we have here a famine–disease–disease connection through which famine enters through the "back door," in effect, by means of its connections with one side of the disease equation. This hypothesis is strongly supported by the recent work of two archaeologists who examined the skeletons of 490 victims of the Black Death buried in London's East Smithfield cemetery. They found that those victims who bore skeletal lesions—strongly indicating illnesses caused by malnutrition—had a 50 percent higher chance of subsequently dying from plague compared to their non-damaged bedfellows sharing their mass grave. Though death's preference for previously-ill victims is even more noticeable during non-plague years, owing to the fact that during an epidemic many more people are dying in general, the Black Death nonetheless did choose its victims selectively, rather than mowing them down indiscriminately as had been widely assumed. The fact that any mortalities during a famine disproportionately affect children may explain

why this age cohort during the Great Famine was perhaps slightly underrepresented when the Black Death struck in 1347–48.

I am therefore convinced that the Great Famine, through its disease "surrogates," did play a significant role in the great mortality inaugurated by the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century. Such a connection, albeit a somewhat convoluted one, would go a long way to helping to explain the incredibly high mortalities during the first outbreak of plague that seem incredible to some. The repeated occurrences of both famine and plague throughout the rest of the late Middle Ages bode for a continuing role for famine in Europe's disease-ridden history.

WAR

> What a joyous thing is war … .When one sees that one's quarrel is just and one's blood is fighting well, a tear comes to the eye. There comes to the heart a sweet feeling of loyalty and pity to see one's friend, who so valiantly exposes his body in order to do and accomplish the command of our Creator. And then one is disposed to go and live or die with him, and for love not at all abandon him. From that comes such a delectation, that he who has not tried it is a man who cannot say what a delight is. Do you think that a man who does that fears death? Not at all; for he is so comforted, he is so elated that he does not know where he is. Truly he fears nothing.
>
> Jean de Bueil, *Le Jouvencel*, c. 1466

Both the refinement of chivalry and the frenzied bloodlust in the heat of battle characterize war during the later Middle Ages. In his semi-autobiographical romance, *Le Jouvencel* (*The Youth*), Jean de Bueil has his sacrificial warriors fight with a mystical, almost erotic gusto, and one can imagine that armored soldiers during the fifteenth century did just that because they were encased in metal plates that gave them the feeling, if not the reality, of impenetrable protection. How different is war for modern man, who for the past 60 years or more has witnessed the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction capable of the complete annihilation of our civilization. Our medieval forebears seem to have enjoyed the luxury of waging war without the specter of an apocalyptic outcome. As a consequence, medieval men are rarely associated with dovish pursuits.

This is, of course, too simplistic a picture of how most people viewed war during the Middle Ages. The vast majority of the population—namely the peasants—can have been little enamored of an activity that on occasion threatened their livelihood and even their lives, with few opportunities of fighting back. An English *Song on the Times*, dating to the early decades of the fourteenth century, seems to give vent to an authentic cry of the people, who implore: "May peace be in the land, through thee, God, bountiful power!/ Prevent war, may want not afflict us!" The Church, too, suffered from war's depredations and occasionally tried to broker peace agreements between combatants or built fortified churches (complete with crenellated battlements) to afford protection to its parishioners when under attack. Manuals for princely behavior held up the pursuit of peace rather than of war as a model for their royal readers. Even Bueil himself, a battle-hardened veteran, speaks of the desolation and destruction wrought by war on a nation and its people. However, it

is *Les Voeux du Héron* (*The Vows of the Heron*), a fourteenth-century French poem, that most effectively bursts the bubble of the kind of bravado bruited about by Bueil:

> When we are in taverns, drinking strong wine, and ladies with white throats and tight bodices pass and look at us, their sparkling eyes resplendent with smiling beauty, nature makes our hearts desire to fight, looking for mercy from them as a result. Then we could defeat Yaumont and Aguilant, and others Oliver and Roland [all characters from *The Song of Roland*]. But when we are in the field, on our trotting warhorses, shields hung 'round our necks and lances lowered, a great frost numbing us, limbs crushed before and behind, and our enemies advancing on us, then we would like to be in a great cellar, and never make a vow again.

This, it seems, was the reality of war, which even a well-armored knight secretly dreaded.

War underwent some profound changes in the course of the late Middle Ages. Many of these changes came about during the Hundred Years War between England and France from 1337 to 1453, which is the main focus of this chapter. However, of course, other countries throughout Europe were caught up in the conflict and were also changed by it, as the two main protagonists had allies in Scotland, Flanders, Germany, Spain, and Portugal, whereas mercenary captains like Sir John Hawkwood, who had first seen service in the war, later made their military careers in Italy. The so-called "military revolution" that some say took place at this time foreshadowed not only modern techniques of warfare, such as

The Second Horseman, War. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

professional armies, infantry-based tactics, and gunpowder technology, but also a modern consciousness toward war, in which propaganda became just as potent a weapon as any pike or firearm and non-combatants became just as legitimate targets as the battlefield enemy. What place there was for peace in this new reality of war also is explored in this chapter, along with the connections that contemporaries began to draw between war and plague, which may have changed their views of the sword-wielding Second Horseman on his fiery red horse.

The dawn of modern warfare

The fourteenth century opened with a battle that was to herald a new style of warfare, one that hitherto had hardly been seen in the Middle Ages but was quickly to become the norm down into the modern era. The battle took place just outside the town of Courtrai in the county of Flanders on July 11, 1302. The cream of the French army, the "glory of France," probably expected little real resistance from the militiamen of the few Flemish cities that were trying to free themselves from the suffocating control of the French king, Philip IV. After all, how could an army fighting on foot, recruited from the tradesmen and artisans of the city guilds, stand up to noble knights whose entire lives were dedicated to war, astride warhorses that were trained to charge straight at the enemy? However, what the French men-at-arms perhaps did not know is that the Flemish militia, equally well protected by suits of chain mail and steel helmets and shields, were also well-trained and disciplined fighting units whose cohesion was ensured by their community connections. They also fought with weapons that gave them equal if not greater range than the knight's sword and lance, despite having to wield them from the ground: the *geldon*, or a 10- to 14-foot spear, and the shorter but stouter *goedendag* or pike, which greeted its target "good day" with a sharp metal spike atop its 4- to 5-foot pole. The Flemings positioned themselves with their backs to a river and a marshy stretch of ground in front of them, standing in "hedgehog" formation with the longer *geldons* in front. The battle commenced with a charge of some 2,500 French cavalrymen thundering toward the Flemings' three divisions drawn up in line.

What happened next is evocatively described by the military historian, Clifford Rogers:

> Caught up both emotionally and physically in the onrush of their line, the French cavalrymen jumped the brooks in front of them at speed, then roared forward. Some stumbled and went down, for the ground was very muddy and crisscrossed with irrigation ditches and trench-traps dug by the Flemings. The horsemen drew nearer and nearer to a collision, accelerating to a gallop from about fifty yards out. When they saw that the line of infantry did not break, did not waver, some of the men-at-arms must have lost their nerve at the last minute, and tried to turn aside before impaling themselves and their horses … others, confident to the last or simply beyond caring, pressed on until their mounts hit the pikes which the militiamen held with their butts firmly grounded in the earth. Some of the Flemings went down, pierced by a knight's lance or trampled under a destrier's metal-shod hooves, but with eight-deep files the fallen could rapidly be replaced and the line restored. The French charge collapsed

into a jumbled mass of screaming horses, cursing men, spraying blood, and splintered wood.

With the French charge stopped dead in its tracks, the Flemish militia went on the attack, slaughtering without mercy more than 1,000 French noblemen, despite the fact that hefty ransoms could have been negotiated from their capture. Instead, the bourgeois soldiers simply stripped whatever was valuable from off their mutilated enemies' carcasses, thus christening their victory as the Battle of the Golden Spurs.

Courtrai was nothing less than the start of a "military revolution" that would ultimately be responsible for Europe's rise to supremacy as a world power, commanding colonial empires in almost every corner of the globe by the nineteenth century. This revolution was about more than just technological progress and was actually quite complex, consisting, it is said, of four main components: (1) a revolution in tactics, involving infantry- rather than cavalry-based armies and newer gunpowder weapons; (2) a revolution in strategy, which boldly sought out battles rather than avoided them and involved several armies campaigning simultaneously; (3) a revolution in numbers, whereby armies greatly increased in size in order to execute the foregoing strategy; and (4) a revolution in impact, as war intruded more deeply into all levels of society in terms of recruitment, taxation, and other means of material support and in terms of the destructive scope of an army on the march.

Although these developments are traditionally dated to between 1560 and 1660, recently it has been argued that they fully emerged in Europe already during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, so that instead of one military revolution we may have had several. Admittedly, many of the elements we typically associate with a modern military had to wait until well after the end of the Middle Ages, such as armies numbering in the hundreds of thousands, mass conscription of populations, development of the *trace italienne* or bastion fortifications, and full integration of artillery and firearms onto the battlefield and in naval warfare. However, the beginnings, indeed the very foundations, of most of the modern revolutionary changes in warfare can be traced to the late Middle Ages. Let us look at each of the four components of the medieval military revolution in turn.

Well before the start of the Hundred Years War, Courtrai had proved the mettle of dismounted soldiers even in the face of the shocking impact from the charge of thousands of heavily armed and armored knights on horseback. Similar results were achieved in other battles at around this time, such as at Sterling Bridge (1297) and Bannockburn (1314), wherein Scottish schiltrom formations defeated English cavalrymen, and at Morgarten (1315), wherein Swiss infantry did the same to Austrian mounted forces. Whereas foot soldiers previously had occupied only a secondary role as the "shield to the sword" of cavalry forming up for battle, now they were coming into their own as the main weapon of the army. Provided they stood their ground and were armed with long pikes or halberds and the enemy was willing to hurl itself against such an immovable object, armies composed almost entirely of infantry were demonstrating the futile impotence of cavalry charges, which once had been the mainstay of battlefield tactics throughout the early and high Middle Ages.

The Hundred Years War showcased an almost unbeatable combination that the English developed of having dismounted men-at-arms fighting alongside longbow archers. The effectiveness of this tactic was proven time and again, as longbowmen, even if they did not kill their targets outright, harassed and channeled them into killing fields wherein the

more heavily armed soldiers fighting on foot could do their worst. Moreover, the longbow, which could fire an arrow with as much as 180 pounds of penetrating force behind it, became a distinctly English weapon, one that was carefully nurtured by the English crown. Robin Hood ballads celebrated the yeoman hero who showed such skill at the butts, and in 1363 English citizens were even ordered to desist from "dishonest games" such as handball, football, cricket, hockey, and cockfighting in favor of taking up the bow. Meanwhile, the French monarchy and nobility were far more distrustful of such infantry contingents. At the battle of Crécy in 1346, French knights rode down their own Genoese crossbowmen in the mistaken belief that they were fleeing the battle, whereas King Charles VI (reigned 1380–1422), who briefly flirted with the idea of training up a contingent of archers, gave up any attempt at imitating the English example on the grounds that "if they had been gathered together, [archers] would have been more powerful than the princes and nobles."

Longbowmen proved especially effective at stopping cavalry charges because, even if the knight was safely cocooned in full plate armor, his horse could not be so well protected and thus proved an easy target for arrows. At Crécy, English archers unleashed as many as half a million arrows which "fell like snow" upon the French, so that they "impaled or wounded horses and riders, who fell to the ground in great distress, unable to get up again without the help of several men." The Flemish chronicler Jean le Bel commented that at Crécy:

> The [English] archers shot so well that horse and rider, feeling their flesh pierced, behaved strangely: one did not want to go further, another sallied forward as arranged; one defied [the arrows] courageously, the other turned its back to the enemy in spite of its master on account of the arrows that it felt, and the others let themselves fall, for they could not do any better; and the English men-at-arms advanced on foot and struck out among those men, who could not help themselves nor their horses.

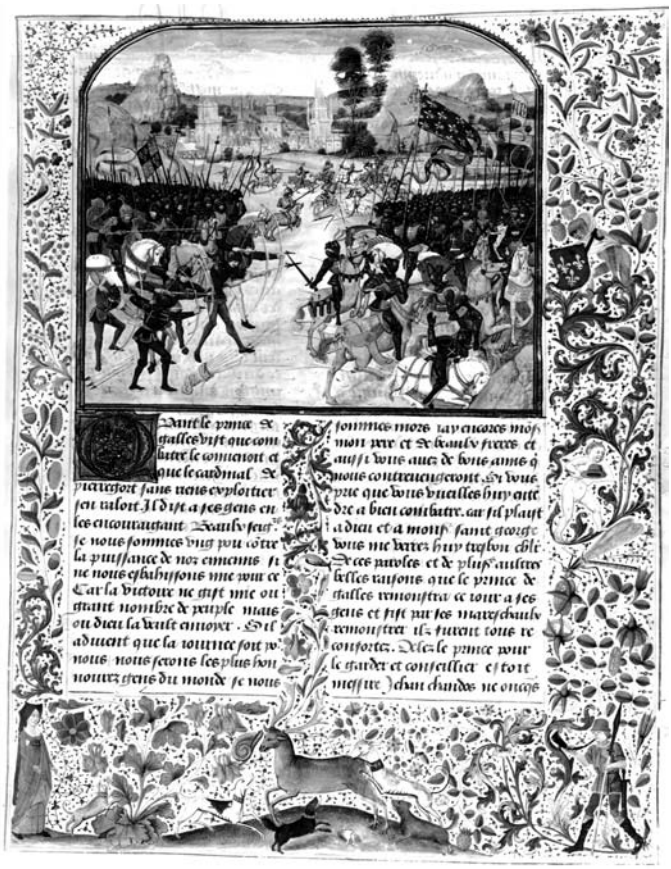
Again at Poitiers in 1356, English archers shot murderously at French cavalry as they advanced between two rows of hedges, so that they were "knocking down horses and piercing everything before them with their long barbed arrows." The result, predictably, was that "the injured and terrified horses refused to go on" and then "swerved or turned back, or else fell beneath their riders, who could neither use their weapons nor get up again." The chronicler of this battle, Jean Froissart, sums up the situation with admirable frankness: "If the truth must be told, the English archers were a huge asset to their side and a terror to the French; their shooting was so heavy and accurate that the French did not know where to turn to avoid their arrows."

Finally, the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* (*Deeds of Henry V*), written by a cleric who apparently accompanied the English army during the Agincourt campaign in 1415, reported that at the battle, English archers were ordered to drive six-foot-long sharpened wooden stakes into the ground to blunt the charge of French cavalry on their "barded [armored] horses" who were intending to specifically target them, according to information obtained from French prisoners. During the actual battle, the archers once again were able to halt cavalry charges with their "stinging hail of missiles shot at both horses and riders" and, once their arrows were used up, they took up any weapons to hand and "struck down, hacked, and stabbed the enemy." The exact same tactics were imported by the English to Spain and Portugal, where

they won victories for Pedro the Cruel and the Portuguese at the battles of Nájera (1367) and Aljubarrota (1385).

Another aspect of these battles upon which nearly all the chroniclers agree is that their casualties were immense. Horror was expressed not only at the quantity of men who fell but at their quality: for the first time, it seemed, nobles were seriously in danger of losing their lives. This was apparently a shocking change from the way war was conducted during the high Middle Ages, when casualties were few and far between. After a year-long war in Flanders in 1127, for example, only one knight had fallen in battle, and four others succumbed to accidents, including one who was said to have died from overenthusiastically blowing his horn. Now, however, the numbers of battlefield dead were counted in the thousands, which the French chronicler, Jean de Venette, declared "cannot be believed." Partly these were owing to the new tactics of war, in which arrows traveling at speeds of more than 200 feet per second were not about to pay knights the courtesy of enquiring whether they wished to surrender. However, there also can be detected a more ruthless and realpolitik approach to battle than ever before. Rather than taking the enemy prisoner for ransom, as in the past, soldiers simply killed one another outright. No doubt this was largely determined by the greater composition of infantry in armies. Socially speaking, the common foot soldier was less inclined than his superiors to respect the international law of arms or code of chivalry that had made war a gentleman's game among knights. Besides, an infantryman facing the thundering charge of a heavily armored cavalryman was not about to pull any punches. Likewise, knights had little reason to spare commoners, who could offer little or no ransom for their capture.

The results could be seen at Courtrai, where the Flemish apparently agreed before the battle not to take any of the French prisoner, and at Cassel (1328), where the French repaid the Flemish in kind. Swiss pikemen, who made their reputations at the battles of Morgarten and Laupen (1339), were notorious for not only refusing to take prisoners but even cutting the heart out of their enemies' bodies, and understandably, such fearsome warriors were later in great demand as mercenaries. Similar tactics were at work during the Hundred Years War. At Crécy, the English "took no prisoners and asked no ransoms, acting as they had decided among themselves in the morning when they were aware of the huge numbers of the enemy." Apparently, "Welsh and Cornishmen armed with long knives" were allowed by the army to wander among the injured, and "when they found any in difficulty, whether they were counts, barons, knights, or squires, they killed them without mercy." John of Luxemburg, king of Bohemia, although blind and clearly not much of a threat to his enemies, nevertheless was found nearly dead on the battlefield along with all his companions, who had tied their horses' bridles together to lead him to the fray. Before the battle of Poitiers, the French king, John II, ordered that no Englishman be left alive except the Black Prince. The Black Prince, in turn, sent the body of Sir Robert de Duras as his calling card to the dead man's uncle, Cardinal Talleyrand de Périgord, who the day before had attempted to arrange a truce between the two sides. The metrical verse life of Henry V by Thomas Elmham has the English king declaring before the battle of Agincourt in 1415 that "England must never lament me as a prisoner or as to be ransomed," and the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* reports that when the English were all but victorious at the end of the battle, they nonetheless killed their French prisoners for fear of a last-minute counterattack. Both incidents, noble and ignoble, later made their way into Shakespeare's famous play.



The battle of Poitiers, 1356, where the English once again defeated the French using the longbow, incapacitating both horse and rider. (From a fifteenth-century manuscript of Froissart's *Chronicles.* Courtesy Bibliothèque Nationale de France.)

The final phase of the tactical revolution in late medieval warfare was the development and use of artillery. Gunpowder, a mixture of sulfur, charcoal, and potassium nitrate, also known as "saltpeter," seems to have been invented as early as the ninth century by Taoist alchemists in China, and its use in firearms was probably developed there a couple of centuries later. By the thirteenth century, knowledge of gunpowder had come to the Islamic Middle East by way of the Mongols, and Roger Bacon in Europe also discusses it and gives a cryptic recipe. By 1327, some kind of "crakkis of wer" were reported being used by the English against the Scots in the Weardale campaign, although it doesn't seem to have helped them much. Over the course of the fourteenth century, dozens and then hundreds of cannon were being developed and used mainly for besieging towns and other fortified places, but their effectiveness was still limited as they could only fire *into* the town, where they hopefully could wreak enough havoc to induce the inhabitants to surrender. It was not until the early-to-middle decades of the fifteenth century that cannon were developed that could batter down walls and so deliver towns in a matter of weeks. This was achieved by

The new gunpowder technology, according to Konrad Kyeser's *Bellifortis* (*Strong in War*), an illustrated military manual written in c. 1405. (Reproduced with permission of Gottingen University Library.)

forging a better cannon, using long iron staves reinforced by cylindrical bands to construct a longer gun barrel that could fire shot much more rapidly and with more firepower. The largest of these cannon were impressive indeed, such as the *Pumhart von Steyr*, now on display in the Army History Museum in Vienna, which when mounted was as high as a man and fired stone balls weighing three-fourths of a ton, or the "Great Turkish Bombard" cast by a Hungarian cannon maker for the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II, which was reportedly 27 feet long and helped batter down the mighty walls of Constantinople in 1453. Later cannons cast in bronze were lighter, more transportable on their two- or four-wheeled carriages, easier to load and fire (from the muzzle or rear of the gun instead of from the breech or front), and, pound for pound, more effective despite their lower caliber of bore. At the same time, invention of corned gunpowder and use of iron instead of stone shot greatly aided these developments.

Meanwhile, artillery, including the handgun or culverin, later replaced by the more accurate, muzzle-loading arquebus, were making their debut on the battlefield. During the Hussite Wars between 1419 and 1434, the Bohemian followers of the reformer Jan Huss, executed in 1415, used culverins to great effect to defeat Catholic German armies sent against them. Firing from behind their *wagenburgen*, mobile fortresses made from wheeled wagons chained together, the Hussite hand-gunners first goaded their enemies to charge and then brought down cavalrymen by targeting their mounts, much as English archers had been doing in France. Cannons and culverins also allowed the French to regain the tactical advantage over the English during the last stages of the Hundred Years War. After inducing the duke of Burgundy to switch sides and form an alliance with them in 1435, the French were able to incorporate the formidable Burgundian siege train into their army and retake

town after town in Normandy and Guienne at lightning speed. The final curtain to the war came at the battle of Castillon in 1453, described as the first battle on European soil where artillery decided the outcome, as the serried ranks of the English were mown down by enfilade fire coming from the French fortified camp. The last act of this tactical artillery revolution was probably the adaptation of light, rear-loading cannon or culverins on board ships, which was to transform naval warfare.

Even though new tactics in infantry and artillery were perhaps late-medieval Europe's greatest contribution to the military revolution, there was also an important, strategic element that allowed these tactics to be so effective. This was a strategy that sought out battles rather than avoided them, even if the more aggressive army subsequently took up a defensive posture on the battlefield. Already in 1300, the French royal courtier, Pierre Dubois, was advocating a new military doctrine that targeted non-combatants, as neither battles nor sieges seemed to prove decisive, in a work that promised *Successful Expeditions and Shortened Wars*. Ironically, it was the English who took this strategy most closely to heart against the French during the Hundred Years War, as they consistently targeted civilians during their *chevauchées*, or armed rides, through the countryside, which required divisions to peel off for leagues at a time from the main line of march, thus establishing a swath of destruction typically 15 miles wide. This not only destroyed an enemy's economic wherewithal to fight, as Dubois had foreseen, but more often than not goaded the French king to attack, which allowed the English army to use its tactical superiority to greatest advantage. The strategy was slightly modified by Henry V during the Agincourt campaign of 1415, when he apparently imposed tight discipline on the English troops to demonstrate to the French people he was conquering that he could be a good ruler to them. However, by 1435, Sir John Fastolf was urging a return to the old "werre cruelle and sharpe" strategy to reverse declining English fortunes in the war, yet by this time it was really too late, as the French now had the tactical advantage. The Hussites of Bohemia also adopted Dubois' strategy with their "beautiful rides" through parts of Germany, Hungary, and Poland during the 1420s and 1430s; though they did not stop these areas from supplying men and material for the anti-Hussite crusade, the raids may have helped spread Hussite propaganda that eventually convinced Catholic German princes to come to terms before such proto-Protestant and democratic ideas came to their own lands. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, an offensive, war-seeking strategy finally allied itself with offensive tactics during the Burgundian Wars between 1474 and 1477. Swiss pikemen, or *gewalthut*, demonstrated at Morat (1476) and Nancy (1477) that they could keep their formation even when charging at the enemy under threat of archery or artillery fire. These lessons were not lost on later military innovators, such as Gustavus Adolphus, king of Sweden, when the military revolution supposedly reached its height during the seventeenth century.

Probably the one area in which late medieval warfare least anticipated modern trends was in the size of armies. Right up until the advent of the Black Death in Europe in 1347–48, the largest military musters that could be put into the field numbered between roughly 20,000 to 40,000 men, but the plague sharply curtailed manpower and available financial resources, so that it was not until the middle decades of the fifteenth century, when population again was on the rise, that armies as large were to be seen again on a regular basis. For the 100 or so years in-between, armies of 10,000 or fewer were the norm. The army of between 80,000 and 100,000 that Sultan Mehmed II of the Ottoman Empire

assembled to besiege Constantinople in 1453 was an exception that no single European ruler could match until Spain was able to do so by the 1550s.

Nevertheless, the development of new technologies; the greater reliance on cash payments instead of feudal tenures to recruit armies, especially mercenaries; and the higher price of food, clothing, and equipment needed to supply and outfit soldiers meant that waging war did not get any less expensive despite the fall in numbers of fighting men. This meant, in turn, that war became ever more intrusive into the lives of ordinary men and women, who, even if they were not directly caught up in the conduct of a campaign, would be expected to contribute in terms of recruitment, purveyance, and taxation, obligations that became especially onerous after the population declines brought on by the plague left fewer remaining to shoulder the burden. For at least the first half of the Hundred Years War, England held the advantage here, being able to rely on recruiting tools such as commissions of array (orders to sheriffs to recruit men from the shires), letters of indenture (contracts for specified numbers of men at specified rates of pay), and other inducements such as pardons in exchange for military service, though it could also call upon national systems of purveyance and taxation, as mediated through a parliament that was now meeting on a regular basis. England also had the advantage of a flourishing trade, both in terms of exports such as wool and imports such as wine, which it taxed and which, in fact, formed the bulk of its revenue. By contrast, France did not institute a permanent, peacetime taxation until after the Treaty of Brétigny of 1360 imposed the enormous ransom of 3 million gold crowns, or £500,000, for the return of King John II, captured at the battle of Poitiers.

By the end of the war, however, the tables had turned. France was now the innovator, as Charles VII founded the first standing, professional army, the *compagnies d'ordonnance*, in 1445, to be financed by regular imposition of the land tax or *taille*. Initially this was merely an attempt to co-opt mercenary companies who had been scorching the French countryside (hence their name, *écorcheurs*) for the past 10 years, but the degree of control, uniformity, discipline, and readiness that it provided the French crown in terms of its military needs was almost irresistible. It was an example that was to be imitated down through the remainder of the Middle Ages by Burgundy, Milan, Hungary, and Spain (but not, apparently, England or Germany). The last even imposed what may be considered the first national conscription, calling up 1 man in 12 between the ages of 20 and 45, by the Ordinance of Valladolid in 1496. Such forces not only gave unprecedented advantages to the states who could afford them over their rivals on the battlefield but also could be used to overawe their own populations.

There are many caveats that can be made to this rather whirlwind tour of Europe's late medieval military revolution. The Burgundian Wars of the 1470s are especially instructive in this regard. For instance, they show that cavalry still had an important role to play in battles despite the rise of infantry, for Swiss pikemen were unable to pursue and finish off retreating Burgundians at Grandson in 1476, and it was not until Morat (1476) and Nancy (1477) that they achieved decisive victories with the help of mounted allies. Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, lost every one of these battles and was himself killed at the hands of an amateur citizen militia hastily recruited from the Swiss cantons, despite having painstakingly developed between 1468 and 1473 a professional army modeled on the *compagnies d'ordonnance* of France, which even engaged in military drills when standing down. Much still depended on chance and good timing, for France acquired the rich prize

of Burgundy only through the death of its duke in 1477, not through its standing army or artillery siege train, magnificent though these were. And artillery, which for a while did throw a significant advantage to the attacker especially in sieges, was eventually neutralized by 1520 with the development of *trace italienne* or bastion fortifications. The English strategy of seeking a conclusive battle through their *chevauchées* did not always work, for Edward III began and ended his reign with campaigns in 1339 and 1373 that achieved very little at great cost; in fact, in the latter instance, chroniclers agreed that it was the Fabian tactics employed by the French king, Charles V "the Wise," which avoided battle at the same time as shadowing the enemy to limit the damage they could do on the march, that proved the most successful. Nor am I truly convinced that states ever really solved the problem of how to finance the new styles of war: the most advanced political systems in Europe were probably located in Italy, wherein the almost incessant wars among city-states between the mid-fourteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries were financed by a combination of heavy taxation and (often forced) loans, which is basically how the West still pays for its wars to this day. Even though in the early modern period some might get lucky with the discovery of silver in the Americas or a sharp recovery and rise in their populations, it was war that greatly contributed to the fall of monarchies in England in the seventeenth century and France in the eighteenth.

Yet all this is not to deny a fundamental truth of modern warfare that was dawning in the late Middle Ages, which is that now no one could escape the entanglements of the Second Horseman, who exacted a price in blood and treasure that was far higher than ever before.

The language of war

An element of the military revolution that has received considerably less attention but was equally important for the future development of modern warfare was the propaganda that was being churned out and disseminated on both sides during the Hundred Years War. This propaganda worked on several levels but had essentially the same effect: to glorify one's own cause by imbuing it with an almost mystical, religious aura and, at the same time, demonize one's enemies by depicting them as motivated almost entirely by malice and evil. This was the essence of the new nationalism: to suffer and deal out death in the name of a country or sovereign who can do no wrong, against a dehumanized enemy who is never in the right. The patriotic fervor that was to lead millions of men to their deaths in Europe's two World Wars was already bestirring itself in the later Middle Ages.

At its highest level, propaganda assumed the genteel form of an appeal to chivalry. This was subtle propaganda, perhaps, but words with a purpose nonetheless. Among the most accomplished literary expressions of chivalry were works recounting the legend of King Arthur, whose very name is almost synonymous with chivalric ideals. Of the real, historical Arthur, possibly a fifth- or sixth-century ruler who led British resistance against the Anglo-Saxons, not much is known. What is far more interesting is how the Arthurian legend was manipulated for political purposes by various medieval monarchs. By far the most skillful in this regard were Edward I and his grandson, Edward III. In 1278, Edward I and his queen, Eleanor of Castile, presided over the translation of what were claimed to be the bones of Arthur and Guinevere to the high altar of Glastonbury Abbey. Edward III tried to go one better in 1344: at a tournament held in February at Windsor Castle, he announced before a

glittering array of lords and ladies that "when the opportunity should be favorable to him, he would set up a round table, in the same manner and condition in which Lord Arthur, formerly king of England, left it, namely to the number of 300 knights, and that he would cherish and maintain it on behalf of [all] men, always increasing its number." The round table may never have been realized but, shortly thereafter, Edward founded the Order of the Garter, an international chivalric society that survives to this day. Likewise, on the opposite side of the Channel, the French king, John II, formed the Order of the Star in 1352, apparently inspired by French Arthurian romances such as *Lancelot du Lac* (*Lancelot of the Lake*), *La Mort le Roi Artu* (*The Death of King Arthur*), and the *Queste del Saint Graal* (*Quest for the Holy Grail*). In the words of the historian Malcolm Vale, these orders became important as "the only formal means whereby chivalric values might be enlisted and harnessed to the service of a sovereign."

Clearly, the cachet of limited membership that such societies conferred greatly appealed to an upper-crust audience. This was particularly important to both Edward III and John II: the former sorely needed to improve his standing among the aristocratic community after the disastrous reign of his father, Edward II, whereas the latter was eager to further legitimate the recent Valois claim to the French crown. Chivalry, therefore, was not the dead letter many think it had become by the end of the Middle Ages.

It is true that some aspects of chivalry seem jarringly at odds with the new realities of war and the actual behavior of armies on the march, particularly toward civilian noncombatants. Therefore, it is easy to see why the Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga, concluded that, as far as late medieval chivalry was concerned, "a blasé aristocracy laughs at its own ideal." Indeed, the fifteenth-century author of perhaps the greatest work of Arthurian literature, Sir Thomas Malory, was a suspected rapist who wrote his *Le Morte d'Arthur* in jail. However, for contemporaries, such apparent discrepancies were justified on the grounds that, according to most medieval laws of war, chivalry only applied to the *chevalier* and not to the ordinary peasant, especially one outside the king's obedience who remained loyal to the enemy. In any case, fighting at the behest of a sovereign absolved the individual combatant of any atrocities committed in war. Even in its heyday, chivalry always contained within itself an inner dichotomy between what was said in theory and what was done in practice, a tension between a warrior culture's natural inclination to violence and society's need for public order. Nor was chivalry necessarily invalidated by the way armies behaved toward one another. The lower class of soldier that increasingly made up infantry units did prove more indifferent to the niceties of war as they were correspondingly more willing to shed noble blood. However, the exemplars of late medieval chivalry, such as *Le Jouvencel* and Geoffroi de Charny's *Book of Chivalry*, made a point of noting that any fighting man, regardless of his status, could rise through the ranks and make his fortune on the battlefield, especially in mercenary service. And conflicts such as the wars in Italy, in which rival city-states competed for such service, gave many adventurous souls like Sir John Hawkwood the opportunity to do just that.

For the crown, chivalry also continued to be relevant down into the late Middle Ages, especially when patriotic passages emphasized selfless service to one's sovereign over vainglorious deeds of individual prowess, a point that Huizinga himself noted. Indeed, the Arthurian works that became popular in late medieval England, such as the anonymous *Morte Arthur* poems and Malory's epic, all seem to depict an "Arthurian Apocalypse"

wherein their hero is equated with the sacrifice and promised second coming of Christ. It is not hard to see how this would help imbue the English monarchy with some of chivalry's quasi-religious overtones. Divine right, the cornerstone of the coming absolutism, is here starting to take shape.

The next level of propaganda disseminated during the Hundred Years War catered to the educated middle class: the country squires and town burgesses who paid a lion's share of the taxes and helped finance the war and whose support and enthusiasm it was, therefore, vital to sustain. This propaganda was much more virulently anti-French than that served up to the nobility, whose chivalric camaraderie retained an international flair. It usually took the form of doggerel verse written perhaps by one of the king's clerks or minstrels who accompanied him on campaign.

A typical example of this sort of patriotic poetry is *An Invective against France*, written by an anonymous author shortly after the English victory at Crécy in 1346. An extremely long poem of no fewer than 391 lines in Latin rhyming couplets, the *Invective* does not foster national identity so much as a hatred of the Valois monarchy. Much of the poem, in fact, is devoted to persuading the French to adopt as their rightful ruler Edward III, who had a legitimate claim to the throne through his mother, Isabella, and who had formally assumed the title of king of France in 1340. Whereas "Philip Valois" is compared to sly and cruel animals such as the lynx, the viper, the fox, or the wolf, Edward is represented by the noble boar and leopard. Philip's historical models are Xerxes and Darius, the Persian tyrants defeated by the ancient Greeks, whereas Edward's are David, Judas Maccabaeus and, of course, Arthur, who are among the "nine worthies" of chivalric literature. Perhaps the most pointed lines of the poem employ a clever pun on Philip's Latinized name, *Philippus*: "*Phy* [a fish] stinks, *lippus* [a blind man] does harm with his eyes, / Therefore Duke Philip does harm and stinks; he will reap a sordid fate."

As propaganda, the *Invective* takes rather astonishing liberties with the truth. Its description of Edward's mother as "a bright star of virtue" is laughable in light of the fact that her son in 1330 engineered a coup against her regency that resulted in the execution of her lover, Roger Mortimer, and her comfortable retirement to Castle Rising in Norfolk. Yet this flattering characterization was essential if Edward was to make a convincing claim to the French throne. At another point in the poem, Philip Valois is described as a man "cruel, piratical, of rare faith," who has "captured, destroyed, raped many" by means of his navy. This undoubtedly refers to the French raids upon the southern English coast in 1338, which terrified Englishmen into believing that a full-scale invasion was imminent. In addition, Philip is the "accursed of Christ" and is out to conquer England and divide up the spoils. Should this happen, "honor and love will be driven underground, true faith will die, the law, merit, peace will not be found." Edward, by contrast, is the "English angel," the "friend of justice … peaceful, patient, pious and modest, just, generous, merciful, moderate, even-tempered, truthful, distinguished, affable." He also is "devoted to Christ, pleasing to his people"; he rides through France "in Christ's name," disdaining "filthy lucre" and false truces. All this hyperbole is rather hard to swallow when for two months prior to the battle of Crécy, the English army, according to its own diary of the campaign, pillaged and burned its way through Normandy "until the sky itself glowed with a fiery color."

Truly, national stereotypes begin to emerge with *The Dispute between the Englishman and the Frenchman*, another anonymous Latin poem also dating probably to the 1340s. Though

written by an Englishman, the poem is remarkable for presenting a candid French view of the English, although the Englishman is allowed the last laugh. The Frenchman caricatures the English as unkempt, uncouth, and insatiable. Nothing but filth comes out of their mouths, they commit all sorts of crimes and, worst of all, their hair is uncombed. "Their belly is their God" to which they offer sacrifices until they resemble beasts more than humans. They prefer "vats of corn" (beer) rather than the "liquor of the vine" (wine), and even if they drink the latter, it is only the dregs. When the Englishman is allowed to speak, he mocks the French as cowardly and feminine (a characterization also applied to Philip Valois). Hence the hen, a female chicken, rather than the more virile rooster, is an appropriate symbol of the French nation. The Englishman's hair may be uncombed, but the Frenchman combs his locks in a mirror by turning his head this way and that "until it does not wish to be yours." If the Englishman drinks the dregs, he at least has something, whereas the Frenchman is left with nothing. Because the Frenchman prefers to hear his own language spoken rather than English, the Englishman will make him suffer so that he cries out in French words of pain. The epithets of "frog" and "*le rosbif*" (roast beef) that Englishmen and Frenchmen use today to characterize the other have a very long history.

Another way that the English monarchy communicated national prejudices to its more learned subjects was through the official chronicles, or histories, of the period. History as propaganda was an old technique in England, dating back to at least the reign of Alfred the Great during the ninth century. Toward the end of the thirteenth, there was perhaps the first systematic use of an official history when Edward I distributed "proofs" of his overlordship of Scotland to various monasteries, along with instructions to copy the evidence into their chronicles. By the early fourteenth century, even before the Hundred Years War began, the concept of nationalism was already emerging in English annals. The histories of Robert of Gloucester and Robert Manning, for example, consciously foster a sense of nationhood by telling the entire story of the island in its native language. Given these precedents, it is no surprise to find that information from the dispatches Edward III and his ministers regularly sent back from the front during the Crécy campaign found their way, sometimes verbatim, into the chronicles. By far the most incendiary piece of propaganda sent back to England was a copy of an alleged invasion plan drawn up by Philip VI in March 1339, which was said to have been discovered in the muniments of the town of Caen, taken by Edward's forces toward the end of July 1346. The plan reportedly called for a second Norman Conquest of the island by means of the mustering of a large army in Normandy to be led by its duke, none other than the dauphin, John (the future John II). Should England be conquered, the realm was to be divided up among John and his Norman nobles, to be held as a fief of the French king. This "find" was read out to the English populace by Archbishop John Stratford at St. Paul's churchyard in London, which is perhaps how the chroniclers learned of it. It also conveniently justified Edward's *chevauchée*, or armed raiding march, through Normandy, which he claimed was being conducted for the better security of the realm. Although the invasion plot is treated as genuine by most modern historians, there is no way of confirming it outside of its appearance in English documents and chronicles. If the French really did have a secret plan to conquer England, there is no evidence that they ever attempted to carry it out.

Patriotic propaganda was no less indulged in across the Channel. Its most sublime expression came from the mouth of a young girl from Domrémy, Joan of Arc. As the

Maid led Charles VII to his coronation at Reims on July 17, 1429, she began the process of restoring the sacred character of the royalist cause at a time of its lowest ebb, when it had been in real danger of being supplanted by the English house. After her capture outside Compiègne in May 1430, an English-controlled tribunal attempted to discredit Joan as a divinely inspired champion of the French monarchy by having her tried and condemned as an alleged witch, claiming that her saintly "voices" were instead demonic. Presciently, Joan seemed to come to the realization during her trial that her death would serve the French cause far better than her life had ever done. On March 14, 1431, she told the tribunal that her voices had predicted her coming "martyrdom," which she should accept "cheerfully." Indeed, when Joan was burned at the stake in Rouen on May 30 of that year, her apotheosis was complete, even though it was to be more than 20 years later that the verdict was to be officially reversed at a "trial of rehabilitation" in 1455–56, presided over by Charles VII. For in Joan, the French found their equivalent of England's King Arthur: a figure who lent a divine stamp of approval to the crown.

Earlier in the war, anonymous French poems such as *Le Dit de la Rébellion d'Angleterre et de Flandre* (*The Tale of the Rebellion of England and Flanders*); *Les Voeux du Héron*, *Poème sur la Bataille de Crécy* (*Poem on the Battle of Crécy*); and *Complainte sur la Bataille de Poitiers* (*Complaint on the Battle of Poitiers*) mirrored their English counterparts both in the extreme bias of their points of view and in the poor quality of their verse. It was perhaps from one such poem that a most effective piece of French propaganda wormed its way into the chronicles: the story of the rape of the countess of Salisbury by Edward III, alleged to have taken place in 1342. The rape story was a particularly damaging slur on Edward's reputation, as legend holds that it was by his picking up the countess's fallen garter belt that the Order of the Garter, founded in 1348, received its emblem, *Honi soit qui mal y pense* ("evil on him who thinks evil of it"). Thus, in the French mind, Edward's chivalrous act was transmuted into a crime. Yet it is highly unlikely that, if the rape truly occurred, the victim's garter belt would have been adopted as a symbol of an order of chivalry. Highly suspicious is the fact that the rape story is not backed by authorities outside of French sources and that it follows a standard scenario dating back to the Roman historian Livy's account of the rape of Lucretia by the son of the Etruscan king, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus: prince falls in love with another's wife, prince ravishes wife, wife confesses to her husband, husband and wife are separated forever. Nevertheless, the story was disseminated by Jean le Bel, a chronicler normally well disposed to the English side, and more recently it has taken in the popular modern historian, Barbara Tuchman, who cites it to demonstrate the hollowness of Edward's chivalry.

By far, the type of propaganda that influenced the most Englishmen the most often was that propounded by the clergy on the crown's behalf to their congregations during church services. The machinery that accomplished this task was impressive: usually the crown issued a writ out of chancery directed to the prelates asking that certain religious ceremonies be performed—which could include prayers, processions, masses, litanies, psalms, vigils, fasts, and even bell ringing—whose purpose was to anticipate or give thanks for a victorious battle or diplomatic enterprise; the archbishops and bishops then forwarded the royal request for execution to their archdeacons or officials; and from there the message was relayed to every priest in every parish of every diocese. Sometimes sermons, or even a proclamation in English giving news from the front (provided that this was favorable),

also were ordered. The people themselves were encouraged to take part in the ceremonies by the promise of 40 days' indulgence against their assigned penances. Theoretically, if this entire process worked according to plan, an awareness of and support for the king's exploits would have been demanded of every churchgoer in the country, which would have included just about everyone except, perhaps, for foreigners. Six hundred years before the age of television and radio, a more effective means of "broadcasting" to the nation cannot be imagined.

How often and to what effect did the crown employ this extraordinary propaganda tool? If we restrict ourselves to the first phase of the Hundred Years War, between the opening of the conflict in 1337 and the death of Edward III in 1377, we can see how well it worked. Royal propaganda was issued by the clergy for 25 of the 41 years during this period, sometimes more than once a year, and in as many as 13 of the 17 dioceses throughout the country (Table 2, p. 277). By following the propaganda, one can gain a complete blow-by-blow narrative of the king's progress in his struggle with France, often involving sideshows in Scotland, Spain, or Prussia. When victories occurred, such as at Sluys (1340), Crécy (1346), Poitiers (1356), and Nájera (1367), news of them, so vital to maintaining enthusiasm for the war, was communicated to at least a substantial portion of the population. Medieval Englishmen and Englishwomen, flocking to their parish churches to hear the word of God, also harkened to the voice of their king.

Despite being disseminated by the Church, such propaganda twisted the truth no less than other forms. Even when undertaking offensive campaigns, the English army was described as facing an enemy out to "devastate," "destroy," "subvert," "submerge," "overthrow," and "exterminate" the king and his realm, his people, his Church, even the English language itself. In reality, England was rarely in danger of being invaded by the French. Likewise, when Englishmen were exhorted to pray for peace, often they were really sanctioning war: it is hard to imagine the Black Prince in 1356 going to France "for the purpose of acquiring peace," when in fact he led a *chevauchée* through the country that culminated in the battle at Poitiers.

How exactly were the people's prayers supposed to help the king and his army, and how important were they to the war effort? It is clear that prayers were considered an essential part of the preparations for a campaign, so much so that they were ordered to be said on a regular basis. In a typical turn of phrase, the king commanded prayers

> because the outcomes of wars are in doubt and a triumph comes not from man but from God, in that every victory and every triumph [resides] not in the arms of a nation, in an abundant virtue of the army, or in the strength of the human arm, but in the dues paid to God.

Alarms were raised when the people seemed "sluggish" or "tepid" in their devotions on these occasions, as was reported by English prelates in 1359, 1370, 1377, 1382, 1388, and 1416–18. Historical and biblical examples were invoked to demonstrate how the power of prayer could turn the tide of battle. Perhaps the one most often cited was that of Moses, who defeated Pharaoh's armies in Egypt by calling down a pillar of fire and cloud and parting the Red Sea (Exodus 14). Indeed, prayers were thought of in almost the same terms

as the material weapons of an army. In the words of John Trillek, bishop of Hereford, who ordered prayers for the Crécy campaign in 1346:

> We believe that nothing in this life more immediately renders succor than the humble instance of prayer, judging it to be, if well and suitably done, like our soldiers gathered for the defense of our public weal, for the repulsion of our injuries, for the well-being of our persons and goods, for the peace and quiet of our bodies and the ministration of our hearts … and we take comfort in the labors of the people left behind in our care, whose arms are reckoned to be their prayers and tears.

The aid of ordinary citizens, including women and children, was being enlisted in the English war effort as never before, and this undoubtedly affected how noncombatants on the opposite side of the Channel were treated when encountered by the English army.

Although clerical propaganda during the Hundred Years War focused on benediction of one's own side rather than malediction of the other, the actual language employed makes it clear how hated was the adversary. It is rather disturbing to see members of the Church giving thanks for the deaths of other Christians, as Simon Langham, archbishop of Canterbury, did in 1367 when he ordered prayers of thanksgiving for "the great slaughter of the enemy … namely to the number of 6,000 or thereabouts" in the course of the Black Prince's victory over Henry of Trastamara at Nájera in Spain. It could certainly be argued that this went against the spirit, if not the letter, of Christ's command to "love your enemies … and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you" or to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 5:44–45; 22:39–40). As a matter of fact, Richard Fitzralph, archbishop of Armagh in Ireland, did so object to prayers in support of the king's wars on these very grounds in a sermon preached in London in 1346. Yet Fitzralph's "conscientious objection" was exceptional, and even his was qualified by the assurance that Edward III and his army were still deserving of prayers because their war was a just one.

Some priests not only prayed against their enemies but fought and shed their blood as well. The great thirteenth-century theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, wrote that "warlike pursuits are altogether incompatible with the duties of a bishop and a cleric," whereas a fourteenth-century arbiter of the laws of war, Honoré Bouvet, declared that a priest could shed blood in self-defense but not in attack. Yet during the later Middle Ages, English clerics were being called upon more and more not merely to pray but to fight. In 1369, Edward III issued the first writ of array for the clergy, who were to act as a kind of home defense in case of invasion, and further calls to arms were issued to the first estate no fewer than 10 times during the rest of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The weaponry that was required of these fighting fathers—lances, swords, knives, axes, and, if suitably trained, bows and arrows—was not exactly designed to maim rather than shed blood, which was permitted for a cleric under a narrow interpretation of canon law. Yet there was one priest who did protest being drafted for war: Thomas de Lisle, parson of Shentling on the Isle of Wight, who led the Island's clergy in resisting a general array ordered for the island in April 1338 and February 1339, according to Sir John de Langford, warden of Carisbrooke Castle, who was commissioned to supervise the array. Apparently, though, this was not on the grounds of having to shed blood but was for De Lisle a matter of clerical immunity of the Church. De Lisle's ordinary, Adam Orleton, bishop of Winchester, wrote to Langford

reminding him that only the bishop, namely himself, had the authority to order the clergy's array, yet on the very same day, he did exactly that, ordering De Lisle to "warn and induce all and several rectors and vicars of the Isle" to find "suitable arms to resist the enemy wishing to invade the same Isle" (a moot point as this had already occurred more than a month previously). At the same time, Orleton, perhaps hoping to avoid the necessity to use arms, ordered that nearly all the spiritual weapons at the Church's command—including prayers, processions, masses, litanies, psalms, and bell ringing—be brought to bear for the sake of peace.

The fourteenth century was by no means the first time the English priesthood took up arms. However, by 1369, the English clergy seem to have become almost an extension of the royal army, so thoroughly entwined were they in the war effort. It was not always thus. During the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Church had proclaimed the Peace and Truce of God that tried, if not to eliminate fighting, at least to limit its destructive scope. When the Church became more involved in war during the crusading movement of the subsequent two centuries, its propaganda was geared toward fighting for a religious cause rather than a national one. However, now even the Church's involvement in the ethos of chivalry was being challenged, as late medieval authors of chivalric works, such as Geoffroi de Charny, member of the Order of the Star and keeper of the sacred oriflamme, banner of the kings of France, asserted a pragmatic "lay independence" from religious ideals. There probably was nothing late medieval clerics could have done but acquiesce in the inexorable onslaught of nationalism. Nevertheless, the Church as an institution was practically the only one capable of halting the Second Horseman of the Apocalypse; yet it surrendered the reins when it placed its services at the disposal of the state.

The Church in France was equally caught up in the propaganda machine of monarchs. Although no episcopal registers survive in France from the Middle Ages, we know from other records that prayers were on occasion ordered to be said for the well-being of the king and his realm. The chronicler Jean Froissart testifies that on both sides of the Channel, the kings sought to explain to their subjects their reasons for going to war, an effort that would imply the medium of parish priests. In addition, we possess a sermon in support of the Valois cause delivered in February 1338, at the very start of the Hundred Years War. In it, Pierre Roger, archbishop of Rouen, trusted adviser and diplomat to King Philip VI and the future Pope Clement VI, harnessed the theory of "just war" to the Valois bandwagon. Dating back to St. Augustine (354–430), just war theology held that a war was just only when waged by a legitimate authority, for a "just cause," and when motivated by a "right intention." The French monarchy was about to face a serious challenge to its legitimacy from its English rival, and Roger chose to ignore the whole question of Edward III's claim to the French throne, focusing instead on Edward's rebelliousness as Philip's vassal for the duchy of Aquitaine. This enabled Roger to portray the French as possessing the all-important just cause that destined them for victory.

Conversely, the English no less vehemently claimed that *they* were waging a just war. A sermon preached in support of Edward III's Scottish campaign by the archbishop of Canterbury, John Stratford, sometime during the 1330s declared that a just war was one fought "for country" and compared the young king to Christ because he sacrificed his body in battle. Edward himself, in his writs requesting prayers, regularly referred to the "truth and justice of our cause" in his prosecution of the war with France. Both sides thus claimed

a monopoly on just wars. There seemed little prospect for peace when neither side was willing to admit that its waging of war was anything less than divinely inspired.

War and the noncombatant

The implications of the new propaganda—that all citizens, even noncombatants, were participants in, and therefore legitimate targets of, war—were fully realized by the *chevauchées*, or raids, conducted by English soldiers marching through France, especially during the middle decades of the fourteenth century. It is often pondered how knights, supposedly bound by the code of chivalry, could have perpetrated such ungracious deeds. As already mentioned, the answer usually found is that warriors did not consider themselves bound by chivalry's rules when engaging their inferiors, or that armies—in particular, the lower class of soldiers—disregarded chivalry altogether during the day-to-day operations of a campaign. If we look at the question from another angle, however, the atrocities appear slightly more justifiable. A victim's actions may, in the eyes of an invading army, bring him lawfully within the purview of war. Especially if the French populace was assumed to be supporting the war effort just as much as in England, there may have been no "innocents" in wartime. Honoré Bouvet, the author of *L'Arbre des Batailles* (*The Tree of Battles*), a famous fourteenth-century treatise on the laws of war, deplores that "in these days all wars are directed against the poor laboring people and against their goods and chattels. I do not call that war, but it seems to be pillage and robbery." Nonetheless, elsewhere Bouvet declares that ordinary citizens are immune only if they "are unwilling to aid their King in war," which was extremely unlikely. The far more probable scenario, as was the case in the Hundred Years War, was that

> if on both sides war is decided upon and begun by the Councils of the two kings, the soldiery may take spoil from the kingdom at will, and make war freely; and if sometimes the humble and innocent suffer harm and lose their goods, it cannot be otherwise.

Peasants, like the clergy, were no longer assigned one task in society, namely their work in the fields, but were being drafted into the integrated organism of the state, sharing in all its benefits and misfortunes.

What was the purpose behind these incredibly destructive raids? An obvious motive was the profit and plunder to be had from ransoming prisoners and looting houses and churches, especially if the king was short of cash with which to pay his troops. However, it does not explain some of the seemingly wanton destruction caused by English armies, such as the burning of entire villages, that might range 10 to 40 miles outside their line of march and thus allow little time to seek out valuables. Perhaps this can be explained as part of a general "scorched-earth" policy to sap enemy morale, challenge the legitimacy of the local authority (whose primary function was to protect his subjects), reduce the physical resources with which the enemy could fight, and induce him to accept unfavorable peace terms. Recently, however, a more specifically strategic reason has been offered for the *chevauchées*: The English were trying to bring the French to battle, despite being outnumbered and seemingly on the run, because they *knew* they could win, having learned

Soldiers looting and burning houses, from early fifteenth-century manuscripts of the *Chroniques de France*. Such scenes were typical of English *chevauchées* during the Hundred Years War. (Both images reproduced with permission of the British Library. © The British Library Board. Royal 20 C. VII, f. 41v, and 15269, fol. 178v.)

a bitter lesson from the Scots (who had employed exactly the same strategy against them in their War for Independence earlier in the fourteenth century). This was not a new strategy, of course. William the Conqueror seems to have employed it to induce Harold, his Anglo-Saxon rival, to meet him at Hastings in 1066. The difference is that during the fourteenth century, these raids were conducted more often and on a much larger and more systematic scale than ever before. According to one estimate, a two-week *chevauchée* led by Edward III in 1339 through northeastern France caused as much as £5 million worth of damage. A human face to the destruction is given in the papal record of disbursements totaling 6,000 florins that were made to 187 villages throughout the Cambrésis region to compensate them for damages they had suffered from the English. One village, La Capelle-en-Thiérache, which was listed simply as "burned," received a total of 94 *livres tournois* distributed to 88 households. In nearly every disbursement, all the members of the household—old people, orphans, widows, children—are described as paupers or reduced to begging. The entry for this town concludes:

> And very many of these [victims] were cultivators of the land and lived decently by their lands, and [now] do not dare to return to their inheritances, as all their homes are burnt, and they lost all their mobile property, and the cattle which nourished them and with which they tilled the soil … and, unless God should provide some peace, they will have to die of hunger or to beg.

Here was a potential famine created entirely by war.

Almost two decades later, in 1355, another English *chevauchée*, this time led by the Black Prince in the southwest of France, inflicted devastation on a total of 18,000 square miles in a little more than two months. Raids such as these made by the regular army by no means represent the entirety of devastation caused during the Hundred Years War. In addition, there were the depredations of the "Free Companies," or *routiers*, bands of soldiers who had nothing better to do once a campaign was over than continue to prey at leisure on local populations and who established strongholds for a considerable length of time and over a considerable area of the French countryside. Although not in the pay or under the supervision of the English crown, the Free Companies nevertheless aided the overall English strategy of undermining the Valois monarchy. For instance, the villagers of La Capelle complained of being continually harassed even after English armies had left in 1339 by men-at-arms in the employ of one Lord Jean from the neighboring county of Hainault, which was allied with the English cause. (Edward III's queen, Philippa, was the daughter of Count William.) All told, France "probably suffered no comparably destructive invasions" as those during the fourteenth century, in the judgment of Clifford Rogers, which were not to be eclipsed until the two World Wars in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, depredations by mercenary companies are claimed to have taken an even greater toll in Italy at this time, which the historian William Caferro attributes to "the close geographical confines of the peninsula and its multiple theaters of war." He cites as an example the case of Siena, which suffered during the second half of the fourteenth century no less than 37 raids from marauding war bands—paid off with bribes totaling well in excess of 300,000 florins—the cumulative impact of which was to result in the city's decline as a great power and loss of independence to Milan in 1399.

In addition to contemporary inventories of the damage inflicted by English *chevauchées*, there is no shortage of more literary eyewitnesses to the suffering. Perhaps the most famous and often-quoted account is that of the Italian poet Petrarch, who wrote in February 1361 to a French friend:

> As I recently passed through your kingdom on an official mission, I could scarcely recognize it as the same one I had previously visited. Everywhere were dismal devastation, grief, and desolation, everywhere wild and uncultivated fields, everywhere ruined and deserted homes except for those spared by being within the walls of a fortress or a city, in short, everywhere remained the sad vestiges of the Angli [English] and the recent, loathsome scars of defeat.

The French poet Eustache Deschamps, directing his countrymen's attention to the horrors of war in a 1380 ballad, mourns his hometown, Virtus, burned to the ground by enemy soldiers:

> If you would see great poverty,
> The countryside destroyed and the village deserted,
> Walls ruined where the shield had been,
> Poor abodes and the people discomfited,
> Go straight to Virtus; that's the thing.

The most indignant Frenchman was probably Jean de Venette, prior of the Carmelite house in Paris and provincial of the order in France, who had come from humble beginnings and, therefore, sympathized with the plight of the poor. In a chronicle entry for the year 1359, he describes the state of his hometown, Venette-near-Compiègne in northeastern France, after the passing of some English soldiers:

> The vines in this region, which supply the most pleasant and desirable liquor which maketh glad the heart of man, were not pruned or kept from rotting by the labors of men's hands. The fields were not sown or ploughed. There were no cattle or fowl in the fields. No cock crowed in the depths of the night to tell the hours. No hen called to her chicks. It was of no use for the kite to lie in wait for chickens in March of this year nor for children to hunt for eggs in secret hiding places. No lambs or calves bleated after their mothers in this region. The wolf might seek its prey elsewhere and here fill his capacious gullet with green grass instead of rams. At this time rabbits and hares played freely about in the deserted fields with no fear of hunting dogs, for no one dared go coursing through the pleasant woods and fields. Larks soared safely through the air and lifted their unending songs with no thought of the whistling attacks of eyas or falcon. No wayfarers went along the roads, carrying their best cheese and dairy produce to market. Throughout the parishes and villages, alas! went no mendicants to hear confessions and to preach in Lent but rather robbers and thieves to carry off openly whatever they could find. Houses and churches no longer presented a smiling appearance with newly repaired roofs but rather the lamentable spectacle of scattered, smoking ruins to which they had been reduced by devouring flames. The eye of man

> was no longer rejoiced by the accustomed sight of green pastures and fields charmingly colored by the growing grain, but rather saddened by the looks of the nettles and thistles springing up on every side. The pleasant sound of bells was heard indeed, not as a summons to divine worship, but as a warning of hostile incursions, in order that men might seek out hiding places while the enemy were yet on the way.

Not everyone, of course, was able to successfully hide from the English raiders. One unfortunate victim, Hugh de Montgeron, prior of Saint-Thibault of Brailet in the Gâtinais region in east-central France, pitifully describes the fate of those who were unable or unwilling to pay the ransoms demanded by the English:

> Some they shut up in very dark dungeons, threatening them daily with death, and continually punishing them with whippings, wounds, hunger, and want beyond belief. But others had nothing with which to pay ransom or they were unwilling to submit to the power of the English. To escape from their hands these made themselves huts in the woods and there ate their bread with fear, sorrow, and great anguish. But the English learned of this and they resolutely sought out these hiding places, searching numerous woods and putting many men to death there. Some they killed, others they captured, still others escaped.

Although Hugh was one of those able to escape for a time by hiding in his hut or fleeing to the swamps, "shivering and shaking with the cold," eventually he was captured twice and deprived of his wine, oats, pigeons, clothes, and all other movable goods. Writing on the inside cover of his prayer book while hiding out from the English behind his barn on November 11, 1359, he ends by addressing his countrymen, "Do you who live in cities and castles ever see trouble equal to my trouble? Farewell."

On the opposite side of the Channel, Englishmen such as Thomas Walsingham gloried in the booty brought back from campaigns. Writing in 1348, Walsingham crowed,

> there was not a woman of good name who did not possess something out of the hands [of former owners] in Caen, Calais, and other towns across the sea: cloth, furs, quilts and utensils, table cloths and necklaces, wooden bowls and silver goblets, linen thread and cloth, were to be seen here and there in every home throughout England.

Official campaign letters from the front in 1346 and 1355–56, some by the king and the Black Prince, take evident pride in all the towns and countryside "burnt and destroyed" or "laid waste" by both land and sea. Finally, from Froissart we get an intimate portrait of a freebooter, Squire Bascot de Mauléon, who, somewhat perversely, regales the chronicler with his tale of a career of extortion and general mayhem one night while the two are staying in the same tavern. Perhaps the most entertaining story the old campaigner tells is of how he and five companions dressed up and disguised their voices to pass themselves off as women, so that they could approach a town gate unrecognized and give the signal to their band to take it by storm.

To this day, national perspectives are still apparent among historians when discussing the fate of noncombatants during the Hundred Years War. As the French historian Jean Favier has

remarked, the *chevauchée* may be described as a "pleasant jaunt for some, a catastrophe for others." More than 100 years ago, a perhaps independent observer, the Austrian archivist, Henry Denifle, chronicled the "desolation" of French churches and their lands at the hands of English soldiers and freebooters. Basing his study primarily on records in the Vatican archives, he summed up the fourteenth-century evidence thus:

> I do not believe that there was in France, in the fourteenth century, a church, a monastery, a hospital that was, if not destroyed, at least untested by the general misery, and that had no cause to deplore, either the devastation of its goods, or the theft of its movables, or the reduction of its revenues, or the diminution of its alms, or a general disorder.

Writing shortly after the Second World War, Robert Boutruche warned against allowing Europe's recent experiences in postwar reconstruction from projecting too sanguine a view onto medieval France's more limited abilities to recover from the devastations of war. Since then, regional studies, such as that by Guy Bois of eastern Normandy, have found evidence of significant demographic decline during the course of the Hundred Years War, which Bois compared to the impact of nuclear annihilation. Of the 50 percent drop in population in the region between 1347 and 1374, Bois estimates that perhaps 20 percent was due to the ravages of war beginning in the 1350s. As is usual with such studies, however, it is extremely difficult to disentangle the disparate deaths to be accorded to each of the apocalyptic horsemen: famine, war, and plague.

If French and continental historians have been preoccupied with counting up their dead, some English scholars have seemed almost willfully ignorant of them. For decades, the leading medieval historians in England preferred to debate the contributions made to their country's economy by the booty taken from raids in France, to the virtual exclusion of the human factor. A. R. Bridbury, in fact, cavalierly dismissed the damage done by English *chevauchées* as limited "because there was so little to destroy that could not be quickly and easily rebuilt or made good." The latest attempt by an Englishman to assess the effects of the war on French noncombatants has concluded that their sufferings have been exaggerated by both medieval and modern historians. Instead, Nicholas Wright argues, the French peasant was far from helpless because he had the options of armed resistance or refuge in communal defenses, such as a fortified parish church. One imagines that the men, women, and children who actually suffered through the agonies of war would have seen things quite differently.

What chance for peace?

Honoré Bouvet, a French cleric and canon lawyer, pessimistically summed up the prospects for peace in his treatise on the laws of war, *L'Arbre des Batailles* (*The Tree of Battles*), dedicated to King Charles VI in 1387, thus: "At this stage I would like to put a question … namely, whether this world can by nature be without conflict, and at peace? I reply that it can by no means be so." Around the same time, in 1394, the French poet Eustache Deschamps imagined rustic shepherds and shepherdesses discussing the peaceful possibilities of a 28-year truce that had been concluded that year between Charles and

King Richard II, which had been sealed by the marriage of Charles' six-year-old daughter, Isabella, to the English monarch. Nonetheless, the conclusion of these simple folk, with names such as "Margot the stout," "Berthelot of the garden," "Henri the deformed," and "Guichard the brown," was that "you will never have peace unless they restore Calais," which acts as the refrain to each stanza of the poem. Calais, first captured by the English in 1347, was not to return to French hands until 1558.

These men and women had good reason to be so gloomy about the chances for peace in Europe. Perhaps the one institution capable of mediating the interminable Hundred Years War between England and France—the Church—was woefully ineffectual owing to the fact that for much of the time, between 1309 and 1378, the papacy was held "captive" to the "Babylon" of French popes residing in Avignon, nominally residing outside the French kingdom but certainly subject to its influence. And just when this "Babylonian Captivity," to borrow Petrarch's phrase, was over, a new crisis arose in the Church, which made it perhaps even more incapable of brokering any peace between warring factions in Europe, as the papacy from 1378 until 1417 was now at war with itself during the Great Schism, when two and then three candidates all vied for the apostolic throne, each with their own factions and supporters. Although Pope Clement VI declared at his accession in 1342 that he wished "to minister to the good of peace, which is our highest aspiration," the English never really trusted the Avignon popes to be impartial, as is evidenced by some graffiti that allegedly appeared all over the walls of Europe in the aftermath of the great English victory at the battle of Poitiers in 1356: "Now is the pope a Frenchman born, and Christ an Englishman/ And the world shall see what the pope can do, more than his Savior can."

Yet, judging from the literature of the times, there certainly was a desire for peace among ordinary inhabitants on both sides of the Channel, which became ever more insistent as the war dragged on. Particularly during the 1370s and 1380s, after the gains made by the Treaty of Brétigny of 1360 had been all but erased, a sort-of "grass-roots" campaign for peace began to emerge in England at this time. Perhaps the most outspoken critic, not only of the Hundred Years War but of war in general, was the Oxford theologian and controversialist, John Wycliffe. By equating war with sin, especially anger, and adopting a literal approach to biblical admonitions against killing, Wycliffe was led to reject wars altogether, even just ones. Moreover, he accused the Church, headed by the pope, of bearing the primary responsibility for war's proliferation, going so far as to call clergymen the "enemies of peace" whose "prayers are cursed." Yet Wycliffe and his later Lollard followers went too far in rejecting any type of killing, even in self-defense, to be considered a part of the cultural mainstream. At the same time, entirely orthodox preachers such as Thomas Brinton, bishop of Rochester, and the Dominican John Bromyard took up the cause of encouraging their audience to pray for peace rather than war, viewing the latter as a scourge from God brought upon man by his sins, much like famine and plague.

If Wycliffe was too radical for most Englishmen's blood, an author more representative of the educated gentry class, John Gower, nevertheless echoes some of his fiery sentiments against war. For Gower, a just war can become unjust through the greed, pride, lust, and other unworthy motives of those who wage it. Gower likewise rounds on the clergy for supporting and engaging in war, which in his view goes against the example of Christ and is unnatural. Just as "it is not the function of a knight to offer sacrifice at the altar," so it is not "that of a priest to carry on wars of state." He fears that if the Church continues to engage

in war "then war will last forever," for "if those who ought to restore peace practice war, I do not know how one can safely enter upon the path of peace." Even when he abandons his political support of Richard II in favor of his usurper, Henry IV, Gower continues to extol in his address to the new king the benefits of peace as a more natural state of man than war.

Gower's more famous contemporary, Geoffrey Chaucer, despite having had actual experience of war, is more circumspect in his pacifist leanings, perhaps because of his greater prominence and patronage at court. Even so, Chaucer's knights are typically fainthearted warriors, and significantly, the only story in *The Canterbury Tales* narrated by the author himself, the "Tale of Melibeus," is adapted from a political work of the thirteenth century that explicitly counsels against war. Prudence's persistent advice to her husband, Melibeus, that he avoid war at any cost may have been a thinly-veiled message to the young English king, Richard II.

Yet another fin-de-siècle poet, William Langland, in his allegorical poem, *Piers Plowman*, has Peace complain to the King of all the wrongs committed against him in war:

> Then came Peace into parliament, and put forth a plea,
> How Wrong 'gainst his will, had abducted his wife,
> Had borne away Rose, Sir Reginald's love,
> And Malkin the maiden, with merciless force—
> "My geese and my swine his serving-men steal,
> I dare not, for fear of him, fight or complain.
> My bay horse he borrowed, and brought him home never,
> For pence, in repayment, I pleaded in vain.
> His men he maintaineth, to murder my hinds,
> Forestalleth my fairs, and fights in my market,
> Breaks up my barn-doors, and bears away wheat,
> Tenders a tally for ten quarters of oats,
> Mauls me with bruises, maltreats my maid;
> I scarce have the boldness his presence to bear.

Rape, theft, unpaid requisitions, or purveyance, disruption of trade, assaults: all were part of the horrors of war and potent arguments for peace. Nevertheless, Langland, by the time he wrote another version of his poem in the late 1370s, was perhaps disillusioned after the end of one reign and before evidence of promise in another, for he predicted that lasting peace would come only with the second coming of Christ at the Apocalypse.

Even when a work such as the *Morte Arthure*, an alliterative poem written in a style typical of many another late medieval English romance, treats of a theme that would have been dear to the heart of Richard's grandfather (Edward III), it does so in a way that seems very critical of the warmongering policies of the previous reign. Dating perhaps to the last decade of the fourteenth century, the *Morte Arthure* contains many of the usual elements of the Arthur story—the round table, Arthur's betrayal by "Mordrede," and the king's final departure for Avalon—yet its realistic depiction of Arthur's war against the Roman emperor, Lucius, on the continent bears more than a passing resemblance to Edward III's campaigns of the 1340s and 1350s. Rather than indulge in the usual glorification of the Arthurian regime, the anonymous poet portrays Arthur as motivated by overweening pride

and ambition, which lead to the sacking and pillaging of towns, the death of his knights, and the neglect of his island kingdom. By stripping Arthur—a figure so closely identified with Edward III—of much of his heroic and supernatural qualities and by depicting war in so graphic and violent a manner, the *Morte Arthure* strikes a powerful blow at the warrior ethos of the mid-fourteenth century.

Across the Channel in France, the most outspoken advocate of peace was Philippe de Mézières, close friend and adviser to Charles V and tutor to his son and successor, Charles VI. A writer who, like Chaucer, had direct knowledge of war, Mézières made his most urgent appeal for concord between England and France in his *Epistre au Roi Richart* (*Letter to King Richard II*). Although obviously addressed to the English monarch, the letter urges both kings (Richard II and Charles VI) to stay the course of peace negotiations and warns of the terrible consequences of a resumption of war. In his famous parable of the "Garden of Horror and Perils," Mézières conjures up a nightmarish world ruled by war, where armies are like leeches and locusts, who "suck the blood of the poor" and devour "all the green things of the garden, right down to the roots." Elsewhere, he is even more explicit about the evils attendant upon war:

> O evil, perilous, and mortal wound, by whose poison so many kings, dukes, counts, and barons, and the ancient and valiant chivalry, both of France and England, and elsewhere, have been brought so tragically to destruction of body and soul: Alas, alas, how many churches by the venom of the said wound have been destroyed! How many widows and orphans created, to die of hunger and ill-treatment!

Mézières was joined in his abhorrence of war by the court poet, Eustache Deschamps. In one ballad, the poet, exasperated by 40 years of praying for peace while waiting for negotiators to come to an agreement, suggests that men fight for no better reason than that "if we cannot have peace, let us have war! War!" In another poem, he warns two friends about to go off on a "war of adventure" of the coming dangers and hardships they will face and urges them to "come back home" if war persists too long.

The pacifist sentiments expressed by all these men were no passing fancies. They were taken up in the next century by the Englishmen Thomas Hoccleve, John Lydgate, and George Ashby and by the French authors Alain Chartier, Christine de Pisan, Georges Chastellain, Jean Meschinot, and Pierre de Nesson. Chartier, in particular, wrote a fascinating account in 1416 of the effect of war on the home front in his *Le Livre des Quatre Dames* (*The Book of the Four Ladies*), which records the response of four women to the fate of their husbands at the battle of Agincourt the previous year, one of whom was killed, another was taken prisoner, a third went missing, and the fourth simply fled the battlefield. Lydgate, in his *Praise of Peace* written in 1442–43, expressed a new desire to condemn war without exception. After evoking the Second Horseman of the Apocalypse wielding his "sharp swerd" and riding upon his "steede of colour reed," Lydgate declares that all "werrys" are "dreedful" but that the "virtuous pees is good," because "werre causith povert, pees causith habundaunce." Although he pays homage to the "prowesse and noble chivalrye" of the warrior king, Henry V, he claims that now is the time, "after his discees," for all parties "to live in parfiht pees."

For a brief time during the reign of Richard II (1377–99), the peace mongers actually got their way, and there was probably a most welcome respite to the Hundred Years War. As already mentioned, Richard concluded a truce to last for 28 years with his French counterpart, Charles, in 1394, which was cemented by Richard's becoming Charles's son-in-law. Even though Eustache Deschamps was skeptical through the mouths of his shepherds about the prospects for the truce, elsewhere he enthusiastically endorsed it, declaring that, "Every peace comes by a holy marriage." The conclusion of the truce was accompanied by a concerted propaganda effort on behalf of peace, which sought to counter naysayers such as the king's uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, who asserted that "the people of this country want war" and who led what seems to have been the last English *chevauchée* in France, in 1380. (Gloucester was more effectively silenced by his murder, apparently on Richard's orders, in 1397 after being arrested and imprisoned in Calais.) At a parliament held in January 1397, the king "with his own mouth" defended the truce before the assembled commons after it had come under fire when Richard proposed aiding a French expedition to Milan to help end the Great Schism and fulfill one of the peace terms. The king's first and primary justification for upholding the truce, he said, was

> to bring peace and stop the wars of his realm, and to avoid the misfortunes that came from war to his realm and to his people, and also in order that the very great benefits and promises [produced] by reason of a lengthy state of peace, quiet, and safety will endure in his realm and for his subjects of England, and to arouse in his said father-in-law [the king] of France a greater love towards himself and his realm and his people in times to come.

Nor was this all. Richard privately communicated to many his peaceful intentions, which were passed down the grapevine to end up in chronicles and other works, no doubt exactly as the king had planned. Thus, the Flemish chronicler, Jean Froissart, reports the gossip, probably dating to 1395, of Sir Jean de Grailly, bastard son of a French nobleman, that Richard was prepared to make peace by marrying the French princess Isabella no matter what the cost in terms of bad publicity:

> He is attracted to the daughter of the king of France and to no one else, and it has caused some dismay in this country that he should wish to marry his adversary's daughter. It does him no good with his people, but he takes no notice. He makes it clear, as he has always done, that he would rather make war elsewhere than on France, desiring—as we already know of him by past experience—that there should be a lasting peace between him and the king of France and their two countries. He says that the war has gone on too long between him and his ancestors and the French, that too many brave men have been killed in it, too many evil deeds perpetrated and too many Christian people destroyed or ruined, to the detriment of the Christian faith.

Eight years before, in 1387, the *Westminster Chronicle* had put it about that the king wished to avoid war because otherwise "he would inevitably be compelled to be forever burdening his people with new imposts, with damaging results for himself." In fact, Richard in 1389 was to order all the sheriffs to proclaim to the people that the latest taxes of a

tenth and a fifteenth of movable goods would be waived provided he concluded a truce with France, a promise that, in this instance, he was able to make good. However, perhaps the most vocal cheerleader for peace on Richard's behalf was the Frenchman Philippe de Mézières. In his *Songe de Vieil Pèlerin* (*Song of the Old Pilgrim*), written perhaps in 1389, Mézières urges both kings to "pay no heed to the advice of certain generals, who have been reared in war and enriched by it." In an allegorical passage (conveying a message perhaps similar to that of Chaucer in his "Tale of Melibeus"), Mézières describes Richard as the "white boar" who wishes to "sheathe the sword and make a good peace with the king of France" but is impeded by the "black boars," namely his warlike uncles. Mézières pursues a similar allegorical conceit in his *Epistre* of 1395, in which he praises Richard's departure from the war-making heritage of his father and grandfather (respectively, the Black Prince and Edward III):

> The very gracious and loving King Richard, following the vocation to which he had been called and predestined by Jesus, the gentle Author of peace, was, so to say, transmuted from the nature of the Black Boars from whom he sprang, into the precious lodestone, with its miraculous power of attraction, as we have explained earlier, and afterwards into the rich diamond. And he was transported by fraternal love towards his brother, King Charles, and the transport was so strong and great that, by the goodness of God, in a brief moment the glowing carbuncle was also transmuted figuratively speaking by the virtue and love of the diamond, and carried into the heart and soul of our diamond in such a way that the love of the two precious stones, by the grace of God, became merged into one whole, to the satisfaction of this Old Solitary and all good men.

By astutely appealing to Richard's love of the visually beautiful, which was on display when he wore a long gown of red velvet and "a full bonnet [encrusted] with precious stones" to receive his bride from the hand of her father at Ardres, near Calais, in October 1396, Mézières hoped to persuade his royal correspondent, and others, to stay the course of peace.

Whether and by how much all this peaceful propaganda changed people's attitudes toward war is difficult to say. During the era of the *chevauchées*, a substantial proportion of the English population probably had a vested interest in continuing the Hundred Years War, because they profited from its campaigns. Yet, eventually, the costs of fighting the war probably outweighed its benefits. The economic impact of war could thus be a two-edged sword, as is likewise well illustrated by the Wars in Italy, where its burdens not only fell disproportionately along social class lines within each city-state (with the wealthy generally able to obtain exemptions or compensations) but also made winners and losers of cities relative to one another on the peninsula (e.g., Florence, Venice, and Milan "won," whereas Siena, Lucca, and Pisa "lost"). However, when war was inconclusive or interminable, as it often was in Italy, its effects were detrimental for nearly all concerned. If war was a boon for some, such as armor makers and weapons manufacturers, this came at the expense of their other business in peacetime, which was always more profitable than war. Even if war helped stimulate the Renaissance in Italy through soldiers' conspicuous consumption and display, this artistic windfall came with a heavy price for most citizens in terms of increased costs, disruptions in trade, and the sheer physical damage inflicted by war.

Pacifistic feelings in countries caught up in long-standing conflicts no doubt ebbed and flowed with the tides of the fortunes of war. According to Ben Lowe, an expert on late medieval English pacifism, "opposition to war … had permeated all layers of society by the end of the fourteenth century." Lowe's contention, however, that widespread opposition in England to war continued even during the victorious and popular reign of Henry V (1413–22) is hard to accept. Disillusionment with war probably did not set in again until the 1430s, with the decisive reversal of English fortunes, despite the execution of Joan of Arc. It could even be said that the Hundred Years War came to an end in 1453 only because a 30-year-long civil war in England, the War of the Roses, broke out just two years later in 1455. Indeed, the formation of the *compagnies d'ordonnance* by Charles VII 10 years earlier almost made it a certainty that France would continue to engage in war to justify expenditure on a standing army. True enough, France under Charles VIII did invade Italy in 1494 in pursuit of a claim that dated all the way back to the Sicilian Vespers of 1282, when the king's brother was forced to abandon Sicily—but not his other kingdom of Naples—during an uprising against French rule. (When Charles boasted to the Spanish ambassador before the invasion that his army would move so fast in Italy he would on the same day "breakfast in Milan and dine in Rome," the ambassador wittily replied that no doubt he would be in Sicily in time for vespers.)

Perhaps if Richard had reigned longer, a "peace culture" would have emerged to tame late medieval Englishmen's warlike ways. By the end of September 1399, Richard was deposed by his exiled cousin, Henry Bolingbroke, who took advantage of widespread disaffection with Richard's tyranny and the king's absence on campaign in Ireland to return home to be crowned Henry IV. By February 1400, Richard was dead, probably starved to death by his jailers at Henry's castle at Pontefract, Yorkshire. In 1401, Isabella, Richard's former queen, was sent back to France, and well could Deschamps wonder, "What will become of the grieving widow?" The very personal foundation of the truce between the two countries was, therefore, at an end.

We are told by one historian of the Hundred Years War, A. R. Bridbury, that "peacetime, when it did not serve some professional or political purpose, was merely a wearisome break, a demoralizing interlude which had to be got through somehow without loss of spirit or skill, self respect or honour." Likewise, the fourteenth-century expert on war, Honoré Bouvet, resignedly declared that just as "it is impossible for the sky to be at rest," so is it for the world to be at peace, although if God wished it so, it could certainly happen. This fatalistic approach to the possibilities of peace was fairly typical of the time and can be traced all the way back to St. Augustine's concept of just war in the fifth century, which declared war to be the unavoidable lot of fallen man, with peace reserved for the heavenly realm. Yet it could be argued that Richard II had demonstrated peace to be possible and, therefore, his efforts represent an ideological sea-change. As Lowe points out, late medieval pacifism laid the foundations for a "peace ethic" that emerged during the early modern period, when English humanists no longer viewed peace as an unattainable ideal but as a practical objective of foreign policy. Indeed, if Richard's reign had continued, we might now be talking of a war of 50 rather than 100 years. Relations between Richard and the French court remained amicable right up until his deposition, and chroniclers across the Channel loudly lamented his demise. In England itself, none of the 33 "objections" presented before the parliament of October 6, 1399 to justify the deposition mention the truce, except

insofar that Richard did not use it to alleviate the tax burden on his subjects, as he had originally promised. Richard's reign ended for reasons of domestic political tyranny that began to emerge in 1397 and had little to do with foreign policy.

So many factors went into the making of war and peace, even in the fledgling medieval state, that we probably will never know what tipped the balance in favor of one or the other. Unquestionably, the public mood played a large role in influencing royal policy. Both Edward III and Henry V badly needed to restore confidence in the monarchy after a recent, quasi-legal transition from a hated tyranny. Uniting the country in war was one way of achieving that end. Richard, conversely, sought to avoid the political costs that seeking taxes from parliament to pay for war would have necessitated, an absolutist policy that invites comparison with a later king of England who also came to a bad end, losing his head in 1649: Charles I.

In addition, there were private and personal factors at work that can be explained only in terms of an individual ruler's psychology. Edward's father, Edward II, was a homosexual, a fact that, according to several chronicles, determined the horrible manner of his death, in which a branding iron was thrust into his bowels. Thus, there is the possibility that once on the throne, the son felt the need to raise the royal testosterone level by plunging into war, hosting tournaments (which had been banned under his father), and siring no fewer than five sons. Henry V likewise seems to have succumbed to the urge to make a clean break with the past, in his case by renouncing a dissolute youth and assuming the stern raiment of war.

Richard's reign represents an important departure from the warmongering that had characterized the foreign policy of his predecessor. It gave both England and France an important breathing space to recover from the miseries and pressures that war had inflicted. This does not mean that Richard was an ideal monarch. In domestic terms, his rule, especially toward the end, was a disaster. He murdered and exiled enemies, suppressed dissent in the commons, arbitrarily raised forced loans and taxes, and, perhaps most shortsightedly of all, confiscated private property, whose inviolability was one of the cornerstones of the English constitution. However, Richard's commitment to the cause of ending war is surely one of his few qualities worthy of our emulation. In a reversal of previous policy, his propaganda trumpeted the benefits of peace rather than the glories of war, and if only such sentiments had arisen earlier in the century, starving peasants on the border during the Great Famine might have suffered a little less. Richard was the rare king who tried to rein in the horseman of war, but he did not reign long enough or well enough to give peace a fighting chance.

War and plague

Like that between famine and plague, the connection between war and disease is a complex one that can cut both ways. That a connection does indeed exist is indicated by a French study that found that war and plague coincided on no less than six occasions during the late Middle Ages, in 1348, 1362, 1374, 1388–89, 1450, and 1465. Moreover, in 1380, 1436, and 1474–78, war directly preceded plague, whereas in 1402, it was the other way around, which suggests that one may have caused the other. However, during certain years, such as 1442–44 and 1489, wars occurred without plague making any appearance at all, whereas in 1456, plague reigned while war was in retreat. The French historian, Jean-Noël Biraben, concludes from all this that war and plague maintain an irregular relationship

in which the influence of one over the other is not always a dominant one and that other factors besides war must explain the recurrence of plague throughout the late Middle Ages and on into the early modern period. It is also possible that states deliberately timed their campaigns to coincide with occurrences of plague among their enemies, as we have seen was the case with famine. This seems to have occurred on at least six occasions when Florence waged plague-ridden wars against various rivals including Pisa, the papacy, and Milan between 1362 and 1430. As William Caferro remarks, states planning these offensives hoped, "despite the risk to their own forces, to force an opponent to capitulate quickly."

When plague first arrived on the Continent, rumors of its coming did not stop the king of Norway and Sweden, Magnus Ericsson, from launching a crusade against the Russian state of Novgorod, which culminated in his defeat at Toads' Field on July 23, 1348. However, in most of the rest of Europe, the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1347–50 seems to have imposed, by the very severity of its mortality, a de facto truce among rival powers. The English chronicler, Henry Knighton, reports that the pope, Clement VI, sent letters to both the kings of England and France in an effort to restore peace between the two kingdoms so "that they might escape the vengeance of God's right hand," namely the plague. The clear implication here is that the plague had come down upon Europeans in retribution for the "sins of mankind," one of which included the waging of war. A Scots army allegedly gathered at Selkirk, just over the English border, in 1349–53, hoping to capitalize on their neighbor's misfortune to invade, but was soon itself annihilated by the plague. In another region on the periphery of Europe, Morocco, just across the Straits of Gibraltar from Spain, the Marinid ruler, Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Othman, was defeated by the Black Death during his attempt to conquer Tunisia in 1348. Finally, a Flemish captain of war serving as "constable" for the Florentine commune, Libertus of Monte Feche, succumbed to the plague as he was attempting to re-take the subject city of Arrezo for his masters. Arrezo was not to return to Florentine control until 1384, but undoubtedly the longer-term reason for this was the temporary collapse in Florence's population owing to the Black Death and, as a consequence, its preeminent economic muscle.

Plague continued to play its role in war throughout the rest of the Middle Ages. In 1384, King John I of Castile was forced to call off his siege of Lisbon in Portugal owing to the ravages of the disease among his troops, whereas in 1412, the duke of Berry in France had to do the same at Bourges. However, perhaps the most dramatic episode wherein disease turned the outcome of war in Europe came in the early sixteenth century, at the hands not of plague but of typhus, another bacterial disease that causes a rash and high fever and is spread by the body louse. Typhus first made its appearance in 1489–90 at the Spanish siege of Granada, where it is said to have killed 17,000 soldiers, representing perhaps a third of the entire Spanish army and six times the casualties inflicted by the Moors. Then in 1528, typhus besieged the French troops of King Francis I who were in turn besieging the forces of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, in Naples. Charles's soldiers, unpaid and starving and already decimated by bubonic plague that they had contracted in Rome, suddenly found the ranks of disease in their favor as typhus mowed down some 30,000 of the enemy in July, nearly wiping out Francis's army. Francis was forced to lift the siege and go home, leaving Charles free to finally receive his crown from the pope two years later in Bologna.

It is not hard to imagine that the Black Death also exerted an indirect influence on late medieval Europeans' capacity for waging war. We've already mentioned that plague

probably reduced the size of armies fighting in the European theater, which would not recover again until the devastating recurrence of plague began to abate by the mid-fifteenth century. One also imagines that war drove up the pay rates for soldiers and mercenaries serving on the battlefield, just as it did for laborers tilling those same fields. Yet the evidence for this is often hard to detect. In July 1349, the commune of Florence did authorize an increase in the pay of its foot soldiers, crossbowmen, constables, and even police, evidently out of a concern for maintaining public order in the wake of the death of so many city officials from the plague; by contrast, in 1350, the crown of Aragon set the pay of squires in a lord's employ as not to exceed 60 shillings per year, whereas foot soldiers younger than 20 years were to be paid 30 shillings a year with food and those 24 years and older 20 shillings with food and footwear. The Spanish laws evidently indicate a concern over the potential rise of wages there, yet the fact that Aragon repealed its legislation two years later suggests that in the meantime the concern had abated. Soldiers' pay was usually in arrears for the many mercenary companies serving under *condottieri*, or military "contractors," in Italy throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and payments recorded for French and English army members, such as in letters of indenture, were set at fixed rates that remained in force from before the Black Death until well into the fifteenth century. However, there were also hidden inducements, such as bonuses, ransoms, pardons, and plunder, that could increase the attractiveness of service without detection, just as bribes of food, clothing, and banquets could do the same for lords anxious to hire laborers on their manors without seeming to violate the wage limits set by labor laws. It has been argued that the Black Death, by playing havoc with manorial incomes, gave many members of the gentry and aristocratic classes an invested interest in prolonging the Hundred Years War as a way of maintaining their accustomed status and estate, but this argument really works for only one side, England, as depredations in France caused by the lethal combination of war and plague probably outweighed any such benefits.

At the same time, taxation in both England and France remained at extraordinarily high levels for several decades after the Black Death to finance the war. As lay subsidies were collected in fixed amounts from each community, it was inevitable that, after the ravages of the Black Death, the burden upon individuals would become higher. When these outlays were not followed by the expected victories, we have seen how the tide of public opinion could turn sharply against war. It is suggestive that a major peasants' revolt known as the Jacquerie occurred in France just two years after the ignominious defeat and capture of the French king, John II, at Poitiers in 1356, which required not only higher taxation to pay off the king's ransom but the added ignominy of peasants having to organize their own defense against English attacks. Perhaps nothing else could bring more to home the French government's failure to do its duty by its citizens, exactly what the English strategy meant to accomplish. Meanwhile, English peasants staged their own uprising in London in 1381, which was sparked by three poll taxes, the last of which went to pay for Thomas of Woodstock's dismally unproductive campaign in France. The leader of the English Peasants' Revolt happened to be a former soldier who had seen service in France, Wat Tyler. Still, the costs of war were easily forgiven in the euphoria of victory, so that the fortunes of war were probably an equal, if not greater, factor as any economic hardships imposed by the Black Death in determining citizens' attitudes toward their country's war policies.

A final aspect to consider is what effect, if any, did war have on the virulence or spread of the Black Death? Contemporary opinion certainly expected that war could at least be a local, or "near," cause of the plague. It was a widely-held notion among late medieval doctors that the unburied, rotting corpses left over in the aftermath of a battle created a stench that putrefied the air that, when spread by the winds, could give rise to either a "universal pestilence" or at least to a local epidemic. For instance, the Catalonian physician, Jacme d'Agramont, states this quite explicitly in a plague treatise he wrote in April 1348, at the very start of the Black Death in his country. Among the many ways in which a universal pestilence can arise, Agramont said, is "when in battles and long sieges a great number of people and horses have been killed and they are not buried," for then "the putrefaction of the dead bodies brings about great infection and corruption of the air." Proof of this can be seen in the fact that "flies and poisonous worms in great quantity" arise from the "decayed bodies" of the dead and, as an example, Agramont cites the case of a French siege of Gerona, on the coast near the border with France, when, "as by miracle, these flies were generated." The Italian doctor, Gentile da Foligno, also explained that war could predispose people to the disease by forcing them to adopt a bad diet or regimen that then generated bad, putrefying humors, whereas the German physician, Johann Vinck, explained this predisposition in psychological terms, "because in times of strife men suffer the most anguish, toil, fear, anxiety, penury" that alters and corrupts their blood and humors. Although medieval doctors usually based their opinions on ancient authorities such as Galen, a few cited personal knowledge of or experience with actual conflicts when discussing war's connection with plague: in addition to Agramont's example of the French siege of Gerona in 1285, Foligno, the late-fourteenth-century Sevillan physician Juan de Aviñón, and the fifteenth-century Italian humanist Marsilio Ficino cited, respectively, the war between Padua and Venice in 1336–37, Cardinal Gil de Albornoz's conflict with Giovanni di Vico at Viterbo in 1354, and the Pazzi War in Italy in 1478–80. Chroniclers of the late Middle Ages also made note of when war corresponded with plague, a connection they often explained as a function of refugees overcrowding cities in wartime. Thus, the Gatari brothers of Padua blamed the plague of 1405 in their city on a "plague-ridden war" with Venice that had been going on since the previous year, which "caused the peasantry to enter the city with goods and animals, creating such a mass of people that every house was full with three or four families as well as the churches, monasteries, and warehouses." There was a long tradition of making such observations, for it was the ancient Greek historian, Thucydides, who first noted how the Plague of Athens of 430 BCE coincided with the start of the Peloponnesian War.

Even though medieval doctors were wrong about plague's being caused by a corruption of the air from rotting corpses, observers such as the Gatari brothers were onto something when they said that war had a hand in plague through the movements of people and general disruptions that followed in its wake. Not only could overcrowding in besieged cities create conditions that could greatly facilitate the spread of disease, but, troops dispersing to their homes would bring any sickness they had back with them, and in addition war also would play havoc with any organized efforts to impose quarantine and other measures to contain plague. Armies were said to have played a critical role in helping to sow plague in 1361, 1363, 1382, 1387, 1456, and 1464 in England, France, Spain, Italy, and the Balkans. However, the most dramatic example of war's helping to spread disease came at the very

end of the Middle Ages, in 1494, when King Charles VIII of France was forced to withdraw from Italy by a disease new to Europe, dubbed the "French pox" or the "disease of Naples," perhaps a form of syphilis imported from the Americas. Infecting both Spanish and French soldiers (who shared their prostitutes, in this case perhaps deliberately), the disease caused a burning sensation in men's penises until these "rotted away and fell off, and they died." As syphilis infection can be latent, although this was probably much less so in Europe's virgin population, and becauase Charles fought with a polyglot army whose members subsequently returned to their respective homelands, war became the weapon by which an epidemic of the disease exploded all over Europe.

Though it is unlikely that men would give up war to spare themselves disease, one would expect to see changes in the way the dead were handled in the aftermath of a battle as a consequence of the belief that unburied bodies could cause plague. Unfortunately, references to the treatment of battle corpses are few and far between in both medieval chronicles and modern histories of war, perhaps because of the less-than-romantic associations with this anticlimactic phase of the battle. One modern historian, Michael Prestwich, has declared that: "How the cleaning up process [after a battle] was done is best left to the imagination." Yet there are indications that, whereas before the Black Death massacred soldiers may have been left unburied for the purposes of plundering armor and equipment, displaying the scale of victory, or simply out of carelessness, now perhaps there was a new sense of urgency to get the bodies underground to prevent the spread of plague. This much is indicated by modern excavations of the mass grave site at Visby in Gotland, the scene of a battle between local defenders and Danish soldiers in 1361, the same year that a second outbreak of the Black Death occurred with a mortality nearly rivaling that of the first outbreak in 1348–49. The fallen at Visby—about 2,000 of them—were buried in their armor, which indicates that the dead were interred in some haste before the usual rites of plunder. Given that the battle was fought at the height of summer, on July 27, there may have been heightened concern over the rapid decomposition and putrefying of the corpses. Similar mass graves to receive casualties numbering in the thousands were specially prepared in the aftermath of the battles of Otterburn in 1388 and Agincourt in 1415. Some towns acted upon the advice of plague doctors, such as Johann Hartmann, the fifteenth-century physician of Luzern in Switzerland, who recommended that "the bodies of the dead be buried deep enough in the ground so that their putrid smell drawn out by the sun's rays … not infect [others]." It is more than likely that similar considerations spilled over into cleanup operations after any battle fought within living memory of the plague.

There is one exception to this hygienic rule, however, and it is a notable one. In 1346 the Mongol Muslim armies of the Kipchak Khan of the Golden Horde, Janibeg, were besieging some Genoese merchants in Caffa (now Feodosiya) on the north coast of the Black Sea in an attempt to expel this rival trading factory of their ally, Venice. Just as the Genoese, who had been under siege for the past three years, seemed on the point of being hopelessly hemmed in by the "infinite" multitudes of their enemies, bubonic plague began striking down the Mongol ranks in the "thousands," to the point that the Mongols, "worn out, thunderstruck, and utterly stupefied by so great a calamity," decided to withdraw. However, before lifting their siege, the Mongols fired a parting shot at the defenders in the form of the dead bodies of their plague-stricken comrades, which they now catapulted into the town until "mountains of the dead" began piling up, from which the Italians could not

flee, no matter how many they dumped into the sea. If this account, from the pen of the Piacenzan chronicler, Gabriele de Mussis, is true, it would be the first recorded instance of using plague as a biological weapon of warfare, even though the technique of using diseased or rotting corpses against the enemy was an old one, going back to ancient times. (The latest attempt before the Black Death was at the siege of Thun l'Eveque in Hainault in 1340, when the carcasses of horses and other animals were flung over the castle wall. Though this was not successful in communicating disease, the intolerable "stynke" of decomposition did apparently persuade the defenders to come to terms.) The principle was exactly the same as that which impelled victors to bury the dead on the battlefield: that rotting cadavers would generate disease by corrupting the air or water. Indeed, Mussis goes on to say that "the whole of the air [inside Caffa] was infected and the water poisoned by the corrupt putridity [of the corpses], and so great became the stench that hardly one out of a thousand remained to try to flee the [Mongol] army." He in fact ascribes the origins of the Black Death in his country to this one incident, as refugees from Caffa began returning back to Italy. Because Muslims and Christians shared the same medical assumptions, the Mongols would certainly have catapulted cadavers with the intent of causing disease. Any dead bodies would have served their purpose, but perhaps bodies infected with plague were judged extra lethal.

Even if we read Mussis' story in disbelief, it demonstrates the two-edged sword of plague in war, one which armies both had to defend themselves against and could use to assault their enemies. The Mongols' tactics made a resurgence during the eighteenth century, when Russian troops lobbed plague corpses into the Swedish-held town of Reval in Estonia, and again in 1785, when Tunisians catapulted the clothing of plague victims into Christian-held La Calle. During the Second World War, the Japanese "bombed" millions of infected fleas over the central Chinese towns of Changde and Ningbo in 1940–41, causing perhaps hundreds of deaths from bubonic plague, as part of a secret weapons program known as Unit 731. Some decades later, the former Soviet Union developed antibiotic-resistant strains of plague bacteria to be spread in aerosol form (thus communicating the even more deadly pneumonic plague) as part of its bio-weapons program during the 1970s and 1980s, in what was to be the last gasp of the Cold War. Humans seem to know no end of ingenuity, and unscrupulousness, when it comes to "weaponizing" plague.

PLAGUE

> And in many places in Siena great pits were dug and piled deep with the multitude of dead. And they died by the hundreds, both day and night, and all were thrown in those ditches and covered with earth. And as soon as those ditches were filled, more were dug. And I, Agnolo di Tura, called the Fat, buried my five children with my own hands. And there were also those who were so sparsely covered with earth that the dogs dragged them forth and devoured many bodies throughout the city. There was no one who wept for any death, for all awaited death. And so many died that all believed it was the end of the world.
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> Agnolo di Tura, *Cronaca Senese*, 1348

Ever since humans began to settle down several millennia ago and live in close quarters with their fellow human beings, along with their newly domesticated animals, they have been plagued by epidemic and pandemic diseases. Smallpox, cholera, influenza, tuberculosis, typhus and typhoid fever, and most recently AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) are but a few of the many maladies that caused the deaths of untold millions before (in some cases) we had begun to find a cure. Some of these diseases have changed history. During the thirteenth century BCE, a succession of plagues convinced the pharaoh of Egypt to let his Hebrew slaves, led by Moses, return to the their "promised land" in Palestine, an event recorded in the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament. Between 430 and 426 BCE, a disease, perhaps smallpox, devastated the crowded city of Athens, killing its leading statesman, Pericles, and bringing to the fore political newcomers like Alcibiades, who altered the course of the Peloponnesian War. In the early sixteenth century CE, the Spanish adventurers Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro conquered the Aztec and Inca empires of Central and South America largely with the help of the smallpox virus, to which the Native Americans had no prior exposure and therefore no immunity. In 1918–19, an influenza pandemic, caused by a new strain of the virus that was 200 percent more lethal than previous, non-virulent strains, killed an estimated 50-100 million people worldwide, more than had died from the Great War. The latest pandemic to stride the world stage, AIDS, has to date claimed more than 25 million lives since it first emerged in the early 1980s, and currently no fewer than 33 million are living with the disease, two-thirds of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa, which by far has been hardest hit by the pandemic.

The First Horseman, Plague. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

However, even compared with all these remarkable events, the Black Death of 1347–1353 was unique in history. The Black Death, which most equate with a specific disease known as plague, was probably the most deadly disease outbreak ever recorded in human history, killing in its three bubonic, pneumonic, and septicemic forms an average of 70 to 80 percent of its victims whenever it strikes. Although more modern pandemics such as influenza may have killed more in total numbers than the plague outbreak in the late Middle Ages (which was only one of three pandemics of plague known to have occurred in history), it is probably true to say that never before and never since has so much disproportionate death come in such a short period as during the Black Death. Imagine that, tomorrow or the next day, every other person you see around you could be dead and you may grasp something of the terror that this disease could inspire. The Black Death, a term that did not come into currency until well after the Middle Ages, did not strike just once but many times throughout the second half of the fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth centuries. What contemporaries called plague (from *plaga*, or "blow" from God), pestilence, or simply the "great mortality" nonetheless returned with a lower overall death rate in its later occurrences, which was probably owing to the reduced extent of its spread throughout Europe, rather than any lower virulence, as plague confers no long-term immunity. However, even without its recrudescence, the Black Death was terrifying enough in just its first outbreak during the mid-fourteenth century, when it carried off about 50 percent, on average, of Europe's population in a few years. Such a mortality was bound to have lasting impacts at all levels of European society. Little wonder that chroniclers of the plague, such

as Gabriele de Mussis, Louis Sanctus, and John Clynn, saw it as a sign that the Apocalypse, the end of the world, was at hand.

Was the Black Death plague?

Gabriele de Mussis's apocryphal story of Mongols' catapulting dead bodies into the Genoese-held town of Caffa (now Feodosiya) on the north coast of the Black Sea, retailed at the end of the previous chapter, seems to indicate that the disease first entered into Europe at the Crimea, perhaps from an endemic center of origin further east along the Mongol trade routes in Central Asia, or else from a more proximate source in southern Russia. Apocalyptic tales of a rain of frogs or fire that were reported by European chroniclers to have taken place in the East may actually have a scientific basis in fact, as native Chinese annals do report natural disasters, such as floods, famines, droughts, and earthquakes, as taking place there during the 1330s. This may help explain why plague broke out when it did, for the sudden advent of the Little Ice Age during the earlier part of the fourteenth century, which we have already seen brought in its wake a much wetter and unpredictable climate to the world, may have forced rodents carrying the plague out of their remote habitats and into closer contact with humans. It is also likely that the bad weather created famine conditions—as it indeed did in northern Europe between 1315 and 1322—that compelled Asians to hunt and eat native marmots in greater numbers and more indiscriminately.

Nonetheless, it is rather doubtful that plague-infected fleas were actually lobbed into the town of Caffa along with the cadavers, as fleas will invariably abandon a host once it has gone cold to jump onto a nearby living one; more likely, plague came to Caffa in the form of rats surreptitiously entering the town or else by means of fleas hitching a ride on animal furs, which was the most important export product of this region. From the Crimea, plague next commenced its march through the Middle East and Europe, invading Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Greek Empire, by the late spring or summer of 1347, and then reached Sicily and Alexandria in Egypt around the same time, in the autumn of that year. By the end of 1347, plague also established bridgeheads at other strategic places in the Mediterranean, including the island of Mallorca off the eastern coast of Spain, the port of Marseilles in southern France, and the trading cities of Genoa, Pisa, and Venice in Italy. In 1348, the Black Death spread through Italy, the Balkans, and much of France and Spain, and invaded Austria, Switzerland, southern England, and perhaps Ireland, Norway, and Denmark. By 1349 and 1350, plague completed its conquest of Spain, France, Austria, Switzerland, England, Ireland, Denmark, and Norway, and in addition it had come to Iraq, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Wales, Scotland, Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, Romania, and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. It was not until 1351 to 1353 that plague seems to have spread throughout eastern Germany, Poland, and Russia north of the Caucasus. More complete evidence than available hitherto indicates that the only large areas bypassed by the plague in the mid-fourteenth century were Iceland and Finland, perhaps owing to their isolation and sparse inhabitation.

On the basis of modern diagnoses, plague is a disease that occurs in three forms, depending on how the bacterium, *Yersinia pestis* (which causes the disease in all cases) invades and spreads within the body. In bubonic plague, the most common and widely-known form, the bacteria

are introduced into the bloodstream by means of a flea bite, owing to the fact that the flea is said to be "blocked" by plague. What this means is that *Y. pestis*, once ingested with a blood meal into the flea's gut, proliferates very rapidly and at the same time produces an enzyme that clots the blood meal, so that together the mass of bacteria and clotted blood block the narrower, upper portion of the flea's stomach, known as the *proventriculus*, which prevents the insect from ingesting any more blood, making it perpetually and ravenously hungry. Consequently, the flea will bite its host even more in an attempt to feed, so that inevitably an infected flea will in turn infect the one it bites; this happens when it regurgitates a blood and bacterial mixture it cannot hold in its stomach back into its host, thus almost directly "injecting" its victim with perhaps thousands of plague bacteria. Though a blocked flea typically starves to death rather quickly, an infected, non-blocked flea and even a blocked one can live on for many months and still transmit the disease. Although the flea that typically spreads the plague (*Nosopsyllus fasciatus* in Europe and *Xenopsylla cheopsis* in Asia) normally lives and feeds on house-dwelling rats (which are highly susceptible to the disease), it will seek out other victims in the proximity, including domestic animals such as dogs and cats and, of course, humans, after all its preferred hosts have died from plague. With their flattened bodies, rat fleas are also specially adapted to traveling in fur and thus can easily hitch a ride on human clothing or merchandise going from town to town. Even more important, rat fleas have adapted to living solely on grain detritus (needing blood only for propagation) and thus could have traveled independently of animal hosts as a guest of the grain trade that was nearly ubiquitous throughout medieval Europe.

In the case of pneumonic plague, the bacteria enter the lungs after being breathed in, which typically occurs as the result of exposure to the infected expectorate, or airborne droplets, that have been coughed or sneezed out by an infected person. Therefore, direct, human-to-human contagion is the norm in pneumonic plague, where no animal intermediary is necessary, even though a pneumonic plague outbreak seems to start out as a secondary symptom of the bubonic form and tends to be localized, owing to the narrow window of time in which this form of the disease can be spread by an infective cough. (This does not preclude, however, the possibility of local epidemics of pneumonic plague occurring concurrently at considerable distances from one another, as patients are well enough to travel during the non-infective incubation period.) Modern tests have demonstrated that coughing pneumonic plague patients can be infective from more than three feet away and that their sputum, when it is bloody, contains large numbers of bacteria. Yet the experience of modern pneumonic plague epidemics seems to indicate that, in general, "prolonged close contact" is necessary for infection.

Finally, septicemic plague, the third and rarest form of the disease, seems to be disseminated in much the same way as bubonic plague, that is, through the bite of a flea. Transmission via the human flea, *Pulex irritans*, seems to be rare (owing to the reduced chance of blockage in this flea's stomach and the more diffuse presence of plague bacteria in human blood compared to that of animals), but because the rat flea typically communicates as many as 25,000 bacteria with each regurgitation of its blood meal, perhaps repeated bites from a ravenous blocked flea introduce bacteria in such numbers that they overwhelm the body's defense mechanisms. It is also possible that a human victim could have been bitten numerous times by dozens of different fleas: it has been estimated that 50 to 100 fleas may be present on an infected rat about to die of plague, at which point all those fleas will then seek a new host, and experiments conducted during the Third Pandemic of plague in India

around the turn of the twentieth century found that a man could expect to find an average of 75 human and rat fleas on his legs each time he entered a plague-infested home. How an individual body reacts to *Y. pestis* in terms of being able to isolate the bacteria within its lymphatic system may also determine whether one develops a case of bubonic or septicemic plague. One should also not discount the possibility of septicemia resulting from entirely artificial means, such as tainted medical instruments, which, as we will see further, was a distinct possibility during the Middle Ages.

After an incubation period that typically lasts anywhere from two to seven days, plague next begins to manifest itself in the patient through certain symptoms, not all of which, however, are unique to plague. In all three forms of the disease, the illness commences suddenly with flu-like symptoms such as high fever, violent headaches, and body stiffness, chills, or pains. These may also be accompanied by nausea and vomiting, constipation, sensitivity to light, bloodshot eyes and a coated tongue, restlessness and an inability to sleep, delirium or stupor and loss of motor control and, in general, a vague but unmistakable feeling of anxiety, dread, and fear.

In the case of bubonic plague, the characteristic symptom is, of course, the bubo, a lymphatic swelling caused by bacterial accumulation at the nodular point closest to where the flea has bitten the victim. If infected on the legs, the bubo will appear in the groin area, which occurs in the majority of cases. Next most common is that the bubo appears in one of the armpits, the result of being bitten on the chest or back or on the arms. Finally, if bitten on the head or face, the bubo will appear on the neck, which seems to be the rarest location of the swelling, even though it has been argued on the basis of contemporary descriptions that it was more prevalent during the medieval Black Death. (It should be noted that cervical bubos can also occur in cases of "tonsillar plague," which results from inhaling infected droplets that do not travel all the way down into the lungs.) However, it is not unknown for buboes to form on other places aside from the lymph nodes, such on the inside of the elbow or on the back of the knee, and they are sometimes accompanied by painful vesicles or pustules that can appear almost anywhere on the body. The bubo is considered by most medical experts to be the defining symptom for a conclusive diagnosis of bubonic plague, even when the case is so mild that it can barely be distinguished from other diseases. It is also the symptom that has allowed historians to make a positive identification of the first plague pandemic in history, owing to the description by Procopius of Caesarea and John of Ephesus of the swelling that occurred in the "boubon," the Greek word for groin, that accompanied the disease's appearance in Constantinople in 542 CE. In both modern and medieval cases, it has been noted that the bubo's getting larger in size (approaching the dimensions of a walnut) is actually a good sign for a prognosis of recovery, even as it remains tender or painful to the touch. After about a week of living with these symptoms, recovery is marked by spontaneous suppuration, or bursting open, of the bubo, releasing its pus. Without the timely intervention of modern-day antibiotics, death occurs in 60 to 90 percent of bubonic plague cases, usually three to six days after the onset of symptoms.

In the case of pneumonic plague, the characteristic symptom is the coughing up of a bloody sputum, accompanied by rapid and painful breathing, although this can also occur as a secondary symptom of bubonic plague. What seems to ultimately confirm the presence of true pneumonic plague is the fact that it is 100 percent fatal, and death ensues quite quickly,

usually within two days. Unless they die suddenly from heart failure, pneumonic plague patients can be cursed with a horrible death, gasping for hours from "air hunger."

By contrast, septicemic plague has almost no distinguishing symptoms beyond those characterizing the general onset of the disease, as it usually kills the patient too quickly—sometimes in 24 hours or less—to allow more marked outward signs such as the bubo to manifest themselves. However, for those who do live a little longer, before they invariably die, some very dramatic symptoms can emerge, such as spontaneous bleeding from the nose and eyes, blood present in the urine and stool, and subcutaneous bleeding as the bacteria plug capillaries just underneath the skin, resulting in dark, purplish spots all over the body, called in medical parlance "petechiae" or "disseminated intravascular coagulation" (DIC). A man I interviewed (John Tull), who contracted plague in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2002, was fortunate (and unique) enough to survive septicemic plague, yet he still bears the purpuric spots on his skin to this day. These same symptoms of petechiae or DIC were also noted by medieval observers of the plague. They also occur in roughly half the cases of those suffering from bubonic plague; indeed, some experts consider septicemic plague to be merely a "fulminant," or exceptionally virulent, form of bubonic plague, wherein the bacteria happen to overwhelm the bloodstream and bodily organs instead of being drained into and isolated in the lymphatic system.

However, was this disease that modern observers know as plague the same as the horrific Black Death that struck Europe in the late Middle Ages? One objection to identifying Black Death with plague centers around the rat–flea nexus thought to be responsible for spreading the bubonic form of the disease. As best as I can summarize it, the argument goes something like this: population densities in Europe, England especially, were not sufficient to sustain the large number of rat colonies needed to maintain epizootics, or disease incidence among animals, that were the foci of infection and spread of bubonic plague to humans. The black rat prevalent in Europe was a non-migratory animal and is nowhere mentioned in contemporary accounts. Yet, in contrast to plague's slow spread in modern times—4 to 20 miles per year—the Black Death spread as fast as 5 miles a day. Cold weather prevalent throughout northern Europe was inimical to the activities of the black rat and, above all, to rat fleas, whose optimal temperature range is between 50 and 78 degrees Fahrenheit, and yet in some areas, such as southern England, the mortality of the Black Death peaked during the winter or early spring months. Nor does pneumonic plague solve this problem, as pneumonic plague epidemics are still dependent upon the bubonic variety to arise in the first place or break out again elsewhere, as they burn themselves out so quickly. Either the Black Death did not kill nearly as many victims as is supposed or else another disease, such as anthrax, must have been responsible.

It will be noticed that this objection is based almost exclusively on modern knowledge of rat and flea biology, and its leading advocates are in fact scientists by training (in bacteriology and zoology), rather than historians. Its Achilles' heel has always been that it does not stand up very well to the test of medieval sources and evidence. For example, recent archaeological research suggests that black rats were indeed plentiful throughout Europe since ancient times and that their numbers were surging on the eve of the Black Death, perhaps owing to the wet weather brought on by the Little Ice Age that helped increase their food supply. Rats are, in fact, mentioned in various chronicles and other contemporary writings on the plague. During the First Pandemic in the sixth century, John

of Ephesus even noticed that mice, among other animals, had died "whose groins were swollen" from the disease (although typically rats get buboes in the neck). Chronicles of the Black Death in the fourteenth century also made the connection between rats and plague, including such disparate accounts as by the Constantinopolitan Nicephorus Gregoras, the Florentine Giovanni Villani, and the Strasbourger Fritsche Closener. A fifteenth-century plague doctor, John of Saxony, after reciting Avicenna's standard sign of mice and other "reptiles" fleeing the ground as heralding a plague, provides his own, concrete example: a neighbor of his in Strasbourg, who already had lost eight of ten sons to the plague, had decided to transfer what remained of his household to another dwelling on the doctor's advice, but they were forced to evacuate even this refuge after "mice scurried into the same house so that the rest of the household that stayed put could not fend them off, [leaving] a lamp burning that is [still] there to the present day." Granted that rats were not seen to be actually dying of the disease, as was witnessed of other animals, the connection between vermin and plague is nonetheless made very clear.

A close analysis of medieval chronicles and other evidence available on the Black Death's spread throughout the Middle East and Europe reveals that this was a complex process, characterized by "metastatic leaps" in which the disease's progress was unpredictable and inconsistent (a feature also noted of the First Pandemic of plague in the Mediterannean during the early Middle Ages). It might skip over some towns, such as Costellón on the eastern coast of Spain, during one outbreak only to hit them later in a subsequent epidemic. It might approach cities or regions from unexpected directions, such as invading Paris and the Russian states of Pskov, Novgorod, and Kiev from the north instead of the south. Its rate of spread was very uneven: sometimes, as indeed was the case in northern Germany in 1350, it might break out all at once in several towns that were miles apart. Otherwise, it might linger for months or even years at a time, especially in densely-settled areas such as Italy, France, and the Low Countries.

Contemporaries were well aware of this erratic behavior of the disease's spread. Konrad of Megenberg, a university-trained cleric and author who specialized in writing on natural or "scientific" questions, composed a treatise in the early 1350s in which he assessed the possible causes of the recently concluded plague: he adduced as one reason for why an astrological explanation was unlikely the fact that the actual mortality was too disordered in its progression, for "now [it] moves towards the east and now in the opposite direction, and then changing direction leaps from the south to the north and retraces its steps in places already visited, in such a way as if it moves with an accidental or involuntary motion." Another German observer, Heinrich of Herford, writing perhaps in 1349, believed instead that the plague moved "as if it were proceeding deliberately," but the end result was much the same as what was noted by his colleague, for the disease behaved like a player "in a game of chess, rising up from one place, in which it had raged, [then] passing by an intermediate one without contaminating it to rage in a third, and perchance afterwards going back to the intermediate place" to rage there. Even when an anonymous physician from the University of Montpellier, also writing in 1349, endorsed the Paris masters' explanation of the plague as caused by a conjunction of the planets, in contrast to Megenberg, he was careful to note how the epidemic could prevail "in two towns a long way distant [from each other] and [yet] not prevail in places in between." He explained this as caused by the "aspects or rays of the

planets" shooting down to strike two places as once, just as the two eyes could spread the plague from person to person, a contagion by sight to which he devoted most of his treatise.

In point of fact, all of this better fits not a rabidly raging disease that spread mainly from human to human but one like plague that could lie dormant in rat colonies or followed shipments of grain, a food that could sustain both rats and host-less fleas, which were transported primarily along Europe's many navigable rivers plied by ships that could travel as much as 25 miles per day. Moreover, it has been argued that the plague spread even into remotest areas, such as Scandinavia, because such isolated communities were still highly dependent on outside contacts importing grain, which was kept in large depots that naturally attracted large flea and rat populations.

However, there is also considerable evidence that the inter-human form of plague, its pneumonic version, did play a role, at least in local areas. Doctors such as Ibn Khātima of Almería in Spain, Giovanni della Penna of Naples, and Gui de Chauliac and Raymond Chalin de Vinario of Avignon, France, and other observers such as Louis Sanctus, also writing from Avignon, and Einar Hafliđason of Iceland, described symptoms of bloodspitting without the presence of buboes, whereby the disease was traced back to the lungs and whose victims died very quickly and at different seasons than sufferers of bubonic plague. The fact that plague is increasingly described as "apostemic" by the Montpellier school of doctors after subsequent outbreaks in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries indicates that the first occurrence of the Black Death in 1348–49 may have had a higher incidence of pneumonic and septicemic cases and that thereafter the disease, for whatever reason, became less virulent, with higher chances of recovery. In Iceland, two highly lethal plague epidemics that bracketed the fifteenth century are thought to have been exclusively pneumonic plague, owing to the isolation and harsh climate of the country that was inhospitable to rats and fleas, the absence of rats in contemporary sources or archaeological finds, and the fact that these epidemics reached their height in the depths of winter.

Finally, the latest evidence for mortality during the Black Death, as we will see, has only revised death rates higher, not lower. Anthrax, a disease that in its cutaneous form can be mistaken for plague, is not really viable owing to the fact that it is not easily or quickly spread, as was demonstrated by the failed bioterrorist attack in the United States in 2001 using anthrax spores distributed by mail. Yet another alternative has lately been proposed in the form of a viral "haemhorragic plague," perhaps similar to Ebola, but it's not clear that its symptoms would match up any better than those of anthrax, and the modern experience with haemhorragic fevers demonstrates that they tend to burn themselves out too rapidly to be spread effectively. Yet another new theory holds that some Europeans today who are immune to AIDS (which is caused by a virus, not a bacterium) acquired their immunity centuries ago during the Black Death, but this is pure speculation and has no hard evidence to support it. It should be noted that the Black Death was a world-wide pandemic that affected areas that currently do not exhibit such AIDS immunity.

Most recently, though, the old chestnut of denying the Black Death as plague has been resurrected in a new form by comparing the epidemiology of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century Third Pandemic of plague with that of the supposed Second Pandemic, the medieval Black Death. It is argued on the basis of this comparison that the Black Death had radically different symptoms, seasonal and long-term cycles of occurrence, and immunity patterns compared to modern plague. The great merit of this approach is that it relies largely on

mining a vast number and array of medieval sources for its evidence instead of relying exclusively on modern knowledge of rat–flea biology, as so many plague skeptics have done in the past. This latest objection claims, for example, that medieval chroniclers and doctors describe the signature symptom of bubonic plague—the lymphatic swelling or boil—as occurring on very different places on the body than is typical for modern plague or that such accounts feature other symptoms—such as smaller pustules, carbuncles, and rashes—that are rare to plague. Testamentary and burial records point to the Black Death's spiking during the summer months in Italy, when it would have been too hot for the rat flea. The same evidence also points to the Black Death's gradually declining in virulence over the course of the latter half of the fourteenth and during the fifteenth centuries, but instead plague mortality increased in India as it persisted through the first half of the twentieth century. This seems to indicate that medieval populations developed immunity to the Black Death, whereas no such immunity exists for modern plague. This would be a most unusual evolution for a disease, as natural selection tends to favor progressively lower virulence for pathogens in successive generations as part of a mutual adaptation of parasites to their hosts.

The marshaling of all this evidence is indeed impressive, but the historical methodology that lies behind it leaves much to be desired. Basically, its main fault is that it compares two sets of evidence that have markedly different historical contexts that are never adequately taken into account. Disregarding the old adage that warns against likening apples to oranges, it applies almost equal criteria to two disease events that are separated from each other by several hundred centuries and entire continents.

The geography and climate of modern subtropical India—let alone its historical context—is worlds away from that of medieval Europe. As we know from our recent experience with AIDS, it is not safe to assume that the behavior of a disease in one part of the world will necessarily characterize its occurrence in all other places and at all times. Moreover, the Third Pandemic in India and China—from which much of our present knowledge of plague is derived—nonetheless occurred under political and medical circumstances that by no means guaranteed scientific objectivity or veracity.

Nor is it really fair to expect medieval plague treatises and chronicles to live up to modern standards of disease diagnosis—the more so as diagnosis was never their main intent, and medieval doctors and chroniclers generally made assertions on the basis of established authority, not their own, first-hand observations. One medieval doctor who does provide modern-style case studies based on his own experience with plague, the Moorish physician, Ibn Khātima, gives a most convincing diagnosis of what seem to be all three forms of bubonic, pneumonic, and septicemic plague: The buboes, he said, "can be recognized by palpation, by progressing, piercing pain, or a feeling of pressure in a specific location"; the second kind was characterized by "blood spitting" as its only symptom and was explained by Khātima as due to "the fact that the blood vessels of the lung shred and tear because of the sharpness and the large amount of blood entering the lungs"; a third kind was distinguished by "black buboes," which Khātima described "as black or reddish blisters, similar to burns on the body." These were accompanied by "inflammation and heat" and exuded "a little watery liquid" when suppurated. Khātima also noticed that, when healing, they separated "from the flesh surrounding them" and that when he cut into them surgically "lumps like burned flesh issue forth." These may be the DIC of septicemic plague or else the "extensive sloughing" of inflamed skin, leaving behind bleeding, "indolent ulcers with

steep overhanging edges" that were noticed during the Third Pandemic in India as one of the symptoms that sometimes accompanied bubonic plague.

As for chroniclers of plague who often describe its symptoms as part of their accounts, it should be noted that even a humanistic author like Giovanni Boccaccio, who seems to have been writing a new kind of history based more on his own, first-hand experiences, was prone to rhetorical flourishes that may have exaggerated the prominence of otherwise unusual features of the disease that happened to catch his attention. It was not unknown for ancient authors to distinguish between the different symptoms of plague in terms of their frequency of occurrence. A description of buboes by Rufus of Ephesus, the Greek physician of the late first century CE, notes that these swellings, which usually occur in the groin, could also appear at the back of the knee or on the inside of the elbow but that "such inflammations do not usually form in these places." However, it is hard to see how any assertions about medieval-observed symptoms of disease, especially by non-medical authors, can have the same diagnostic precision as modern statistics. In the same way, any claims that medieval weather patterns, in particular summer temperatures, were inhospitable to flea activity are simply improvable for the Middle Ages, when no instrument readings are available, and we have already seen how climate was entering an unpredictable phase during the Little Ice Age at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

Finally, plenty of other factors besides supposed immunity can and have been put forward to explain the decline in mortality or incidence of the Black Death, including more effective social responses like quarantine and better nursing care of patients; change in species, numbers, or immunity of rat populations harboring endemic foci of plague; improvements in home construction and storage of animals and grain that reduced human contact with vermin, and so on. Moreover, modern laboratory work on plague bacteria performed in the former Soviet Union has demonstrated that this disease uniquely selects virulent strains for survival and propagation, as these are the ones that cause blockage in fleas and thus ensure that they will be passed on to a host. In this way, then, it is most unlikely that host immunity or less virulent strains of microbes evolved in the case of plague. Nonetheless, modern research has also suggested that different strains of *Y. pestis*, originating in geographically distinct endemic centers, may have been responsible for each of the three pandemics of plague throughout history, with the strains responsible for the First and Second Pandemics being more infectious than what gave rise to the Third. The recent emergence of a drug-resistant strain of plague in Madagascar (to parallel similar developments with tuberculosis) demonstrate the ability of *Y. pestis* to mutate within a relatively short period of time, but it is now thought that even without mutations, a range of strains within the *Yersinia* family of bacteria would have allowed for genetic exchanges that may have affected the historic virulence of plague or else exposure to closely related but relatively harmless strains, like *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis*, may have allowed for crossover immunity to the far more virulent *pestis* variety. All this may help explain any perceived differences in historical manifestations of what is otherwise a genetically stable, newly evolved disease. What is more, recent advances in biomolecular archaeology give additional support to the position that the plague of our ancestors was the same as the one that haunts us today. For instance, a decade ago *Y. pestis* DNA was recovered from the dental pulp of fourteenth-century and later plague victims in Montpellier, France; though replication of these results is fragile and rare, it has now been achieved in London and Germany from

even older remains of the first pandemic. However, perhaps the most damning feature of revisionist challenges to the identity of the Black Death with plague—from which recent efforts are not excepted—is their complete failure to put forward any credible alternative. When all is said and done, the bottom line is that no other disease better fits all the available criteria—particularly the bubonic swellings referenced in nearly every medieval source on the Black Death—than plague.

Measuring mortality

How many people died during the Black Death? For once, our knowledge is no better now than what was recorded at the time. The chroniclers, nearly all scholars agree, were prone to exaggeration. That only a "tenth of mankind" survived—in other words, a death rate of 90 percent—was an oft-repeated shibboleth, whereas many English chroniclers reported something along the lines of "the living were hardly able to bury the dead." However, even if inaccurate, some medieval authors at least were impressive in their descriptions of mortality. Agnolo di Tura of Siena, whose observations open this chapter, testified to the devastating effect the plague had on his family life. Einar Hafliđason, the author of the Icelandic *Lawman's Annal*, in the midst of recording an eerie incident in which a ghost ship from England sailed into Bergen harbor in Norway with all its sick and dying crew, reports that "not one-third of the people" of Norway survived after this infection, whereas back in England, he asserts rather incredibly that only 14 people remained after the plague swept London. In England itself, William Dene of Rochester complained of the unbearable "stink" that arose from cemeteries containing the mass graves of the dead, such that "it was barely possible for anyone to go past a churchyard." The Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani, writing in the midst of the plague in 1348, left an empty space in his account to record the date that the plague ended but himself died before he could fill in the blank. However, my favorite anecdote of all must be the one told by the anonymous contemporary biographer of the Roman leader, Cola di Rienzo, who related how in Rome during the Black Death "there wasn't a dog left pissing on the wall" (actually a re-paraphrase of 1 Kings 25:22, in the Latin Vulgate version).

The numbers of dead given in the chronicles often seem fantastic, especially when one considers how many people were alive at the time. Giovanni Boccaccio estimated that within five months in 1348 "over 100,000 human lives were extinguished" in Florence, a city that probably contained between 90,000 to 120,000 souls on the eve of the Black Death. A Paduan chronicler claimed 100,000 deaths in Venice, whose population numbered at most 150,000; Agnolo di Tura recorded 52,000 out of a possible 60,000 inhabitants in Siena; Louis Sanctus cited 62,000 within three months in Avignon; Gilles li Muisis reported more than 25,000 in Tournai; John Clynn, 14,000 in Dublin; Jean de Venette, 500 daily in Paris; and Robert of Avesbury, more than 200 a day in London.

It may be easy to ignore the more inflated of these figures as products of pure fantasy, but it would be unwise to dismiss them altogether. If anything, they testify to the impression the Black Death made upon the minds of Europeans, who clearly were awed by the scale of the catastrophe. When it comes to modern estimates of the mortality, there is, therefore, something distinctly unsatisfying about the nearly universal mantra that only a third of

Europeans died during the Black Death. Would a 33-percent death rate inspire the degree of hyperbole to be found in the medieval chronicles?

The numerical percentages are actually quite important, because they determine how much of an impact the Black Death may have had upon late medieval society. That only a third of Europe's population was carried off during the first outbreak of plague between 1347 and 1353, with progressively lower mortalities rates thereafter when the plague returned throughout the second half of the fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth centuries, made it quite easy for past scholars to downplay even the initial impact of the disease, claiming that this was nothing out of the ordinary within the context of periodic Malthusian declines that are predestined to occur throughout history. However, this low average mortality for the Black Death seems to have started with a very flawed, pioneering attempt in 1948 by the demographer Josiah Cox Russell to measure plague deaths in England based on post mortem inquisitions, which were records kept by the royal government to keep track of heirs to major estates, as the crown could administer any property inherited by a minor. These yield a death rate of just 27 percent during the Black Death in England, yet because the noble upper class comprised a tiny proportion of medieval population as a whole and were undoubtedly at much lower risk of contracting the disease, one cannot take this number as in any way representative of plague mortality anywhere in Europe.

In fact, in recent years, there has been a veritable tidal wave of data painstakingly extracted from various sources mainly in England, Spain, Italy, and France. As I will show, these new figures point to an *average* mortality of around 50 percent when the Black Death first swept over Europe in 1347–1353. Yet even this astonishingly high number—half the population simply wiped off the face of the earth—may underestimate the true mortality. As medieval records almost invariably register only adult males, this means that children and women are unrepresented, yet owing to their greater susceptibility to fulminating plague, their greater contacts with rats and fleas around the home, and their more vulnerable position in society, they were perhaps more prone to dying from plague. The landless poor are also too often left out of the sources, yet they could make up very large percentages of communities on the eve of the Black Death and then, owing to vacant properties and new wealth created by the plague, large numbers would enter the tax rolls in the years afterward. In essence, they have to be discounted twice: once before the Black Death when they were not included in most institutional records as potential victims, and a second time after the plague, when those who survived inherited or took over vacant properties to be counted for the first time, thus disguising the true number of households that were actually wiped out by the pestilence. In addition, some figures span years immediately after the plague when population could be expected to recover rather rapidly from the ravages of the Black Death, even when population remained basically stagnant before the plague, and household sizes are often assumed to have decreased in the aftermath of the Black Death, affecting tax records based on these units. All this implies that a number of adjustments should be made to mortality figures, revising them generally upward, but of course, the question is by how much? In the end, this is a largely arbitrary number at the whim, or best guess, of the scholar. I have opted to give the barebone figures yielded by the records and leave the guessing to others, but the Norwegian historian Ole Benedictow, who tends to make substantial upward adjustments to raw mortality figures, argues for an even higher,

60-percent average mortality for the general population throughout Europe during the Black Death.

If I had to pick one medieval source to account for mortality during the Black Death, it would have to be the bishops' registers for 10 dioceses in England in 1349. The registers (theoretically) record every instance wherein a rector or vicar of a parish church needed to be replaced by a successor, who had to be presented before the bishop for formal admission (also known as institution or collation) to his benefice. These records were kept by some of the most literate scribes of the day—men trained by the Church—but they are by no means without their problems. Some of these so-called "source-critical problems," such as multiple vacancies in one church within a given year, the presence of pluralism and absenteeism among benefice holders, or the exemption of some benefices to the bishop's right of institution, are usually recorded in the registers themselves and can thus be eliminated by careful manipulation of the data, as was pioneered over a century ago by Francis Aidan Gasquet and Alexander Hamilton Thompson, the first scholars to wring plague mortalities from the bishops' registers. Any remaining, intractable difficulties tend to balance each other out: during the height of the Black Death, the cause of vacancies usually went unrecorded in the registers (the one exception being that of Coventry and Lichfield) so that we have no idea how many priests resigned their benefices instead of leaving them vacant through their deaths, which would tend to *overestimate* mortality. Conversely, some institutions to vacant benefices probably went unrecorded through miscopying into the register of preliminary notes clerks took as they accompanied their bishop on his tour of the diocese, and some institutions may not have happened until later, after the period in question, owing to difficulty in finding candidates to take up cure of the poorer sort of parishes. Both these factors would tend to *underestimate* mortality.

A related question is how to correlate a death rate among the beneficed clergy to the general population (of mostly peasants) living in the parish or on the manor? Here again, competing considerations could be said to be almost a wash. If priests were doing their duty of ministering to their flocks in the midst of the Black Death, such as giving last rites to the dying and presiding at funerals, one would expect their exposure to contacts with infected rats, fleas, and people (including the most impoverished) would be above the norm, even if they had auxiliary priests to help them. And the high mortality of the clergy during the plague suggests that this was indeed the case. However, if they had better housing, better food, and better nursing care than the average peasant, their mortality should be lower. As relative age of adults does not seem to have played much of a role in susceptibility to plague, the rather advanced age of the average priest is perhaps irrelevant. However, parish priests were an integral part of their communities, and so there is a strong argument to be made that their mortality reflects that of their parishioners at large.

Finally, the strongest reason, to my mind, for using bishops' registers as representative indicators of Black Death mortality is the inherent diversity contained *within* the figures obtained for each diocese and for the 10 dioceses as a whole. The 10 dioceses for which complete registers survive are distributed across the length and breadth of the land: Exeter, Bath and Wells, and Winchester in the south; Worcester and Hereford in the west; Norwich and Ely in the east; Coventry and Lichfield, and Lincoln in the midlands; and York in the north. For whatever reason, their respective averages do reveal regional variation, with Coventry and Lichfield, and Lincoln at the low end and Exeter, Winchester, and Norwich

at the high end. Not only that but within each diocese, a mix of hundreds of rural and urban parishes contained within some dozen(s) of deaneries are represented, giving us a whole range of discrete statistics. Within the diocese of Hereford, for example, mortalities ranged from just 12 percent in the deanery of Ludlow to 76 percent in the deanery of Irchenfeld. In the diocese of Exeter, mortality ranged from 19 percent at Woodleigh to 81 percent at Tavistock, whereas in the largest diocese, Lincoln, it ranged from 22 in Huntingdon to 61 at Lawres and Manlake. Moreover, there also was some seasonal variation in the incidence of plague among the various dioceses: In the southern dioceses of Bath and Wells, Exeter, and Winchester, the disease was most virulent during the winter and spring months from perhaps late November–December to April–early May (depending on the lag time between the actual occurrence of a vacancy and its being recorded in the register—some two to four weeks). However, in the rest of the country, the summer months between late May–June to August were the deadliest. This may indicate that a mix of mostly bubonic but also some pneumonic outbreaks of plague were prevalent. For all these reasons, the bishops' registers in England are probably the most diverse and representative of all mortality records available in Europe during the Black Death.

Table 3 (p. 280) gives the mortality figures for each of the 10 dioceses in England, which average out to just over 45 percent. However, we can compare this clerical statistic to an exclusively lay one, as England is fortunate to also have a plethora of manorial accounts and court rolls that record deaths of tenants and other inhabitants on some 56 manors and 36 townships and communities distributed through 17 counties, stretching once again from south to north, east to west. These comprise records of tenant rent-payers; those paying heriots or death-taxes; payers of frankpledge dues, which included all males aged 12 or older who were sworn into a "tithing" on the manor that guaranteed their future good conduct; and even landless males, or "garciones," who paid a head-tax but otherwise would have slipped through the records unnoticed because they did not pay rent or other dues. Using the lowest figures available and without making any adjustments for factors of underestimation, this gives us a mean death rate of around 50 percent. Here again, great variety within each territorial block gives confidence that these figures should be representative: Within the diocese of Worcester, for example, deaths of tenants on 15 manors belonging to the bishop there range from 19 percent at Hartlebury and Henbury to 80 percent at Aston. Among the 28 townships belonging to Durham Priory, mortalities varied from 20 percent at Willington to 78 percent at Jarrow. Of the 17 manors in Somerset, Wiltshire, Berkshire, and Dorset owned by Glastonbury Abbey, deaths of "garciones" range from 36 percent at Marnhull to 76 percent at Badbury. Together, the average of all mortality statistics in England is just over 49 percent (Table 4, p. 281).

Moving to the Continent, the one episcopal register to survive during the Black Death, from the diocese of Barcelona in northeastern Spain, yields a death rate among the beneficed clergy there of 60 percent during the calendar year from May 1348 to April 1349. In the same region, Catalonia, the two communities of St. Ándreu and Taradell paying the hearth tax in 1352 reveal a decline of 74 and 66 percent, respectively. Nearby in the kingdom of Navarre, a comparison of the *monedaje* tax paid in 1330 and then in 1350 in the *merindad* (administrative division) of Estella gives us an unadjusted mortality of 63 percent, whereas a fall in rents known as *pechas capitals* during the same period for the *merindads* of Pamplona and Sangüesa amounts to 39 percent. Finally, a record of scribes and legists at Perpignan

in the kingdom of Aragon shows between 58 to 68 percent of them dying during the Black Death. The average for all these best statistics available from Spain (taking the lowest figure available in Perpignan) yields a mortality of around 60 percent (Table 5, p. 281).

In Italy, a household tax collected in Florence in 1352 points to a decline of between 55 to 65 percent there, and in the city and *contado* (surrounding countryside) of San Gimignano, also in Tuscany, a "salt per mouth" tax levied between 1332 and 1350 yields an unadjusted loss of approximately 59 and 45 percent, respectively. In the commune of Prato, also in Tuscany, a household tax taken in 1339 and again in 1351 shows a fall of around 36 percent, unadjusted, in the city ward of Porta Fuia, and in the countryside, a drop of 42.5 percent is recorded in 1352. Yet another city in Tuscany, Siena, records a 51 percent reduction during the Black Death in the membership of military companies that enrolled all men by ward from their teens to their sixties. A similar list of men eligible for military service in the city of Bologna in the adjacent region of the Romagna shows a 35 percent decline in 1349. Finally, hearth tax records for eight villages in the Piedmont in the far north of Italy point to a fall in population for the entire region of around 40 percent, unadjusted, between 1335 and 1356, with individual figures ranging from 20 percent in Sant' Antonino to 55 percent in San Didero. When averaged all together, the Italian statistics come to 45.5 percent (Table 6, p. 282).

Within the modern-day country of France, 16 towns and villages in the county of Provence bordering on the Mediterranean Sea yield an average 52.5 percent mortality rate based on hearth tax registers, known as the *feu d'albergue*, recorded between 1340 and 1356. These registers range from 24 percent in Esparron to 72.5 percent in Saint-André and Saint-Paul. Meanwhile, just to the north, in the county of Savoy, household taxes taken from 36 parishes and communities between 1329–48 and 1349–59 average nearly 48 percent, when opting for the lowest possible figures and when unadjusted. These range from 27 percent in Collombey to 73 percent in Marlens. Hearth taxes from Millau and Albi in Languedoc record death rates of 40.5 and 54 percent, respectively, between 1343–46 and 1353–57, whereas those within the walls and suburbs of Saint-Flour in the Auvergne are, respectively, 35 and 63 percent between 1343 and 1356, under the same conditions as the foregoing. Finally, the surviving parish register of Givry in eastern France records a mortality rate of approximately 50 percent between July and November 1348. All these yield an average for France of just over 49 percent (Table 7, p. 282)

The grand average of mortality statistics for these four countries in the heart of Europe during the Black Death is 51 percent. As I have opted for the most conservative figures absent any adjustments for underestimation, some may feel that this is still too low. I have already mentioned that one scholar, Ole Benedictow, has urged a 60 percent average mortality on the basis of his substantial reconfigurations upward of all the foregoing percentages, where he typically adds 8 to 10 percentage points but sometimes less and sometimes more. (In one case, he rather arbitrarily adds a whopping 18.5 percentage points to the 34 percent household reduction reported in 1356 for Aiguebelle in the Savoy, representing more than half the original figure.) Others, however, might well say that an average of 51 percent is too high, which they can maintain only by clinging to statistics of atypical populations like Russell's post-mortem inquisitions or to those of isolated communities, such as the island of Mallorca off the eastern coast of Spain, where a record of the *morbati* tax levied in 1343 and again in 1350 shows just a 16 percent mortality for its inhabitants. However,

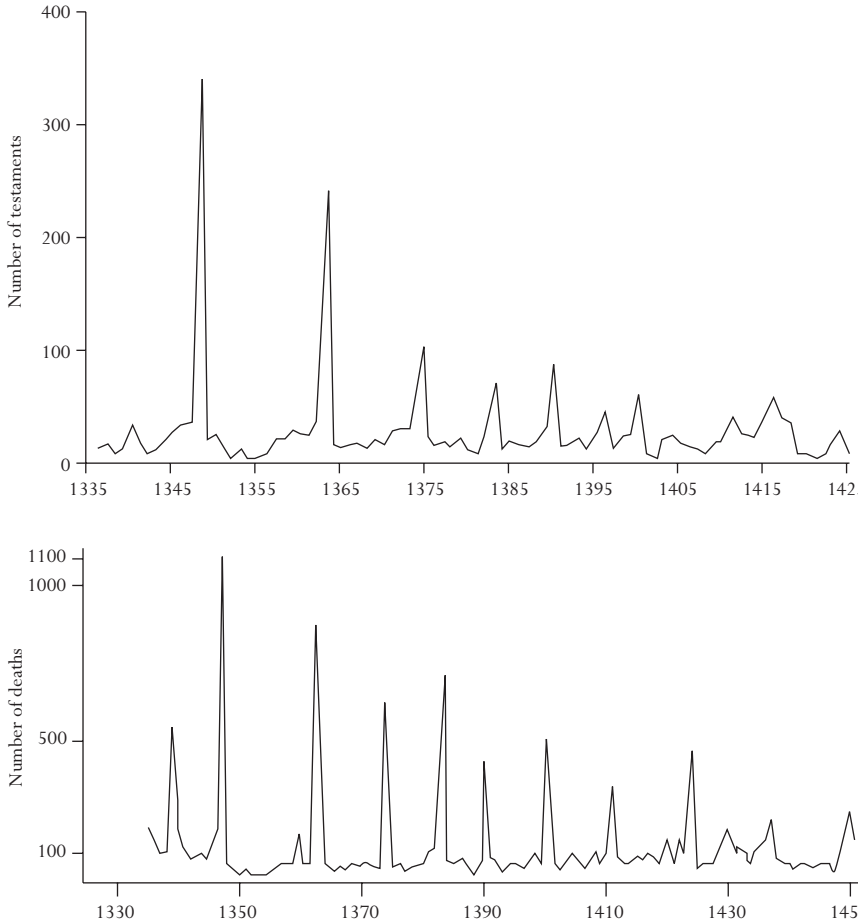
I have tried hard to show that the foregoing averages for each individual country are based on statistics that already contain a wide range within them and are based on some pretty broad, representative samples of each of their populations. Moreover, I take comfort from the fact that 51 percent is certainly no lower than my preferred mortality statistic of 45 percent derived from the bishops' registers of England. However, if other scholars are comfortable with citing only a range of numbers when discussing mortality rates during the Black Death, I must insist that from now on, they quote the mantra of 40 to 60 percent, not a third to a half, as so many do now.

Doctoring the Black Death

The staggering mortality of just the first outbreak of the Black Death, wherein every other person died, is perhaps soberly reflected, after all, in the impressions of contemporary English chroniclers when they said that barely enough souls survived to bury the dead. If roughly half of England was dying, the other half left alive would, almost without exception, know firsthand the pain of losing someone they had loved. What is more, if from 10 to 40 percent of victims naturally recover from bubonic plague, this means that, assuming bubonic plague was the most prevalent form of the disease, anywhere from around three-fifths to four-fifths (55.5 to 83 percent) of all Europeans would have had a direct encounter with the Black Death. However, as the first outbreak was probably especially virulent, one may assume that recoveries tended to be on the low side (55.5 percent).

Of course, this was not the end of the horrible visitations of plague in the late Middle Ages; it was only the beginning. Plague returned about once a decade, or on average every 11 years, in 15 recorded outbreaks in Europe between 1360–61 and c. 1500. (This almost exactly matches the average of 11.6 years for the 18 outbreaks recorded during the First Pandemic of plague between 541 and 750.) The virulence of these recurrences of plague seems to have gradually declined, according to testamentary evidence from six cities in central Italy; though wills do not necessarily record actual deaths, as they are typically made by those *expecting* to die, this is supported by a record of actual burials in the Camporegio cemetery in Siena (see graphs, next page). The continual series of bishops' registers for the diocese of Hereford in England down to 1400 gives much the same result: whereas mortality during the first outbreak of plague in 1349 averaged about 46 percent, in subsequent outbreaks this declined to 10 percent in 1361, 13 percent in 1369, 11 percent in 1390, and 10 percent in 1396 (Table 8, p. 283). More anecdotal evidence is provided by the papal physician, Raymond Chalin de Vinario, writing from Avignon in 1382. At the end of his plague treatise, he estimates that in the "first great" plague of 1348, two-thirds died and nearly everyone who got sick succumbed; in the second outbreak, presumably in 1361, fewer than half died, and a few of those infected escaped; the third time, perhaps in 1369 or 1373-74, "much less" than a tenth died, and many of those sickened survived; the latest one occurring now in 1382, which "was less contagious and less violent than those preceding it," killed only a twentieth part (five percent) and again, many lived who got infected.

Yet cumulatively, such mortalities, though smaller, could take their toll. Using the burial records for Siena mentioned earlier, it has been estimated that an average 15 percent mortality occurred during each of nine occurrences of plague in the 100 years between



The recurrence of plague, according to the testamentary records of six cities in central Italy—Arezzo, Assisi, Florence, Perugia, Pisa, Siena (top), and according to burial records in Siena (bottom). (The bottom graph is from Missimo Livi Bacci, *The Population of Europe* (Blackwell, 2000), and is reproduced with permission of Wiley-Blackwell. The top graph is adapted from Sam Cohn, "The Black Death: End of a Paradigm," *American Historical Review* 107 (2002)).

1348 and 1450. Even assuming a 10 percent population recovery after each mortality spike, as census records for Tuscany do indicate significantly higher marriage and birth rates after each occurrence of plague, this would still yield a net population loss of 45 percent over the course of the century. This is probably on the low side, according to other records of long-term population decline in Tuscany. Tax surveys for Florence, Sa Gimignano, Pistoia, and Prato point to population declines from 62 to 75 percent in each city and district in 1427, compared to figures from about a century to a century and a half ago. Further north, *monnéage* or hearth tax records point to a population loss of more than a third between 1365 and 1424 in Flanders and, in eastern Normandy, a 50 percent decline between 1347

and 1374, another 50 percent decline between 1415 and 1422, and a 30 percent decline between 1436 and 1442. War and famine undoubtedly also took their toll in these regions, not to mention other diseases besides plague. The fifteenth-century obituary lists for Christ Church Priory in Canterbury, England, which reveal a life expectancy from birth of less than 23 years of age, show that plague was the killer in a third of outbreaks among the monks but that they also suffered from tuberculosis, the "sweat" (a mysterious deadly disease characterized by chills, fever, and profuse sweating that first broke out in England in 1485), dropsy or edema, and strangury (a painful inability to urinate). Raymond Chalin de Vinario also pointed to the "great variety of epidemic diseases" that were appearing in his time, including ulcerous scabies (a skin itch or rash), intestinal worms, and "semi-tertian fevers" (malaria). All this inevitably kept Europe's population in a long slow decline until the sixteenth century, or 1450 at the earliest.

Plague thus posed a particularly grave and persistent challenge to those on the front lines of the crisis, chief among whom were the university-trained physicians, so-called barber-surgeons, and other healers who made up the medical personnel of the Middle Ages. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that the Black Death was the greatest catastrophe that doctors have ever had to face in the history of their profession. Well into the fifteenth century, doctors continued to testify to the disease's enduring power to inspire terror and fear. An anonymous doctor in 1411, watching in despair as "too many" of his friends and fellow citizens in Lübeck, Germany, were dying of plague, characterized it as the "[evil] stepmother of the human race" and "the worst possible illness, which I ought not even call an illness but rather, a death." It also seemed to this doctor that plague was an ever-present, "continual" disease, so that "now every year, or, at most, every third or fourth year, a pestilence befalls us, which is why [the number of] people is diminishing and the land is becoming desolate." Dr. Hermann Schedel opened his plague treatise dedicated to the bishop of Eichstädt in c. 1453 by commenting on how, of "the countless ways that men can die … there is none more bitter and more strange than this, most bitter plague" owing to the fact that, more than any other disease, it descended upon its victims with a ferocity such "that it completely alters whomever it ravishes and devours him like a fire." Schedel reckoned that in his time, plague's "contagion has come back in a more [virulent form] than in the days of antiquity." Later, as town physician of Augsburg, Schedel experienced firsthand the plague of 1463. In a letter to his uncle, the good doctor cursed a disease that "chews up the living and the dead" and which, after sweeping away so many friends and acquaintances, forced him to think incessantly of death and of his own potential demise: "I only know that the [Grim] Reaper is here, who may call me to his tribunal [at any moment]." After hearing of the death of the duke of Bavaria during the epidemic, Schedel commented that

> even if this plague is only a mild one, yet still it may rage bitterly, and it does so rage among us even now, and to write this down [is a terrible thing], how in days to come it will invade neighboring lands.

An inescapable conclusion one draws from a close study of these hitherto neglected actors in the drama of the Black Death is that doctors, down through to the end of the Middle Ages and beyond, never found an effective or even adequate response to the disease. This can come as no surprise to anyone who has ever had to rely on modern antibiotics to

fight off an infection. Nonetheless, behind this generalization lies a more complex story, one that is full of some intriguing puzzles and contradictions, which include responses that may well have helped potential victims of plague, and others that could actually do quite some harm, perhaps even increasing patients' chances of contracting or dying from the disease. One must also acknowledge that physicians during the Middle Ages had quite different expectations and understandings about their powers to heal the body than do doctors today. In a nutshell, they believed that their ability to cure patients was limited to helping the body heal itself through its own natural curative powers, all of which could be stymied by patients' unique bodily complexions or susceptibilities to the disease, their willingness to follow the doctor's regimen, the especial potency of the corrupted air or poison that was causing plague, or simply because the stars were not in proper alignment to allow healing or because God did not wish it to be so. There were thus plenty of explanations for why, in Ibn Khātima's words, "treatment shows no results, even when … a prescribed treatment—such as is described by me and outlined by the greatest medical specialist—is done without fail." Conversely, if a natural recovery from bubonic plague happened to coincide with a physician's "cure," observation served to reaffirm what was already being done on the basis of authority.

Though doctors' response to the first outbreak of plague in 1348–49 is well known, there are some misconceptions and large unknowns with regard to how this response evolved over the next 150 years. One might think, for example, that a continual learning curve characterized medieval doctors' ongoing experience with plague, so that responses in later outbreaks were substantially different from those at first contact with the disease. Indeed, it has recently been argued that plague doctors gradually abandoned their reliance on ancient medical authorities such as Hippocrates and Galen and instead adopted a more practical, empirical approach based on their own observations and experience in treating the disease that anticipates modern medicine. However, if one delves deep into some of the hundreds of plague treatises that were written during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, one realizes that the answer is not quite so simple. Some plague doctors did indeed comment on how they were facing a medical challenge unlike anything faced by their predecessors. The papal physician Raymond Chalin de Vinario, mentioned earlier, said in 1382, in an oft-quoted remark, that "the ancients plainly did not cure pestilential diseases, because they were ignorant of their causes or of their modes of action, and in terms of their origin were in [a state of] general confusion." Likewise John of Burgundy, a physician practicing in Liège in Belgium, stated in 1365 that "modern masters are more experienced in treating pestilential epidemic diseases than all the doctors and medical experts from Hippocrates downward," as his illustrious predecessors "never saw a general or long-lasting epidemic" like the Black Death that had "tested their cures by long experience." (By contrast, Burgundy claimed he had spent 24 years fighting plague.) Already in 1348–49, several doctors, including Ibn Khātima, Gui de Chauliac, and Gentile da Foligno, recognized the unprecedented nature of the crisis unfolding before them.

However, if one reads more closely, it will be realized that just because the plague was unprecedented did not invalidate, in medieval doctors' minds, the framework of theory and practice that they had inherited from the ancients. Rather, the universality of the Black Death convinced them to emphasize a universal causal explanation within that framework. Experience was then drafted in support of what had traditionally been accepted on the

basis of authority alone, not to innovate in the modern sense from scratch on the basis of trial and error. For example, Vinario starts out his chapter on the causes of the plague with the foregoing quote but, if we read through to the end of the chapter, it becomes clear that his criticisms are reserved only for those authorities, such as Avicenna (981–1037), whom he felt gave insufficient weight to the first, higher cause—such as a conjunction of the planets—that alone could explain a "true epidemic" of plague that pervaded over "diverse seasons and diverse parts of the world," such as the "great mortality" of 1348. (Avicenna, like other Muslim scholars of his time, was particularly skeptical of the astrological explanation but on religious rather than empirical grounds.) Nearer causes of disease—such as the stench emanating from swamps, rotting corpses, latrines, and fermenting linen or hemp—gave rise, either by themselves or concurrently with a higher cause, to only local incidents of disease (what was usually called a "vintage"), as was the case with most epidemics of the past. Those physicians who "were not great astrologers" were therefore ignorant of the real reasons behind a universal pestilence and could not cure it. This was for its times an entirely conventional—and from a modern perspective a quite conservative, even reactionary—opinion that Vinario backed up by citing Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, and most of their Arab intermediaries. By contrast, the one medieval authority who is perhaps most in sympathy with the modern scientific approach, the science writer Konrad of Megenberg, who championed a universal cause of the plague that was grounded in natural, observable phenomena—in this case earthquakes—and who defended it with some impressive empirical or inductive reasoning (everything, in short, that we think should characterize a more modern, forward-looking approach to medicine), would have been laughed out of court by Vinario.

Likewise Burgundy, quoting both Hippocrates and his own "practical experience," emphasized that "no one ought to be put under the care of any physician who is ignorant of astrology," as medicine and astrology go hand in hand. His contempt was reserved for university physicians who, while being "admirable scholars, well-versed in theories and hypotheses," were nonetheless "too little experienced in the practicalities," by which he meant administering medicine when the planets were in a favorable alignment for the successful treatment of the patient. Burgundy's attitude is actually quite similar to that of a treatise on diseases that was written in 1340, well before the Black Death, by an Augustinian friar, Augustine of Trent, who likewise complained that "many doctors" of his day committed a "pestiferous error … due to their ignorance of astronomy." Thus, post-plague doctors by no means abandoned their "star-gazing" to forge a bold, new approach to medicine that grounded disease in what we would regard as earth-bound realities. Rather, they understood the "practicalities" of their profession in quite different terms than we do today.

If anything, the critical challenge posed by plague convinced doctors to fall back on what was reassuringly familiar. The Prague doctor Sigmund Albich, who defended the pagan Hippocrates as an authority "practiced in dealing with pestilences," as revealed in the *Epidemics*, blamed the prevalence of plague in 1406 as due to the fact that now "there is no order and regimen to medicine" as in olden days, which made people more susceptible to disease. If the Black Death changed anything at all, it was how and why medieval doctors justified the time-honored concepts of medicine. Even when doctors swam against the tide of medical opinion of their times, they did so within only certain circumscribed bounds. John Jacobi,

for instance, a physician who wrote a plague treatise in 1373 and who, like Vinario, practiced at the papal court of Avignon, directly contradicted his colleague by asserting that a "very great" or "universal pestilence" was more likely to come from a local, inferior cause rather than a higher one, as the latter gave rise to diseases that were unpredictable, sometimes killing animals rather than humans and vice versa, or striking down more quickly people living in good air such as up in the mountains than those who lived in bad, such as in prisons or near stagnant waters. Yet Jacobi justified his opposing opinion by citing Avicenna, the same authority with whom Vinario took issue. What is even more confusing, Jacobi, no less than Vinario or Burgundy, declares defiantly at the beginning of his treatise that the pestilence "afflicts us more frequently than it did the ancients, and therefore few of the ancients could say anything on the basis of experience." If two such contrary positions could both claim to be contrarian, it is more than likely that in fact nothing had changed.

The standard plague treatise of the later Middle Ages tried to answer three basic questions: how the disease was caused, how it was to be prevented, and (usually in a much shorter section) how it was to be cured. This pattern, established during the first outbreak of plague in 1348–49, was to hold true for the rest of the medieval period and beyond. One study, for example, found that out of a sample of 152 treatises written between 1348 and 1599, only four deviated from the above organizational structure. Of course, ancient medical theory, going back to the Greeks, stood behind most of the information disseminated by these treatises. Causes of the plague were put down to the miasmatic theory, that diseases arose and spread through a contamination of the air down to its very substance through both higher and more local sources. This did not preclude direct, person-to-person contagion, however, as medieval doctors could explain this as resulting from the miasma—or what Gentile da Foligno, borrowing from Galen, called the "seeds of pestilence"—passing through the breath, touch, or even sight of the infected patient. (The last was discussed extensively in a Montpellier physician's treatise from 1349, wherein the "poisonous matter" of plague was said to travel out "via the optic nerves at the eyes.")

Muslim physicians had to be more circumspect on the subject of contagion, as the religious tradition of Islam going back to the Prophet Muhammad seemed to state categorically that plague came directly from God and through no other agency. Nonetheless, the Moorish physician Ibn Khātima devotes considerable space in his plague treatise to reconciling the Prophetic tradition of Islam with an empirical defense of contagion: though admitting that God alone is the ultimate cause of disease, Khātima also advances evidence of contagion as a secondary cause, such as that people contract plague by buying or selling the clothing of dead victims in the market or that anyone who comes into contact with bloodspitting patients is in especial danger. Even Khātima's friend and colleague, Ibn al-Khatīb, who in his own plague treatise famously defends contagion in a very open and emphatic way, nonetheless claims that his position is not incompatible with the *sharīʿa* (Islamic law) and the *hadith*, although his interpretation of the Prophetic tradition here is perhaps a controversial one. In the end, however, Khatīb asserts that any religious and legal opinions on this matter must give way before empirical observation and proof, of which he gives numerous examples (including that of a contaminated earring!), and he closes his treatise by abruptly declaring that a legal discussion "regarding the existence or non-existence of contagion is not among the duties of medicine." Compared to those of Khātima, Khatīb's attempts to reconcile his religion with his medical science seem half-hearted; instead, he seems to believe that the

two simply should not interfere with each other, which probably explains why he is such an attractive figure to modern observers in the West. Even so, Khatīb was not the martyr to scientific empiricism that some have made him out to be: his position on contagion was not mentioned during his trial at Fez, which ended with his death in prison at the hands of a lynch mob in 1374.

Preventing plague was to be achieved through a regimen of health known as the six "non-naturals," of which the most important was guarding against or correcting the air, as this was how the disease usually entered the body. Other concerns, such as diet, exercise, sleep, evacuation, and "accidents of the soul," or one's mental state, were all about maintaining a balance of the four bodily humors (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile), a tradition that again goes back to the ancient Greeks. Finally, treatment of plague victims involved copious bloodletting to evacuate the bad humors or poisonous matter at the root of the disease or else administering special pills, powders, or drinks (available in a bewildering array of recipes containing dozens of ingredients) to neutralize the plague poison. No less than bloodletting, the use of oral remedies such as theriacs, antidotes, electuaries, cordials, and juleps had an ancient pedigree, but many plague doctors also added their own modifications or entire recipes. When buboes appeared, these could be "ripened" with special plasters or "ruptoriums" and then resolved surgically to draw out the noxious material within by either cupping, cautery, or scarification (i.e., cutting). As plague boils were already tender to the touch, these procedures must have been agonizingly painful: one anonymous German author of a treatise written around 1400 declared his preference to be bled "a thousand times" rather than to be cauterized just once.

When medieval doctors discussed symptoms of the plague, they did so only as part of the many "signs" of the disease's advent, both in individual patients and among the population at large. This was vital information, as it presaged when to begin prevention or therapy measures, but it was not a diagnostic technique in the same way that physicians use it today. Sigmund Albich advised his colleagues in 1407 to "ask of the sick patient, or of those tending him, when was the moment that he became sick, [and] with what kind of symptoms … and how long [did they last]." However, this was only to begin treatment before the disease had a chance to become "poisonous;" once the patient was actually sick, Albich advised (on the authority of Hippocrates and Galen) to let him be and do nothing else, for otherwise the physician "will be a murderer, [making] the sick man die [more] quickly." Treatment during the plague, therefore, did not necessarily entail a close examination of the patients, especially as they were believed to be contagious. John Jacobi advised "prudent doctors" to "stand a long way from their patients and hold their face towards a door or window" whenever they visited the sick, and this advice was copied into other plague treatises. Another recommended that physicians avoid handling the patient's urine, or that if this must be done, use gloves and "send it away quickly." Therefore, it is no surprise that, when Albich states impressively that a patient's urine turning from red to clear is a hopeful sign of recovery, he cites as proof the *Prognostics* of Hippocrates, not his own observation. The Lübeck doctor of 1411 quotes the same work as his basis for diagnosing death when black, green, or yellow tumors and carbuncles appear. He also claimed to be able to predict the patient's demise just by observing the color of his face, but his grounds for doing so were Hippocrates' *Aphorisms* and Galen's *Regimen of Health*. One thus has to be careful about

using plague doctors' "signs" as evidence as to whether the Black Death was really plague; they cannot be treated the same as modern diagnoses of disease.

Perhaps even more perplexing are assertions plague doctors make about the disease that we know from other sources to have been quite inconsistent with what they would have seen with their very eyes. A good instance of this is Gentile da Foligno's elaborate defense of the scholastic opinion, apparently derived from Avicenna, that epidemics always occur "towards the end of summer and the beginning of autumn," which he makes in his *Long Consilium* (*Casebook*) on plague written in 1348, the last section of which raises 17 talking points (*dubia* or "doubts") about plague, perhaps for the benefit of his university students. Yet testamentary and other types of evidence indicate that in several central Italian towns, including Perugia, from where Foligno was writing, plague peaked usually at the height of summer, in June and July. Foligno himself died of the plague on June 18, 1348, obviously before he could actually observe this phenomenon, but his position as to the seasonal timing of plague lived on: similar assertions were made by Heinrich Ribbeniz of Wrocław in present-day Poland in 1370, Rabbi Isaac ben Todros of Avignon in c. 1376, Francischino de Collignano of Florence in 1382, Pietro di Tussignano in 1398, Sigmund Albich of Prague in 1406, John of Saxony in the first half of the fifteenth century, and Primus of Görlitz in c. 1464. One doctor who bucked this trend was Giovanni della Penna, Foligno's contemporary rival at Naples, who maintained that the "cause of this plague greatly threatens during the summer time of the year." Yet even this correct diagnosis may be still another case of a doctor's rigid reliance on theory just as much as on empirical observation, for summer was traditionally seen as the season that corresponded with the hot and dry choleric humor, which for Penna lay at the root of plague's occurrence in the human body.

Another conundrum that emerges in these treatises is the breezy confidence expressed by some plague doctors that their cures or treatments, such as bleeding, would invariably work, when we know from our modern experience with plague that only antibiotic drugs can truly conquer the disease. The efficacy of bloodletting, known in medical parlance as a phlebotomy, poses a particularly perplexing problem of interpretation. Several plague doctors set great store by it: Ibn Khātima claims he had "miraculous results by bleeding" during the plague in Almería, Spain, in 1348–49, citing "countless" cases where patients "were kept alive by this measure." Unlike most plague doctors, Khātima even gives case histories of individual patients helped by his treatments: he retails the story of how bloodletting cured one young man who was apparently afflicted with pneumonic plague, as his only symptom was "spitting blood," a case that "puzzles me still." The papal physician John of Tornamira also gave a specific instance of "a certain nobleman" under his care at Montpellier in France who was cured of a "pestilential aposteme" on his groin after being bled from a vein on the foot.

Bleeding was also one area where plague doctors modified traditional practice in non-plague years: their advice was typically to cast off the usual restraints on this invasive procedure, which was normally viewed as a last resort, and instead bleed more intensely and proactively than in the past. Both Ibn Khātima and Giovanni della Penna of Naples urged their colleagues to be fearless in the application of bloodletting, provided that their patients could tolerate it, and to make it a universal remedy for plague, to be varied only by quantity or degree. Penna recommended that patients be bled as often as possible, for "to evacuate is better than to keep it all inside," and he recommended it most especially for

those sick with fever or a plague boil. Other doctors advised one another to bleed as large amounts as they can, even if the patient faints; to increase the frequency of bloodletting, such as by doubling the number of phlebotomies a patient receives in healthy times; and to bleed without regard to age, gender, complexion, or proper timing for the operation, because, in Khātima's words, this "disease changes all seasons into one season, all diseases into one." Indeed, to bleed too little could actually be fatal to the plague patient, according to a Master Cardo of Milan, who recommended that a "goodly quantity" of blood be drawn because otherwise the bleeding only "repels the [poisonous] matter back to the heart." Khātima attested to courageous patients who gave up to eight pounds of blood (which is almost equivalent to the total volume of blood in the body of a 150-pound adult), but that most gave about five pounds. If we assume that Khātima means by this the total amount of blood given by patients over the entire, months-long "reign of plague," this becomes achievable, especially when plague doctors urged that their patients be bled as often as every two weeks, repeatedly on the same day or, as an anonymous German treatise of 1493 prescribes, that as much as a pound of blood be let at a time over the course of more than an hour. (Most blood donors today give a pint of blood within about 10 minutes.)

Of course, bleeding in such profuse quantities would quickly render patients anemic. However, it has been hypothesized by some modern medical experts that this condition may have actually helped patients fight off infectious disease, as iron-deficiency anemia inhibits bacterial growth. Especially when plague doctors like John of Burgundy advised bleeding at the early stages of the disease, ideally within the hour of patients being "seized by the illness," or else 12 or 24 hours at the latest, this may have given victims' immune systems enough breathing space to localize plague bacteria in the lymphatic glands, where natural recovery was possible in cases of bubonic plague. Moreover, medieval physicians seem to have recognized that bleeding had at least a calming effect on the patient, no doubt because he was rendered light-headed. Penna attested that "the symptoms of this plague appear to be greatly assuaged by evacuation," whereas the anonymous German treatise of 1400 closes with the comment: "Nor have I seen anyone bled in this way without conducting himself well and receiving [some] comfort at heart, even if he does not escape the danger of death." Khātima mentions the specific instance of a man from Homma Biggana near Almería, who had fled his village in fear as it was being ravaged by the plague and who complained of "anxiety, depression, [and] arterial cramps," which the doctor regarded as the first signs of the disease. He was pronounced "fully healed" after being bled twice on the same day in rapid succession—for a total of 40 ounces or two and a half pints—after the first bloodletting of nearly one and a half pints made him feel better only as he was walking away for a block or two, when "he returned in an identical state as before the bleeding."

Conversely, excessive bleeding could be a two-edged sword that fatally weakened patients who might otherwise have had a strong enough constitution to fight off the infection. Giovanni de Santa Sofia, who practiced in Padua during the late fourteenth century, advised that patients who had already come down with plague apostemes or carbuncles not be bled because they "immediately grow weak and a phlebotomy weakens them more," whereas an anonymous German treatise from 1475 warned that regular evacuations should be at the discretion of a physician, as "there is no greater [danger] than to impoverish one's natural constitution of its blood," which needed time to replenish itself after each bloodletting. Sigmund Albich acknowledged critics who claimed that an evacuation weakened the "virtue"

or bodily strength of patients and "therefore is of no benefit"; in such cases, when the patient was being overwhelmed by the plague matter, he recommended a lighter purgative, such as laxatives.

However, the doctor who most defied the status quo in terms of bloodletting was the Jewish physician, Rabbi Isaac ben Todros, practicing in Avignon during the 1370s. In this case, the resistance to authority was personal: Todros was directly contradicting the advice of his colleague, John of Tornamira, even though he mentions him in complimentary terms as a "great" or "exalted" physician, one who ministers to the pope and is chancellor of the medical school at Montpellier. Even though Todros makes the requisite professions of humility, comparing himself and his opinions to "the wing of a fly and the leg of an ant" or like "a grain of mustard compared to the great sphere," he nonetheless reveals an individualist streak here, for he says he is not going to defer "to those who are greater, for I have seen that the essence of the established conduct in this is completely the opposite of what is appropriate to do in my opinion." This was a brave position for Todros to take, as any Jewish doctor who challenged a Christian colleague, especially one as respected and well connected as Tornamira, ran the risk of being accused of much worse than mere academic contentiousness, although perhaps Todros was emboldened by the fact that he was writing in Hebrew, which few if any of his Christian colleagues could understand. Yet for Todros, plague urged especial caution, as a "small mistake" in this instance could be "of great consequence" and blood was a precious bodily fluid "upon which the life of souls is dependent." Todros's main objection to Tornamira's regime of "continual bloodletting" every month was that he (like Penna and Khātima before him) was prescribing the same treatment as a general one "to be performed at all times of plague and for different constitutions," which thus disregarded changing or individual circumstances. Whereas Tornamira based his approach on the assumption that there was a single, higher cause to the plague that always produced a "dominance" or excess of blood, Todros seemed to favor Avicenna's "proximal causes" such as "decayed vapors" issuing from dead bodies or swamps. As decay was usually caused by heat and moisture (proof of which was that those who lived close to seas and rivers died first), this had to be combated with their opposites, such as "cooling and drying agents." As for bloodletting, Todros did allow for this but only in small quantities when necessary. Todros also says that, in comparison with "what the recent physicians have done," he was also emboldened to experiment and do "a little bit of the new"; this mainly consisted of coming up with his own recipes for pestilential pills, of which he found no mention in "recent sources." Here he was also going against Tornamira, who instead recommended powders, and Todros shows a thorough familiarity with Tornamira's own plague treatise of c. 1372 by quoting from it at this point.

There is yet another consideration that thus far has been completely overlooked with regard to bleeding treatments for plague. It is the simple fact that the instruments medieval doctors used to let blood, the lancet or scalpel, could not be sterilized effectively, even if there were the desire to do so. Plague doctors probably did attempt to clean their implements after every use: an anonymous treatise from 1481 recommends, for example, that the eating utensils and bedclothes of patients be washed before being used by others. However, such hygienic measures had not the same rationale as those of today, namely, to disinfect the object *itself*; rather, its intent was to ward off the bad air. This is why John of Tornamira and other doctors recommended that, after washing one's hands with vinegar,

Surgeon lancing a plague boil on a woman's neck, while another patient exposes the boil on his armpit. Such procedures may have inadvertently helped to spread the plague. (From a 14th- or 15th-century fresco at St. Sebastian Chapel in Lanslevillard, France. Courtesy Granger Collection, New York.)

one "hold the hands in front of the nostrils and take a breath." However, modern studies conducted during the Third Pandemic found that plague bacteria in sputum or blood were completely killed only by concentrated solutions of disinfectants, such as carbolic acid, perchloride of mercury, and Lysol. As doctors usually advised treating the worst-off patients first and then bleeding healthy household members as a preventative measure, especially if they were attending the sick, one can imagine how instruments contaminated from lancing plague boils or bleeding near the site of buboes would easily spread the disease. It is probably no accident, then, that plague doctors noted how all members of a family would invariably die or that they would die quite suddenly, perhaps from a greater incidence of septicemic plague. Raymond Chalin de Vinario, for example, observed how many patients "did not live more than a few hours" or that those who died quickly had blood in their feces and urine and coming out their nose, which were noted during the Third Pandemic as signs of septicemia.

Doctors made impressive boasts for other preservatives and remedies besides bloodletting (some evidently of their own design), which in turn must have impressed their patients. Here again, both authority and experience were marshaled in support of their claims. A common refrain is to quote some ancient author to the effect that no one who took a recommended theriac or some other concoction died during a prior epidemic, whereas those who did not succumbed. In other cases, testimonials were cited from more contemporary sources. A recipe for a poultice containing ground-up slugs, worms, and mercury was attested in an Italian treatise by a "certain herbalist" who boasted it would

eliminate any carbuncle or tumor arising anywhere on the body within 24 hours, as "he himself had very often proven during times of plague." Such was the confidence of the Lübeck doctor in his medicines that he compared plague apostemes to the banners raised on castle turrets to signify surrender (i.e., of the pestilence to the physician).

A number of doctors claimed to have demonstrated their cures on themselves, as they had gotten the plague and survived. Gui de Chauliac, the papal physician in Avignon during the first two outbreaks of 1348 and 1361, is perhaps the most famous example of this, but three others we can mention from the fifteenth century include the German physician, Peter de Kottbus, Blasius of Barcelona, and Stephanus of Padua. Chauliac, who says he was sick for six weeks with "continuous fever" and "an aposteme on the groin," cured himself with a ripening plaster in spite of the fact that "all of my friends believed that I would die." Peter de Kottbus says simply that he "was infected by the pestilence" but survived by drinking sour juices six times a night and eating sour foods eight times a day. Blasius of Barcelona, writing in 1406, recalled how he got no less than two boils on his groin (unusual for modern plague) when he was studying medicine at Toulouse, during an outbreak when the disease returned after two years in remission and carried off 200 of his fellow students. When he got his first boil on the right side of his groin, he immediately had himself bled from the saphenic vein on the right foot. However, the next night, he noticed that another "glandular swelling" had arisen on his "other groin" (i.e., his left side), whereas the first one had grown even larger and was very painful. He then asked his teacher, Philippe Elephantis, to surgically operate on the larger of his boils, or on the right side of his groin. A finger-length cut was made deep into the swelling and another from the side, after which "a little blood issued forth" and some yellowish liquid, as much as could fill "a hazelnut shell." Immediately his fever disappeared, and after a "gluey" plaster was applied, by the next morning the wound had healed to a scar, and Blasius was cured. He concluded from this that the plague was localized in the "glandular swelling," which should be the main focus of treatment rather than fever, and that the patient should be speedily evacuated without cauterizing the bubo. However, Blasius did not rely just on the results of his own "experiment" to come to these conclusions; he also cited the Moorish surgical authority, Albucasis, and Avicenna, both dating to the tenth to eleventh centuries, in support. For even though Blasius at the beginning of his treatise seems to criticize these ancient medical authorities—noting that none of them, except for Avicenna, even mentions the plague whereas he himself has the benefit of 40 years' practice in treating the disease at Toulouse, Montpellier, and Sicily, in addition to having lived through two worldwide plagues in his youth, including the "first glandular plague" of 1348 when he was three years old—nonetheless almost all of his prescriptions for preservatives and cures are inspired by them, even if he does not endorse them all by his own experience. What is also interesting is that Blasius makes an exception in applying his evacuating regimen for "silly" persons who "faint at the sight of [the instruments] of phlebotomy alone," in which case he recommends administering drugs. Finally, in 1465, Doctor Stephanus of Padua lay four days in bed with his wife, "he at the head of the bed and his wife at the foot," both running a "horrible fever" and bearing "a very detestable sign," perhaps the plague bubo. Nonetheless, Stephanus was able to "triumph over the plague," not only in the case of himself and his wife but that of "very many others," using a regimen that included bleeding, enemas, and theriac-induced sweating. An anonymous physician of c. 1400 also claimed to have "cured" himself with sage, elder, and bramble leaves taken for nine days on an empty stomach, but in his case,

Bleeding the patient, from a 15th-century medical manuscript. (Illustration courtesy of Bristol Reference Library.)

he experienced only "prickling sensations" in his armpits and groin that he believed were the first signs of the appearance of apostemes.

Yet most plague doctors also included a significant caveat to their "proven" or "infallible" remedies, such as that they would be ineffective if they were administered late in the illness. For example, John of Burgundy, though claiming that "many people have been cured by one bleeding alone," nevertheless cautioned that if bleeding was delayed beyond 12 hours "there is no certainty that it will rescue the patient," because by then the blood became so thick that it was "scarcely able to flow from the vein," and similar kinds of warnings were made subsequently by several others. John of Tornamira, though championing "large phlebotomies," also advised his colleagues to be "cautious" about performing them, "because if the patient should not be cured with the large phlebotomy, his friends easily might lay the blame on you." He also said that, as the plague penetrated right to the heart of the patient, "doctors cannot do much for those suffering from apostemes without great uncertainty and difficulty." A Master Bernard of Frankfurt claimed that his sweating regimen had the power to miraculously dissolve plague boils and that it "has not ever failed him, in his experience," yet if the patient was allowed to cool down, then "nothing can be done" because the humors will stay where they are and not be expelled in the patient's sweat. Others warned that certain signs such as vomiting up of theriac or the appearance of "black pustules" portended death, no matter what the doctor did. Ibn Khātima mainly reserved his confidence for therapies "before the disease takes root" in the patient; once it had taken hold of the victim, however, he admitted that treatment "doesn't make much sense." His colleague in Naples, Giovanni della Penna, likewise concurred that should the plague have "already actively invaded the body," a cure was "quite rare." Rabbi Isaac ben Todros asserted in his plague treatise of c. 1376 that, once the plague "decay" had set in and signs such as "pestilent pustules" appeared, "the physician has not been given authority to cure these diseases and

the sick person has no need for them"; indeed, their efforts were "the ultimate waste," as not only did the sick not benefit from their actions but physicians then only injured themselves by contracting this "transmissible sickness." He quoted Galen, Avicenna, and Rhazes to support his position.

The case of a fifteenth-century plague doctor from Burgundy, Theobaldus Loneti, well illustrates the complex attitudes medieval physicians had toward their treatments of a disease like plague. Loneti, who attested to the fact that "there was debate (*altercatio*) among physicians concerning incurable diseases like leprosy, paralysis, pestilence and the like," nonetheless reported that his colleagues "wished to conclude that no remedy could be found for the mortal pestilence" because ancient authorities such as Galen and Hippocrates make no mention of it, as such "a lethal pestilence did not yet exist in their time." He, however, disagreed, claiming that, alone of his peers, he would affirm that "many remedies can easily be brought to bear against the said plague." However, if we read through to the end of his treatise, it turns out that even Loneti's confidence is not so straightforward. Like John of Burgundy and others, he recognized that a cure was more difficult to achieve after 12 hours had elapsed from the onset of symptoms but, even then, he claimed to be able to effect a cure by administering a theriac. If, however, the patient vomited this up, he took this as a sign that the "pestiferous poison" had turned inward to the heart and gave up hope of saving him. Allegedly, he would then say to the patient: "Friend, you cannot escape [the disease] and I will not willingly lend my hand to it [further]." Loneti also gave up the case as a lost cause if he could not induce sweating in the patient or his blood was too "congealed" to be bled, at which point Loneti noted that his patient would typically live for not more than another five or six hours. One time, Loneti's patient died because he ran out of chickens after using up 13 of them, whose anuses he had plucked and held over the "painful spot" of the boil until they died, supposedly sucking up the plague poison. Finally, at the end of his treatise, Loneti admitted how during a plague he personally treated at Rome in 1424, his remedies seemed to be of no effect and "nearly everyone died," which he explained as owing to the fact that buboes did not appear until five to seven days after treatment, when his phlebotomies were letting out healthy, "pure" blood and leaving the corrupt, infected blood behind, so that in these cases "the phlebotomy cut shorts life." When Loneti felt himself coming down with plague, apparently with headache, fever, kidney pain, "a very indeterminate pulse," and "most mortal" signs in the urine (which he judged on the authority of the eighth-century Assyrian physician, Ibn Masawayh), he decided to forego his usual remedies, such as bloodletting, and try his last resort, a sweating regimen during which he counted out 60 drops of sweat as he lay in bed under many covers and which he repeated three more times despite the "great pain" he suffered. This apparently restored him to health, such that the other doctors attending him who had previously pronounced him to be at death's door now judged him "completely well." Loneti may well have saved himself by resorting to a less invasive procedure, but as he never got the tell-tale buboes, it is not clear that he even had the plague. Ironically, this relatively milder remedy may have been reserved for those who didn't need it in the first place, whereas Loneti still believed in the purgative cure for those on whom the lymphatic swellings appeared early in the disease. His bleeding instrument of choice was the leech rather than the knife, but he insisted that the bloodletting be continued until the blood changed from being "coarse, cloudy, and thick"

to "clear, fine, and lucid," a sign for him that all the plague poison had been evacuated from the body.

When it comes to judging the effectiveness of plague doctors from a modern perspective, one has to balance what we regard as our independent, empirical knowledge of medicine and disease with an understanding of the medieval context. Some medieval plague remedies will seem counterintuitive to modern medicine. For example, to get bedrest is almost a cliché of general practitioners nowadays, but medieval doctors advised that their patients not be allowed to sleep for at least a day or two after coming down with plague, which an anonymous fifteenth-century German treatise explained as owing to the fact that during sleep, "the vital spirits are quiescent, and the [plague] poison is [then] dispersed throughout the [bodily] members" such that it can't be evacuated. Likewise, medieval physicians recommended that their patients avoid exercise, fruits and vegetables, bathing, and sex during the plague, all of which today are considered essential to good hygiene and health. Yet this made perfect sense to a doctor of the Middle Ages, who was concerned to maintain the all-important balance of the bodily humors, avoid greater exposure to the bad air that comes with heavier breathing, and whose understanding of "cleanliness" was quite different, being more about a body well purged by bleeding and other evacuations than well scrubbed. Even so, plague doctors made some allowances for individual preferences, such as setting aside their attempts to almost pickle their patients in vinegar and acidic foods for the sake of sour stomachs, condoning moderate exercise such as light strolls in enclosed places just before a meal, permitting baths in "bone-chillingly cold" water rather than hot, or allowing sex if one was accustomed to it and had an excess of "seed" that needed to flow, in which case Ibn Khātima recommended that it be done "without force and without disturbing the natural constitution"; if this principle was preferentially applied to male partners, plague doctors may inadvertently have engendered something of a sexual revolution in the late Middle Ages! Then there are a few medieval prescriptions that cannot help but strike a modern reader with visceral disgust, such as Gentile da Foligno's plaster for plague boils that included using one's own excrement, although he allowed that it could be omitted "on account of its foulness." Both Master Bernard and an anonymous German colleague mention drinking urine, either one's own or a young boy's, as a prophylactic, yet this was to be resorted to only by the poor and the aged.

Conversely, other prescriptions that medieval doctors had for plague will strike a startlingly familiar chord in many modern readers. Chicken broth needs almost no explanation, even though medieval people explained the properties of food in quite different terms (as a function of tempering the humors) than we do today. Under the heading of "accidents of the soul," medieval doctors advised their patients to be "joyful" and not lose hope during a plague, as giving in to fear and other violent emotions or imagining oneself as sick could actually bring on the disease; if this may seem untenable to some, plague doctors did acknowledge that people had "good reason to be afraid" during such "melancholy times," and who in this day and age has not attested to the power of suggestion and to psychosomatic disorders? That plague doctors poured much more of their faith and effort into preventative measures, as these proved far easier to show successful results than attempting to cure patients once the disease had struck, is also an article of faith in modern-day HMOs. Hartmann Schedel, the younger cousin of the peripatetic German physician Hermann Schedel, advised that his patients not be put off by the "diverse medicines" he

prescribed, as during the plague it was better that "one's natural constitution not grow accustomed" to only one remedy that would soon lose its potency. This is really no different from the strategy behind the "cocktail" of anti-retroviral therapies that today are commonly prescribed for AIDS patients. Many of the ingredients in plague medicines, such as St. John's wort (*hypericon*), leopard's bane (*doronicum*), wormwood (*absinthium*), dittany, camphor, rue, red sandalwood, aloe, and the like are still staples of today's homeopathic remedies. Medieval doctors administered laudanum or opium poppy syrup in doses that were sure to numb almost any kind of pain. However, of the true effect of some medieval medicines we will probably never know: Who can say what unknown properties held the "bone from the heart of a stag," for example, or the *Manum Christi* cordial, which contained dissolved pearls, or the even more exotic-sounding drug, *Blatta Byzantia?*

And then there are measures that medieval doctors prescribed for plague that modern commentators have asserted should have been effective, on the basis of current knowledge and theory, but in reality may just as likely have done the opposite. One of the most common pieces of advice with which plague doctors opened their preventative regimens was to flee pestilential places and persons, warning their patients, in a typical turn of phrase apparently derived from Galen, "to start early, go far, and return late." (Often medieval physicians admitted that this was their "best remedy," in itself a tacit admission of their rather limited effectiveness against plague.) Flight as a response to plague had already been widely adopted during the First Pandemic beginning in 541: the seventh-century Greek saint, Anastasius of Sinai, condoned it in the case of rational, Hippocratic causes of plague such as corrupt air, even though he admitted that when the disease came from the divine will, it was futile. This contrasted with the Islamic tradition, dating back to the "Plague of 'Amwas" that struck Syria and Mesopotamia in 638–39, which proscribed a Muslim from fleeing to or from a plague-ridden area. Inspired by the religious teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, this *fatwa* may also have been adopted on practical grounds to avoid spreading the disease (which refugees can do even in cases of bubonic plague by carrying infected fleas on their persons or in their bedding), despite the fact that Islamic tradition denied contagion as outside the direct agency of God. However, the Moorish physician from Grenada, Ibn al-Khatīb, defied this tradition by advocating in his plague treatise that people avoid the sick and flee from infected places, even though this might mean abandoning dying friends and relatives. For Khatīb, it seems that self-preservation trumped moral or religious considerations: he compared the quills with which religious scholars issued their *fatwas* to "swords upon which the Muslims died" and claimed that these only gave people permission "to engage in suicidal behavior." Yet one of Khatīb's examples to prove his point was a man who chose isolation, not flight: Ibn Abu Madyan of Salé was the only one of his town to survive in 1348–49 because he bricked up the door of his house and hoarded enough food so that he and his family could outlast the epidemic. And as plague spread even into the littlest villages in the countryside, the Liège doctor Simon of Corvino asked, with good reason, "to what [purpose]" did flight serve, even if it alone was deemed efficacious?

Fumigations that many plague doctors prescribed to ward off the bad air thought to be spreading the disease are also believed to have been effective from a modern perspective, as they may have "smoked out" fleas and other insects on victims' persons and throughout their homes. However, in reality these plague fires were to be made from "clean" burning woods such as dried oak, perhaps scented with aromatic plants such as juniper or with incense,

and were not designed to be overly smoky. As anyone who lives in the country knows, a roaring fire actually "brings out the flies" in a cabin by rapidly raising the surrounding air temperature.

If medieval doctors did do any good during the reign of plague, I believe it was mainly in two areas. One was in urging upon their patients greater hygiene, such as by sweeping and cleaning out filth from their homes or streets and changing and airing out sick or dead patients' clothing and bedding. An anonymous fifteenth-century treatise goes even further and argues that "it would be safer to burn everything" left of a patient's possessions, as was the custom in Italy; to support this measure, the author cites his own eyewitness testimony of having seen two boys in Germany touch a dead woman's bedding that had been put out into the street to dry in the sun, after which both died of the disease. The other recommendation that may have done some good is to urge greater attendance on the plague patient, such as by wiping off their sweat, rubbing down their bodies, or compelling them to take even a small amount of nourishment, as loss of appetite was seen as a mortal sign. Master Bernard of Frankfurt promised that his sweating regimen would work only if the sick person were diligently looked after and cared for, because "few or none … can persevere in the sweating, once it has been set in motion, by himself alone." A Bohemian treatise written in c. 1450 lists as one of six contributory causes of plague the fact that "many have died rather than lived because they lacked servants" to help the son or friend nurse the patient, particularly when he was too weak to even "get up in order to attend to his [own] necessities." Likewise, John of Saxony listed as his eighth reason why people get the plague "a lack of faithful servants to assist the sick man," particularly in helping him perform "the operations of nature in terms of digesting and expelling [food and excrement]."

Yet at the same time, these measures may have been more than offset by other considerations in which, wittingly or not, doctors undermined their good intentions. As mentioned, medieval physicians were completely unable to effectively sterilize their bleeding instruments, a factor that may have helped spread disease, and it must have been hard to persuade people, even family members, to stay and attend to patients when they were also being told that plague was contagious and that they should avoid being in the vicinity of, or having contact with, anyone who contracted the disease. Undoubtedly this was the reason why, as John of Saxony noted, even "parents during this plague also fear to draw near to their children and other beloved relatives." Some doctors tried to square this circle by giving precautions to take, such as to fumigate or ventilate the air around patients, reposition them to a higher or more remote part of the sick chamber or, do as physicians themselves do and keep their distance from the patients and their excreta as much as possible, all the while holding the face to a door or window and inhaling aromatics or keeping the body well evacuated and fortified with phlebotomies and pestilential pills. In his *Long Consilium* dedicated to the University of Padua, Gentile da Foligno advised everyone to flee, noting that those who stayed during a plague would be infected just as if they cast themselves "into an oven like bread dough," and he cited Galen to attest to the dangers of conversing "with those who are covered with sores." However, in a shorter *Consilium* written later in 1348 that he addressed to the college of physicians at Genoa, Foligno changed his tune, stating that it was important for the healthy to take preventative measures,

An artist's rendition of the image inscribed in the magical plague ring of Gentile da Foligno.

> in order that those who attend the sick may be able to be by their side more securely [and] in order that those who become sick are not neglected beyond all inhumanity and abandoned in such as miserable way as hitherto and in a manner that is usually accorded to brute beasts.

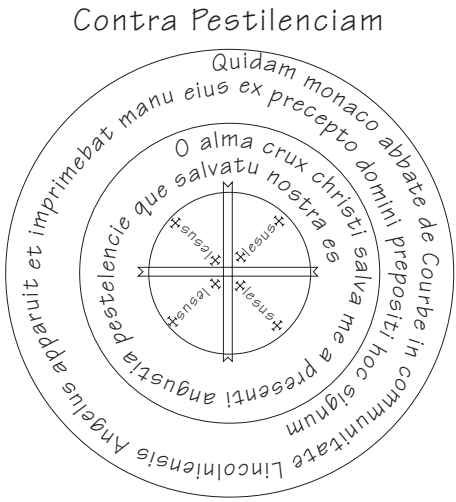
The anonymous physician from Montpellier who championed contagion by sight in a treatise of 1349 warned that attendants of plague patients were in especial danger, particularly if they look "at the sick man in his death throes." However, any visitor, whether he be "a doctor or priest or friend," could easily remedy this situation by blindfolding the patient, after which he should also smell a sponge soaked in vinegar or rue or cumin as an extra precaution. An anonymous treatise of 1481 gave six medicines to take by anyone having to stay with a sick person, although it also advised fleeing the ill, especially those in their last death throes, by which time almost all would agree that it was too late to do much for the patient anyway.

A last category of plague treatments to consider is the magical one, which runs as a kind of undercurrent through some plague treatises. This will not only seem strange to modern readers but would have been looked at askance by most medieval authorities as well. Yet, although magical remedies had, of course, an ancient pedigree, it is the one thing tried by plague doctors that could be said to have been truly bold and innovative, going as it did against both the rational tradition of the Greeks and what was considered orthodox by the Church. Gentile da Foligno is notorious for giving as his "ninth medicine" for plague in his *Long Consilium* a gold ring set with an amethyst overlaying dragonwort root, and on the stone was to be engraved the image of "a man on bended knee encircled by a serpent whose head the man holds in his right hand and whose tail is held in his left" (see illustration). Foligno promised that this ring "will preserve you from any poison and from the darts of pestilence, as well as from any other kind or manner of threat," but he also advised that it best be "kept in a book [reserved for] kingly persons." Instead of citing an ancient authority for the remedy, he referred to a relatively recent one, Pietro d'Abano, a doctor who, like

Foligno, had been a professor of medicine at the University of Padua in Italy and who died in 1316 in the prison of the Inquisition on a charge of practicing magic or heresy. Abano in turn had quoted a "book of the Persian kings" for the image in his work concerning poisons, *De Venenis*. Another of Abano's magical safeguards against poison that was repeated almost word for word by Foligno was the use of an emerald because it was proven to crack the eyes of a toad, a story that is taken from the thirteenth-century *De Lapidibus* (*Concerning Precious Stones*) of Albert the Great. Foligno also gave an alchemical recipe for brewing "potable gold" in an alembic. Hermann Schedel resorted to using a sapphire stone for curing a plague carbuncle, which he claimed would "negate" the symptom when held "directly over it." To counter skeptics, he also quoted from Albert the Great's *De Lapidibus*. Though many people cynically believed that the only power of these stones was their ability "to empty purses," Schedel replied with Albert's argument that precious stones "very often lose their virtue due to the fact that those carrying them have set them to do something [impossibly] enormous," such as curing a carbuncle "that has already dispersed its poison throughout the whole body." Such a stone asked to do the impossible was then damaged and needed to be restored by being kept in "clean, very clear water for several nights." If others advised wearing or holding precious stones, they did so in the belief that either these did indeed possess special properties or else because their patients think they did, which was just as well to "shut out excessive fear, which causes one to be despondent."

Other remedies that could be considered magical include holding a "stretched-out scarlet cloth over the heart" and using a bezoar stone, believed to be effective against any kind of poison, which its owner, Sigmund Gotzkirchner, described as "green with black dots." The Moorish physician, Muhammad ibn 'Alī ash-Shaqūrī, writing from Granada, Spain, included in his plague treatise various magical folk remedies such as wearing a ruby ring or a necklace containing a piece of elephant tusk, suspending a stepping stone inside the house, and using fresh myrtle or eryngium to reduce or remove tumors. Rabbi Isaac ben Todros mentioned a miraculous plaster that could prove and split open a plague boil by its supernatural powers. Perhaps the most taboo of all medicinal ingredients was mummy gum, which was listed by Master Bernhard in 1381 for inclusion in an electuary for the rich, "who have the means to pay" for it. As the name implies, this was nothing less than fluid exuding from cadavers or the actual flesh of a dead human, the consumption of which is, of course, equivalent to cannibalism. A clearly magical ritual was prescribed by an anonymous German treatise for any patient afflicted with plague who "wishes to know whether he might be able to escape it or not," which was to take up a chamber pot full of his own urine and put in a drop of milk "from a woman who has given birth to a son." If the drop floats to the surface, he "will soon be well," or if it floats in the middle, he also "need not fear" of dying but, in this case, "the disease will last a long time." If, however, it goes to the bottom of the urinal, "he will truly meet his death the following week."

Despite the obviously transgressive nature of many of these magical remedies, there were some that straddled a fine line between what was merely spiritual and what was superstitious. In a fifteenth-century English leech book, for example, there is a talisman "against pestilence" that allegedly came to a monk of Corby Abbey in Lincolnshire after "a certain angel" appeared to him and that he wrote down at the "command of his lord abbot" (see illustration). It consists of three concentric circles inscribed with several cruciform figures and the name of "Iesus" written four times, along with the following prayer: "O



Reproduction of a talisman "against the pestilence," from a fifteenth-century English leech-book.

nourishing cross of Christ, which is our salvation, save me from this present distressing pestilence." This circular talisman is sandwiched in the leech book in between two other circular figures, both of which were designed as diagnostic aids for medieval doctors: one is a pen diagram illustrating the color of urines, and the other shows the proper times for blood letting according to the signs of the Zodiac. Another fifteenth-century English medical compendium prescribes "a gud drynke for the sickenes of the pestilence" that contains herbal ingredients that are fairly typical for plague treatises, such as sage, marigold, and wormwood, but it is to be immediately followed by saying seven Our Fathers, seven Hail Marys, and the Creed while making the sign of the cross at each of the emunctories or places where buboes are most likely to appear, namely under the right and left ear and under the right and left "armhole" and "thigh hole" (i.e., at the armpits and on each side of the groin). All this is very analogous to the Islamic tradition of letter magic that employed talismans containing the divine names of God or prayers from the Qur'ān, which were intended to ward off the jinn, or demonic source of the plague, and to supplement or even supplant inadequate medical treatments. Evidently, these sorts of magical talismans were not only popular but had the sanction of both Christian and Muslim religious authorities; moreover, they were considered not incompatible with more standard medical remedies.

Conversely, some medieval physicians' fascination with astrology, such as a fourteenth-century Italian doctor who diagnosed illnesses solely based on planetary movements relative to the moon, could stretch the boundaries of what was considered acceptable natural philosophy. Astral magic was not beyond an anonymous German treatise written in 1349, which recommended wearing "a small image of Leo that has been sculpted in pure gold under [the sign of] Leo" to resist the "celestial cause" of the plague. A drawing of what this image should look like was made in the margin, and the author cited a ninth-century Arabic work on astral magic by Thabit ibn Qurra for why Leo had the most fortunate aspect for channeling the influence of benevolent planets. The fifteenth-century humanist,

Marsilio Ficino, who wrote about the medical uses of astral magic in his *De Vita* (*On Life*), was nearly condemned for heresy before Pope Innocent VIII in 1489.

Closely related to the question of whether medieval plague doctors were effective or were not is the public utility of their medicine. Clearly, many physicians pitched their remedies to noble patrons and friends: who but the rich, for example, could afford such expensive ingredients as gold and silver leaf, ground-up emeralds, rubies, and sapphires, raw silk, ivory filings, coral, amber, "unicorn horn" (perhaps the narwhal horn), or the antidotes bole Armeniac and Lemnian earth? How many patients could buy decades-old theriac or make up one out of more than 40 ingredients (including 10 pounds of coconuts and 1 pound of mummy gum) to be aged in a silver vessel? How available was stag semen, called *hirsgail* in a fifteenth-century Viennese treatise, allegedly "found by hunters whenever a stag has copulated with a doe," that was believed to be particularly efficacious in treating a pestilential aposteme? How realistic was flight for most medieval peasants, who had but one rude home and little means of sustaining themselves away from their territorial base?

In truth, many doctors acknowledged a differential scale of access to their prescriptions and medicines. Those who could not flee the plague were advised to at least avoid public places and gatherings such as at churches, markets, and communal baths (which was to set the stage for future conflicts between health boards and Church authorities during the seventeenth century) or else to burn fires in the house to ward off the bad air and observe certain rules in opening and closing windows and doors. Instead of an expensive smelling-apple, poor people could simply dip a rag or sponge in vinegar and hold it to their nose, and they could ingest as their theriac cheaper items such as a piece of toasted bread dipped in wine or wild apple juice, and garlic, nuts, radishes, rue, juniper, leeks, hyssop, scabiosa, and the like. Though treatises naturally advised their patients to consult a physician, given the difficulties in recognizing plague symptoms or prescribing treatment, some were clearly designed as self-help manuals (admittedly for those who could read). John of Burgundy said that he wrote his treatise of 1365 "so that hardly anyone should have to resort to a physician but even simple folk can be their own physician, preserver, ruler, and guide." Master Cardo of Milan echoed these sentiments in 1378, saying that with his plague regimen "now everyone should be able to be his own doctor during these dangerous times," and he urged that "some form of phlebotomy," cited by medical authorities as "the best and most important remedy," be made available "immediately for the common use of all." Patients could examine themselves for symptoms simply by feeling under the arms or in the groin or treat themselves by pricking open the plague boil "with a sharpened piece of oak" under running water, as an anonymous German treatise of 1493 advised. Ibn Khātima, however, told a cautionary tale of a "dissolute man" who got impatient and took a razor to a boil in his groin, whereupon "the blood gushed out and he died immediately." That the medical faculty of the University of Paris recommended in the midst of the Black Death of 1348 that "the common folk and agricultural laborers, who do not lead delicate lives" should most especially avail themselves of a phlebotomy suggests that bloodletting services of some sort must have been available to many, even if a German treatise from the late fifteenth century warns that "a phlebotomy may not be possible due to a lack of bloodletters."

Many plague doctors also expressed a desire to benefit the "common good" or the "public weal," even when dedicating their work to a private patron. Jacme d'Agramont, who composed one of the earliest treatises during the Black Death in April 1348, stated

in his preface that his work was "principally for the benefit of the people and not for the instruction of the physician." To that end, he wrote his treatise in his native language of Catalan, rather than the academic Latin preferred by so many of his colleagues, and he addressed himself to the "aldermen and councilors" of his hometown of Lérida in Spain rather than to members of a university or to an individual. Nonetheless, Agramont laid out only a preventative regimen and forbore including any treatment for plague, as this "properly belongs to the physician." In contrast to the *dubia* or speculations that he indulged in for the last section of his *Long Consilium*, Gentile da Foligno made a point of responding "to questions posed by the common people" for a shorter casebook written later in 1348. These concerned the effectiveness of various preservatives against the pestilence, including garlic, bole Armeniac, and vinegar (although the first was also addressed by Foligno in his *Long Consilium*, where he mentions it as a kind of theriac for "rustic men"). The plague regulations adopted by some towns in 1348, such as Pistoia in Italy, that try to contain the disease through proper disposal of dead bodies, through quarantine and sanitation measures, or by keeping their citizens in a healthy frame of mind by not tolling the bells to commemorate the dead, also betray the influence of consulting physicians. In fact, Gentile da Foligno in one of his short casebooks specifically suggests as much, advising the "good men" of Perugia to confer with doctors to "make regulations for their city, in accordance with [doctors'] information, so that they safeguard their citizens' well being." Mariano di Ser Jacopo of Siena advised that houses infected by the plague be walled up or locked "so that they not be allowed to corrupt the whole city with their pestiferous poison," a draconian measure that was actually carried out in 1348 at Milan. An anonymous chronicler of Erfurt in Germany noted that during the plague there in 1349, "the citizens, on the advice of physicians, forbade anyone else from being buried" within the town. Instead, 11 mass graves were dug in the cemetery of a nearby village, to which 12,000 bodies were said to have been taken "in carts and wagons" from July 25 until February 2 of the following year. By the time of their heyday in the seventeenth century, the health boards that had been set up in many northern Italian cities temporarily in 1348 and then on a more permanent basis in the mid-fifteenth century were still conferring with and employing physicians, but now the boards sometimes conflicted with doctors should their loyalty to patients interfere with the government's efforts to identify and isolate the sick.

Gauging what medieval contemporaries thought of their doctors during a crisis such as plague also poses something of a challenge of interpretation. Plenty of criticism of physicians can be found in the chronicle accounts of the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1348–49. Louis Sanctus, writing from Avignon, complained that "the doctor does not visit the sick for fear of this contagion, not even if the patient would give him everything he possessed in this life." Both Giovanni Boccaccio of Florence and Agnolo di Tura of Siena judged medicine to be completely ineffective in the face of plague: indeed, di Tura claimed that "the more medicine people are given the quicker they die." According to a Paduan chronicler, "doctors frankly confessed that they had no cure for the plague, and the most accomplished of them died of it"; his colleague from Viterbo was even bleaker in his assessment that this was a "divine plague from which no doctor could possibly liberate the stricken." Boccacio put medical impotence down to either that the plague was a disease that "allowed no remedy" or that those treating it "were not prescribing the appropriate cure," the more so as, in his day, "the ranks of the qualified were invaded by people, both men and

women, who had never received any training in medicine" and were therefore ignorant of its true causes. His fellow Florentine, Matteo Villani, gave the even harsher judgment that doctors "had neither explanation nor cure through natural philosophy or through medicine or through astrology." Those who visited patients and gave one of these explanations did so only "in order to make a profit," but they later "showed by their deaths that their art was feigned and not real." Gabriele de Mussis of Piacenza was perhaps more sympathetic to the medical profession, admitting that "priests and doctors, upon whom most of the care of the sick devolved, had their hands full in visiting the sick"; they quickly got infected by their patients and followed them to the grave.

These criticisms did not necessarily abate with time. The physician or "leech," understood in both the literal and figurative sense of the term, continued to be mocked down through the late fourteenth and into the fifteenth centuries by English authors such as William Langland, Geoffrey Chaucer, and John Lydgate. The last, in his *Dance of Death* poem of c. 1430, has the "Phisician" admit to Death before commencing their dance:

Ful longe a-gon that I unto phesike,
Sette my witte and my diligence
In speculatif and also in practike
To gete a name thurgh myn excellence
To fynde oute agens pestilence
Preservatifes to staunche hit and to fyne
But I dar saie, shortly in sentence
Agens dethe is worth no medicyne.

A long time ago I studied medicine,
Applying to it my reason and my diligence
In theory and also in practice
To get a name for my excellence
To discover against pestilence
Medicines to halt and cure it
But I dare say, briefly in this sentence
Against death medicine is of no worth.

Plague doctors themselves concurred with many of these criticisms. Gui de Chauliac, the papal physician who reflected upon the Black Death as he composed his *Great Surgery* in c. 1363, wrote that "the mortality rendered doctors useless and put them to shame, because they did not dare visit the sick out of fear of being infected. And when they did visit them, they could do little for them and were paid nothing." If it was any consolation, Chauliac admitted that this plague was unlike any epidemic in the past, as it attacked not just one region but "the whole world" and was in no way curable. His colleague at Avignon, Raymond Chalin de Vinario, made a similar complaint in 1382, giving as his first reason why "pestilential diseases" are often not cured either that they are "badly recognized by many doctors, both in terms of their causes and modes of generation," or else "a visit from prudent physicians is not possible because these are rare and, in addition to this, many doctors are on their guard against visiting the sick," which Vinario puts down to a lack

of servants to help them or that their faculties and abilities are not up to the task. An anonymous Paduan doctor from the late fourteenth century, after giving his colleagues a list of precautions to take when visiting the sick, such as ventilating and fumigating the sick room, removing the patient's excreta, and not looking the patient in the face when taking his pulse, finally admitted that "it would be best not to visit" the sick at all. Rather paradoxically, Jacme d'Agramont warned his fellow physicians off attending sick people on both moral and selfishly medical grounds, for he believed that those who did so acted only out of "financial cupidity" for which they paid by means of contagion with the lives of themselves and their friends. It's hard to see how doctors could win in either case, criticized either for abandoning their patients or, conversely, greedily visiting too many. Equally ambivalent is the epigram composed by Bartolomeo de Santa Sophia that he appended to his brief plague treatise of 1442 and had originally inscribed on a wall in Padua where people could read it as they walked from the cathedral to the episcopal courtyard; part of it reads: "Alas, for medicine, which, like a broken pillar, falls [to the ground] from the death of so many men, for which heaven and earth may weep!" Does Bartolomeo mean by "men" (*viri*) so many doctors' patients, in which case it is a criticism, or rather physicians like himself, in which case it actually is quite a compliment to his profession?

In many treatises, doctors warned against making a false hopeful diagnosis to plague patients, as their "vital signs," such as pulse, temperature, urine, and defecations, could appear to be normal, yet it was at this very moment that death would come, as the signs betokened that the body's natural constitution, terrified by the plague's "malice," did not "dare come to grips with the disease." (During the Third Pandemic, it was noted that patients' temperature often dropped two to three and five to seven days after the onset of symptoms.) If true, this must have greatly disappointed many a patient's surviving family. Sigmund Albich, conversely, had an opposite testimonial for why "the physician does not know everything": He had seen a "lighted candle put into [the patient's] hand and his funeral made ready, and [yet] he remained alive." That physicians made false diagnoses, both of death and life, was also noted by the ancient historian Procopius during the first plague pandemic in Constantinople in 542 CE. Late medieval doctors likewise warned against mistakes in administering medicines, such as prescribing opium or theriac too frequently or in the wrong dosage. The Lübeck doctor recalled the case of a physician "held in great esteem by the common folk" who died from taking too much theriac during a pestilence, such that it turned "his whole body black, as if he had drunk poison," and for this reason he himself dared administer it only 10 times in 30 years of practice. Ash-Shaqūrī warned not only against harmful medications but against cupping and insisted that those who practiced it be examined by a physician first. Equally fatal could be the surgeon's knife. Ibn Khātima relayed a bloodletter's story of how a colleague,

> an interloper in his profession, once ordered him to cut into a boil in the underarm which had just appeared and wasn't ready. As he did this, bright red blood streamed forth, the patient lost consciousness, his heart suffered a collapse, and before they left the place the patient had expired.

An anonymous treatise of 1481 also cited the case of "many" doctors "who open up the aposteme [too] forcefully, before it is ripe," and although they pronounce the patient

cured because "the infected blood flows out," nonetheless he thought the operation "unwise because death can follow immediately."

Patients were also apparently put off by the pain and expense of treatment. Nicholas de Burgo of Florence, writing in 1382, requested that "every doctor who takes upon himself the burden of curing this plague" not reveal "the remedies he is going to apply, since this pestilential disease is not cured by reason of the fact that there are those who procrastinate in seeking treatment." Friar Bartolomeo de Ferraria advised his colleagues in 1400 that "if the sick man complains of pain, comfort him [with the idea] that he should be very hopeful because the more he is in pain, the better a sign is it of his being delivered [from the plague]." The fifteenth-century German physician, John of Saxony, complained bitterly of

> the immense miserliness and stinginess among men generally throughout Germany, who scoff at submitting to the expense [of buying] medicines, and who do not venture to do so unless they can be assured by a doctor that they will henceforth be preserved in their healthy state, for they are otherwise terrified of reducing their store of money but have no fear of parting with their life.

This was one of his nine contributory causes of plague; another was the "immense foolishness of pretend doctors" who relied on only "one strategy" of fighting the plague, which was why his profession was subject "to the derision and mockery of the people." He also blamed "empirics" and "cursory" medical practitioners (i.e., those who had not received a formal medical training) for performing cauteries that only increased patients' pain and "results in no alleviation and improvement [of symptoms]." This doctor claimed that he could go on in the same vein about an "infinite" number of other "deceptions" practiced by unscrupulous colleagues but that he was not going to so as not to "give occasion to those wishing to try something new." A Master John of Glogau and Heinrich Ribbeniz both alleged (on the authority of Avicenna) that even a doctor "who is ignorant of the whole of medicinal science" could pass himself off as skilled among the common people if "he but knows the names of [some] herbs."

In the main, however, plague doctors seem to have believed they could make a positive impact on the disease, even if this was limited once it had taken hold of the patient. The very fact that the theoretical framework for fighting plague changed so little over a century and a half, despite doctors' disagreements with each other *within* that framework, argues for a certain self-satisfaction that saw no need for revolutionary changes. The fame and wealth of some doctors also speaks to their success: upon his premature death in 1370, Tommaso del Garbo, a professor of medicine at Bologna and Florence who wrote a preservative regimen for those who wished to remain healthy during a time of plague (as opposed to the far more difficult task of curing the disease), was eulogized by Petrarch in a letter to a doctor friend, Giovanni da Padua, as an "extremely rich physician, so esteemed in his art that he was reputed capable of resuscitating the dead." Frustration was instead reserved for quack colleagues who prescribed the wrong treatments out of their ignorance of the disease and who therefore brought their profession into disrepute. Indeed, a major rationale behind the writing of all these treatises seems to have been not only education of the general public but, more to the point, education of wrong-headed doctors or amateur healers. Taking precautions and hoping for the best, some paid with their lives: three doctors and a barber-

surgeon made up their last will and testament as they lay dying from their illness at the height of the plague in Bologna in July 1348, whereas many more served as witnesses to wills, indicating that they, too, stayed behind to tend the sick at their bedsides. In Perugia, Gentile da Foligno fell ill from the disease in 1348 after "attending too much upon the sick," according to the man who nursed him during the six days it took him to die. At the same time, the surgeon Gui de Chauliac, not daring to depart Avignon "in order to avoid a bad reputation," contracted the plague but recovered. Another papal physician, John Jacobi, writing in c. 1373, told of how he stayed in Montpellier during a pestilence there, going "from house to house in curing the sick by reason of my poverty" (i.e., to collect fees), all the while holding a piece of bread or sponge or cloth soaked in vinegar to his mouth and nose. Even though he emerged untouched by the epidemic, his colleagues apparently "did not believe that I would stay alive." An anonymous physician practicing in Rome was not so lucky during a plague in the late fifteenth century, when he was "infected by men whom he had visited in order to cure them." Fortunately, he survived, having "snatched himself away from death," as he believed, by his own remedies.

No less than doctors today, medieval physicians were convinced that they were doing what was right for their charges, and they struggled mightily—and with great pathos—to reconcile the knowledge and theory they had with the grim realities of this most deadly of diseases. However, on balance, I believe that inadvertently they did more harm than good, and the plague is an object lesson in the humility and caution with which physicians should approach their field, in the spirit of the Hippocratic Oath. In the end, to run away or die themselves was, tragically, perhaps the best thing plague doctors could have done for their patients.

Praying away the plague

Doctors were joined on the front lines of plague by members of the Church, in particular the priests and their assistants who tended to local parishes all across the land. Indeed, the two professions worked hand in hand at the sickbeds of patients, for priests were expected to administer last rites when doctors judged the disease to be fatal, as must have happened quite often with plague, which was known to carry off its victims in a terrifyingly sudden and summary manner. Dr. Sigmund Albich of Prague listed seven diagnostic "signs of death during the pestilence" that would portend when it was time that "the sick man should immediately be anointed with holy oil." The Lübeck doctor warned that "if a true pestilence" is diagnosed in the patient, the attending physician should "first of all advise the sick man to make his peace with God, by setting down his testament [and] making confession of his sins … since bodily infirmity proceeds not only from the imperfections of the body but also from the soul." Most deferential of all to his clerical colleagues was the Lérida physician Jacme d'Agramont, who declared that "if the corruption and putrefaction of the air has come because of our sins, [then] the remedies of the medical art are of little value, for only He who binds can unbind." For Agramont, "the supreme remedy in such a case is to acknowledge our sins and our failings by hearty repentance and oral confession." If this attitude seems too resigned for a physician, the dangers of not being deferential enough is illustrated by the case of Gentile da Foligno, who was condemned more than 100 years after his death from plague in 1348 by a bishop from

his hometown, who complained that he addressed the "health of bodies" but not the "health of souls." Precedence of religion over medicine is also implied by the mock medical recipe of Theophilus of Milan, abbot of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, which opens a fifteenth-century collection of plague remedies attributed to Master Matthew, physician of Verona:

> Whenever anyone is struck down by the plague, let him without delay immediately provide himself with this medication: namely, that he should take as much as he can [of a dose] of bitter loathing against the sins committed by him and of true contrition of heart, [flowing] more freely than at extreme unction, and mix these two with the water of tears. Then he should make a vomit of naked and pure confession, by which he will be purged of the pestilential poison of sin, and the boil of his transgressions will be totally liquefied and will disappear.

Similar advice was given in 1350 by the Liège doctor Simon of Corvino in his allegorical poem, *On the Judgment of Sol at the Feasts of Saturn*, wherein he tells his audience that before taking doctors' medicines, they should first medicate the soul with "holy remedies" such as a "contrite heart" and "tearful prayers." Plague doctors also urged their patients to tend to their spiritual well-being in the belief that this would create the best mental state for preservation and healing, as they then "fear death less."

Priests and doctors were likewise lumped together in terms of criticisms of their behavior during the Black Death. The Franciscan friar Michele da Piazza was especially scathing in his chronicle of the plague in Sicily:

> Because of the scale of the mortality, many Messinese looked to make confession of their sins and to make their wills, but priests, judges, and notaries refused to visit them, and if anyone did visit their houses, whether to hear confession or draw up a will, they were soon sure to die themselves … Corpses lay unattended in their own homes. No priests, sons, fathers, or kinsmen dared to enter; instead they paid porters large sums to carry the bodies to burial.

Naturally, Piazza believed his fellow friars fared better, being more "willing to visit the sick to hear their confession and impose penance," but they "died in such large numbers that their priories were all but deserted." Likewise, the Flemish chronicler Jean le Bel reported how during the plague "one could in no way confess, for a priest was not to be found who was willing to do it." In Florence, Giovanni Villani testified that "the priests to whom the sick confessed often got sick themselves and died, and this occurred so often that every sick person was denied confession, the sacraments, medicine, and bandages," and in similar fashion his fellow citizen, Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, observed how "many died who did not confess or receive the other sacraments," passing away alone and unattended to the point that "many died of hunger" rather than from the actual disease. Agnolo di Tura of Siena noted how people buried their dead by themselves, without the attendance of priests. Even in the seat of Christendom, at Avignon, Mathias of Neuenburg said that while the pope remained "shut up in his chamber, where he had large fires continually burning," out in the town "men perished without the sacraments" owing to the "disease's contagion." That Clement appeared "in public only by the advice of his physicians" was also criticized by

Konrad of Megenberg as an indirect cause of the mortality, as the absence of the pope, "who stands in for God's disposition towards his people," meant the absence of God's blessing "as a means of deliverance" from the plague, especially at the head of prayers and processions that could placate "God's anger and indignation."

However, in a way, this was a backhanded compliment to the Church, as clearly its services were still much in demand in time of plague. In fact, official provision was made for just such an emergency. In a remarkable letter sent to the clergy of his diocese on January 10, 1349, Ralph Shrewsbury, bishop of Bath and Wells in England, squarely addressed a crisis that may have been going on since the previous autumn, judging by the rise in institutions recorded in his register:

> The contagious pestilence, which is now spreading everywhere, has left many parish churches and other benefices in our diocese without an incumbent, so that their inhabitants are bereft of a priest. And because priests cannot be found for love or money to take on the responsibility for those places and visit the sick and administer the sacraments of the Church to them—perhaps because they fear that they will catch the disease themselves—we understand that many people are dying without the sacrament of penance, because they do not know what they ought to do in such an emergency and believe that even in an emergency, confession of their sins is of no use or worthless unless made to a priest having the power of the keys. Therefore, desirous as we must be to provide for the salvation of souls and to call back the wanderers who have strayed from the way, we order and firmly enjoin you, upon your obedience, to make it known speedily and publicly to everybody, but particularly to those who have already fallen sick, that if on the point of death they cannot secure the services of a properly ordained priest, they should make confession of their sins, according to the teaching of the apostle, to any lay person, even to a woman, if a man is not available.

Shrewsbury's radical solution to the shortage of clergy created by the plague was confirmed by a papal indulgence that arrived in England in March 1349, authorizing parishioners to choose their confessor in their hour of death. Nearly two centuries before Martin Luther, Shrewsbury and Pope Clement VI were forced by circumstances to experiment, albeit in temporary fashion, with a form of individual religious practice that was to become one of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation.

For the rest of the fourteenth century, a succession of archbishops of Canterbury issued legislation that tried to do for the Church what labor laws did for serfs and hired laborers on the manor: attempting either to limit the wages priests received or curb their "leapfrogging" to richer livings elsewhere. In his constitution *Effrenata* (*Unbridled*) promulgated in May 1350, just after the first outbreak of plague had abated, Archbishop Simon Islip complained that "priests now refuse to take on the cure of souls, or to support the burdens of their cures in mutual charity, but rather leave them completely abandoned and apply themselves instead to the celebration of commemorative masses and other private offices." Islip's criticisms were repeated by the Rochester cleric, William Dene, in his chronicle of the plague, and by successive archbishops of Canterbury such as Simon Sudbury in 1378 and William Courtenay in 1392, the latter railing especially against "choppechurches," or agents who had sprung up to arrange exchanges between priests anxious to improve their incomes.

The archbishops' concerns are borne out by their registers: exchanges make up more than 45 percent of vacancies in the register of Simon Sudbury as bishop of London between 1362 and 1375, as opposed to just 23 percent in the register of his pre-plague predecessor, Stephen Gravesend, between 1319 and 1338. An examination of exchanges granted in three other English dioceses in the decades after the Black Death reveals that Sudbury's register did not record an isolated trend. A turning point seems to have been reached in 1370–71 at Winchester and Exeter and a little later, in 1386, at Hereford. Exchanges at Winchester went from an average of 10 per year between 1346 and 1369 to a little more than 13 between 1370 and 1400; at Exeter, from 6 between 1328 and 1368 to more than 11 between 1371 and 1400; and at Hereford, from 3.5 between 1328 and 1385 to more than 8 between 1386 and 1400 (Table 9, p. 285).

It was during these decades of high exchanges—the 1360s, 1370s, and 1380s—that the English poets William Langland, John Gower, and Geoffrey Chaucer were writing their famous diatribes against churchmen. Langland's complaint in *Piers Plowman* is perhaps the best known:

> The parsons and parish-priests complained to the bishop
> That their parishes were poor since the pestilence year,
> Asking license and leave in London to dwell,
> To sing there for simony; for silver is sweet.

Gower likewise complains in the *Mirour de l'Omme* (*The Mirror of Man*): "There are priests who, for our money, serve willingly and have no other benefice. They chant for three-month periods or even for years for the dead; and they are commonly followers of every vice." Finally, Chaucer, in his prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, upholds his Parson as a model of priestly behavior, thereby indirectly criticizing the many who behave otherwise:

> He did not let his benefice out to hire
> And leave his sheep stuck in the mire
> And run to London to St. Paul's
> To seek out a chantry for souls
> Or to a guild be beholden
> But dwelled at home and well tended his fold.

The gist of all these complaints was that priests were leaving their parishes to service richer patrons who were engaging them to say private masses for their souls. In other words, the needs of the community were allegedly being abandoned for the very private needs of wealthy individuals. What was worse, those who remained on the job were less than qualified as the Church scrambled to fill vacancies created by the plague. According to the chronicler Henry Knighton: "A great crowd of men whose wives had died in the pestilence rushed into priestly orders. Many of them were illiterate, no better than laymen—for even if they could read, they did not understand what they read." Moreover, contempt and even violence directed against Church personnel seem to have been the order of the day in the wake of the Black Death. Bishop Shrewsbury and his retinue, for example, were surrounded and besieged for a night and a day at Yeovil, Somerset, in the autumn of 1349

by "certain sons of perdition" armed "with bows, arrows, iron bars, stones, and other kinds of arms." In 1364, this scene was replayed against Robert Stretton, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, at Repton, where "certain satellites of Satan, the whole commonalty of the town" assaulted him with "swords and staves, bows and arrows, noise and tumult," forcing him to hole up in the priory of St. Wystan from eleven o'clock of one day until one o'clock of the next. The decade 1379–89 in the diocese of Exeter saw 13 incidents of assault upon the priesthood, including three murders, a blinding, a castration, and a "crucifixion," in which John Calestake, vicar of St. Gluvias, was bound to a cross in the public way of Penryn, Cornwall.

However remarkable these anecdotes are, one should not recite them without recognizing at least three points in the Church's favor. In the first place, the sheer number of churchmen who died of the Black Death attests to the dedication of a substantial proportion of the clergy during the crisis. Aside from the mundanely impressive statistics of the bishops' registers, there is the poetic testimony of Simon of Corvino, who says that this "fearsome plague" laid its contagious hands on priests, the "holy physicians of souls," in the very hour when they ministered their sacraments to the sick. Yet despite their mortality, the Church carried on much as before. There is no more impressive evidence of this than the fact that bishops' scribes continued to enter in their masters' registers the mounting toll of vacancies in parish churches. Nevertheless, the Church had to make extraordinary, even heroic, efforts to maintain the status quo. Recruitment of men to the cloth, judging from episcopal ordination lists, experienced periodic surges during the fourteenth century in response to plagues that decimated the priesthood. Overall, recruitment suffered a long, slow decline until the 1460s, but then ordination levels show a surprising rebound and steadily increase thereafter until the eve of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. How the Church managed to replenish its ranks during times of recurring plagues is a mystery. The most likely explanation is that it lowered its standards for ordination, admitting younger, illegitimate, or less educated men or else that there was a large reserve of men in lower orders—acolytes, deacons, and others—who stood ready to replenish the depleted ranks of the priesthood. Nor should we discount the possibility that recruits voluntarily came forward to be ordained, not all of them for the mercenary motive of advancing their careers in response to opportunities created by the Black Death.

Second, commentators on the Church may have been unduly critical in the self-flagellating atmosphere after 1348–49. Ample complaints about immoral behavior, both within the Church and in society as a whole, can be found prior to the plague and afterward. The *Poem on the Evil Times of Edward II*, which rails against all classes of English society, complains that priests, no less than their counterparts after the Black Death, neglected their parishes:

And whan he hath i-gadered markes and poundes,
He priketh out of toune wid haukes and wid houndes
Into a straunge contre, and halt a wenche in cracche;
And wel is hire that first may swich a parsoun kacche in londe.
And thus theih serven the chapele, and laten the churche stonde.

And when he [the priest] has gathered marks and pounds,

He rides out of town with his hawks and hounds
Into a strange country, and stops with a wench in her bed;
And it is well for her whom first such a parson catches in the land.
And thus they serve the chapel, and let the church stand [empty].

In 1333, Bishop John de Grandisson of Exeter complained that every year on the Feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28), priests in the cathedral would "not fear to irreverently and damnably give rise to frivolities, laughter, guffaws, and other insolent responses, even to the point of wearing masks, and debase the clerical dignity by such obscene hand play in their gesticulation in full view of the people."

Sometimes, however, this negative attitude was not entirely justified. Whereas most contemporaries were quick to see roving priests motivated by greed, the actions of some clerical survivors of the plague may have been dictated by necessity. Evidence of poverty in the parish created by the shortage of parishioners and their offerings can be found in diocese after diocese. In Winchester in 1361, Bishop William Edington had to appeal to the king for a reduction in tax contributions of 13 churches "depopulated since the pestilence," and in 1364 he united the two halves of the church of Abinger because neither alone was sufficient for a living. John Trillek, bishop of Hereford, united the churches of Great and Little Collington in 1352, and his successor, Lewis Charlton, united the parishes of Puddlestone and Whyle in 1364. In 1350, Shrewsbury at Bath and Wells granted special license to Robert Crox, rector of Ilchester, to service a chantry in addition to his other duties "because the tithes and other oblations falling to your church are known to be insufficient." At Rochester, Bishop Hamo Hethe in 1349 likewise allowed poor priests to say private masses because "their income is well known to have diminished through the mortality of parishioners so that they cannot live on what remains or support the burdens incumbent [on their office]." Finally, in the same year at Ely, Vicar-General John de Oo, acting on behalf of the absent Bishop Thomas de Lisle, granted John Lynot, vicar of All Saints in Cambridge, an annual sustenance for two years on account of the fact that his "parishioners have in the meantime suffered for so long from the pestilence … so that the oblations of those coming to the said church are by no means sufficient for [his] necessities." The remainder of the Middle Ages were not to see any substantial improvement in priests' living standards. Moreover, the violence that we see directed against the clergy may not have been the result of anticlericalism but rather may have been symptomatic of a general trend of increasing disorder in fourteenth-century England. Examples of such violence can be found even before the Black Death.

Third, and last, it must be remembered that the severest critics of the Church were themselves churchmen. The episcopal hierarchy was well aware that many priests, confessors, and other Church personnel appointed because of the plague were not up to snuff. What is remarkable is that despite the fact that bishops during the later Middle Ages tended to be servants of the crown as well as servants of God, these "careerist" prelates made a serious effort to reform the Church in the aftermath of the Black Death. There is no better example of such a man than John Thoresby, chancellor of England during the 1350s and, until his death in 1373, archbishop of York. Despite a lifetime of royal service, Thoresby resigned the chancellorship in 1356, probably in protest to a royal infringement of ecclesiastical liberty in that year when King Edward III seized the temporalities of Bishop

Thomas de Lisle of Ely, in the course of a legal dispute between the bishop and the king's cousin, Lady Blanche Wake, sister to Henry of Grosmont, duke of Lancaster. Thereafter Thoresby seems to have devoted himself to pastoral work, in particular to recruiting candidates for ordination, compelling nonresident priests to return to their parishes, fixing wages of stipendiary chaplains, and improving the administration of the sacraments. In addition, Thoresby tried to improve the religious education of both lay and clerical members of his flock; in 1357 he issued the *Lay Folk's Catechism*, an English translation of a Latin work Thoresby wrote himself. Nor was such learning always by the book: mystery plays put on by merchant guilds in the cities dramatized for their audiences important events from the Bible. The Towneley Cycle, for example, one of many Yorkshire plays performed in commemoration of the Feast of Corpus Christi, may have been written not just to instruct the laity in the meaning of the Eucharist but also to respond to attacks upon the sacraments by audacious heretics. Thoresby was by no means a lone reformer. Efforts similar to his own—particularly with regard to absentee rectors and unfit confessors—can be found in diocese after diocese. Moreover, greater educational opportunities were to be had for plague survivors at a growing number of reading and grammar schools and university colleges, many of them sponsored by the episcopate. Between 1348 and 1355 alone, Cambridge University saw the foundation of no fewer than four colleges, doubling its institutions of higher learning.

The religious response of the laity to the Black Death seems to have followed conventional patterns than can be traced back to the first plague pandemic that struck the Mediterranean region between c. 541 and 750 CE. This naturally included calls for prayers and processions throughout the realm, such as came from Edward III of England in 1348 and 1349, whose orders were communicated to the people through the Church hierarchy, headed by its archbishops and bishops. Old Testament parables were usually invoked to attest to the efficacy of this response, but there were also more recent examples from the First Pandemic during the sixth century. Although the Church seems to have organized little response to the outbreak of 542 in Constantinople, where instead monks and priests were apparently shunned as messengers of death, rogations and processions were arranged during a plague in 543 in the Rhone Valley of Gaul, in 573 in Mesopotamia, and in 590 in Rome. The last was the best-known example in the medieval West, owing to the fact that the procession was called and led by the newly-elected Pope Gregory the Great in a sermon preached to both the clergy and people of the city. Despite the fact that 80 people allegedly fell dead during this procession, according to the contemporary chronicler Gregory of Tours, it was credited with ending the plague when the pope had a vision of an angel on top of the Castel Sant' Angelo sheathing a bloody sword. The latter detail was added in the thirteenth century by Jacob of Voragine in *The Golden Legend* and was famously depicted in c. 1413–16 by the Limbourg brothers in the *Très Riches Heures*, but its ultimate source was the Old Testament story of how King David averted a plague from Jerusalem by making sacrifices to the Lord on an altar, as told in 1 Chronicles 21:14–27.

Religious appeals were especially directed to favorite saints during time of plague, such as the Virgin Mary and the third-century Roman martyr, St. Sebastian, whose body was said to have been pierced "like a hedgehog" by arrows at his execution yet who miraculously survived, only to be martyred a second time. (Arrows were a traditional symbol of plague raining down from the heavens, going back to the Hebrew Psalms and the depiction of

the Greek god Apollo in *The Iliad*.) Sebastian's plague cult was first recorded in the eighth century by Paul the Deacon in his *History of the Lombards*, which told how an epidemic in 680 in Pavia was ended when an altar was raised to the saint. The cult of St. Roch also acquired widespread popularity against plague by the second half of the fifteenth century, even though his life is entirely legendary. (Roch is said to have tended plague patients and to have himself survived contracting the disease in Italy, but the traditional date of his death, 1327, well precedes the actual advent of the Black Death.) Local saint cults were also resorted to by plague sufferers: during the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1348, Sicilians were devoted to the point of town rivalry to the Blessed Virgin Agatha of Catania, whereas Englishmen in the west country visited the shrine of St. Thomas Cantilupe of Hereford; by the fifteenth century, the cults of Sts. Nicholas of Tolentino, Rose of Viterbo, and Anthony of Padua were being promoted in northern and central Italy. The popularity of these saints is attested to by the number of children named after them, such as is recorded by the Catasto of Florence in 1427.

The idea that plague engendered a popular reaction against the Church that eventually led to the Reformation, particularly in England, had once been championed by an older generation of scholars such as G. G. Coulton and A. G. Dickens, but by now this is a very sterile debate. Certainly, complaints can be found in the bishops' registers of lapses in parishioners' devotion and respect for the sanctified precincts of the church in the decades after the arrival of the Black Death. These included performing rude plays and "offensive games" that mocked the divine service; absence from church on Sundays or gossiping and conducting business when people did attend; keeping hay, grain, and animals in the sacred precincts; and using churchyards for dancing, feasting, setting up markets, or such pastimes as archery, wrestling, playing ball, and slinging stones, which threatened the integrity of stained-glass windows. However, if we look at more rigorous measures of laypeople's religious attitudes, such as the evidence of last wills and testaments, these reveal a seemingly satisfied constituency. All across England—in London, Canterbury, Salisbury, Bristol, Norwich, Bury St. Edmunds, York, and Kingston-on-Hull—the wills that survive in good number from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth centuries reveal that the average testator was content enough with the Church to leave it a major beneficiary at his or her death. Local priests were by far the group most requested to participate in the deceased's funeral and, outside of the deceased's kin, were left the most money to say masses to speed the deceased's soul through purgatory. Parish churches, the most popular places to be buried among those who could afford it, also received much money for their upkeep, which was only natural as they housed the expensive tombs of benefactors and their ancestors. At Norwich, 95 percent of lay testators and 85 percent of clerical ones between 1370 and 1532 left money to a parish church; 53 percent of testators at Bury St. Edmunds between 1380 and 1399 requested secular priests to preside at their funerals, and 41 percent did so between 1449 and 1530; 81 percent of will makers at Kingston-on-Hull and an average 88 percent of those among the Kentish gentry between 1400 and 1539 wished to be buried in a local church or churchyard, whereas 46 percent and more than 50 percent, respectively, invested in some kind of commemorative masses for their souls. Moreover, it is likely that wills underestimate parishioners' devotion to their parish church; the fortuitous survival of churchwarden accounts and a Church Book listing benefactors known as "good doers" at All Saints' parish in Bristol reveal the extent to which wills, which

only record benefactions made at the expectation of death, may have missed good works performed throughout a patron's life.

Even so, some have argued that this evidence still evinces an individual concern for salvation—what the French historians of death culture call the *de la mort de soi*, or "death on one's own"—that anticipates the Reformation. Endowment of private chapels and chantries, in which priests were hired to attend solely to the spiritual well-being of the patron, are alleged to represent a turning away from the corporate institution of the Church. Yet construction of private burial mausoleums and chapels could be prevalent in areas of Europe that remained staunchly Catholic after the Reformation, such as Tuscany and Umbria in central Italy, where this trend is usually interpreted as exemplifying a secular, humanist concern with individual "fame and glory" that had more to do with the Renaissance than with religious change. Even in northern areas affected by the Reformation, chantry priests often contributed—as was intended by their founders—to the overall service of the parish, and this sense of community was reinforced in other ways, such as bequests to the poor, directions for prayers to be said for others beyond the deceased's kin, and the efforts of parish guilds or lay fraternities, who hired chantry priests on behalf of all their members. Nor can the spurning of worldly pomp and the self-abasement evoked by some wills opting for simple funerals be used as evidence of proto-Protestant beliefs, as such sentiments were likewise expressed by patrons of unquestioned orthodoxy, both in England and on the Continent. The French crusader and Celestine monk, Philippe de Mézières (d. 1405), arranged for perhaps the most self-abasing funeral of all time, directing that his naked body bound by an iron chain be dragged into the church and tied to a bare wooden plank for a coffin, then thrown unceremoniously into an unmarked grave.

This does not mean, however, that a fundamental change in religious attitudes did not occur as a result of the Black Death; I very much believe that it did. Let us go back to the processions that were universally ordered in 1348 to avert or lift a plague that, if not actually present, was expected almost everywhere in Europe. The kings and bishops commanding these processions usually justified them by including the Church's standard explanation for why God allowed disasters such as plague, famine, and war to befall humankind. Taking its cue from the Old Testament, this explanation said that the plague was God's scourge, his righteous retribution raining down like arrows from the sky upon men and women in terrible judgment of their abundant wickedness and sin. (An identical stance was adopted by churchmen and clerical chroniclers during the First Pandemic of plague, such as is revealed in four homilies delivered during the seventh century to coincide with the occurrence of plague in Toledo, Spain.) The preamble to *Terribilis*, Edward III's order for prayers and processions throughout the southern province of England in 1348, can speak for many:

> Terrible is God towards the sons of men, and by his command all things are subdued to the rule of his will. Those whom he loves he censures and chastises; that is, he punishes their shameful deeds in various ways during this mortal life so that they might not be condemned eternally. He often allows plagues, miserable famines, conflicts, wars, and other forms of suffering to arise, and uses them to terrify and torment men and so drive out their sins.

This view of why plagues occurred had permeated down to other levels of medieval society besides the Church. It is a common feature, for example, of many a layman's chronicle of the Black Death. Jean le Bel states simply that "many thought that this [plague] was a miracle and the vengeance of God for the sins of the world." Perhaps its best expression comes in the *Historia de Morbo* (*History of the Disease*) of the Piacenzan chronicler, Gabriele de Mussis, who imagines the Black Death as arising out of a dialogue between God and the earth, which commences thus:

> May this stand as a perpetual reminder to everyone, now living and yet to be born, how almighty God, king of heaven, lord of the living and of the dead, who holds all things in his hand, looked down from heaven and saw the entire human race wallowing in the mire of manifold wickedness, enmeshed in wrongdoing, pursuing numberless vices, drowning in a sea of depravity because of a limitless capacity for evil, bereft of all goodness, not fearing the judgments of God, and chasing after everything evil, regardless of how hateful and loathsome it was. Seeing such things He called out to the earth: "What are you doing, held captive by gangs of worthless men, soiled with the filth of sinners? Are you totally helpless? What are you doing? Why do you not demand human blood in vengeance for this wrongdoing? Why do you tolerate my enemies and adversaries? When confronted by such wantonness you should have swallowed my opponents. Make yourself ready to exercise the vengeance which lies within your power."

The message was also pushed by plague doctors, several of whom reiterated in some fashion the formula first put out by the medical faculty of the University of Paris in its *Consultation* to the king on the Black Death in October 1348, that "an epidemic always proceeds from the divine will, in which case there is no other counsel except that one should humbly turn to God, even though this does not mean forsaking doctors." Earlier that same year, Gentile da Foligno began his *Long Consilium* with a prayer that God spare the city of Padua from the plague through his medical advice, which was modified later in the century by a colleague who requested that instead of sending down plagues upon the Paduans, God should let these "afflict the Venetians and the Sarracens." In a treatise he composed in 1448, the Apulian doctor Saladin Ferro de Esculo listed as his first cause of the plague God's desire "to punish the sins of men, or to avoid the [further] increase of individuals," which he did not elaborate upon because it was incapable of doubt. He cited in support of this position the Old Testament, the *Almagest* by the first century Greek astronomer Ptolemy, and the *Colliget* by the twelfth-century Moorish philosopher and physician, Averroes (Ibn Rushd).

From the very beginning of the Black Death, however, these religious assumptions about plague were being challenged. This was not unheard of: during the First Pandemic of plague in the sixth and seventh centuries, Christian backsliding into paganism in the face of the disease was reported in Palestine, France, and England by John of Ephesus, Gregory of Tours, and the Venerable Bede. (Ironically, Chilperic of Gaul worshipped the bronze idol of a rat for protection from a plague in Paris.) On a less rebellious note, one of a series of four sermons that was preached in Toledo, Spain, whenever the "groin disease" struck the city in the seventh century held out the promise of immortality during the Christian afterlife to help its listeners conquer their fear of imminent death from plague; this marked

a significant departure from the other homilies that instead dwelled on the need for contrite repentence to appease an angry God who was using the disease as a just punishment for sinners.

During the Black Death, the first discordant note was sounded by the Italian humanist, Francesco Petrarch, in a letter he wrote to his friend, Louis Sanctus, in May 1349. Using a popular rhetorical device going back to John of Ephesus, who chronicled the First Pandemic, Petrarch at first claims to be unable to put into words the scale of the catastrophe in a way that will be convincing to future generations. One may thus be forgiven for accusing Petrarch of special pleading when he opines that the plague he was living through was a unique phenomenon, whose utter destructiveness was unheard of in human history going back to the flood of Noah (also cited by John of Ephesus). However, then the author begins to indulge in some interesting, and apparently unique, speculations: He wonders why his generation alone is made to feel the "seething rage" of God's vengeance when his forebears were equally sinful and deserving of the lash, yet were not punished. Evoking Exodus 20:5, Petrarch hypothesizes that he and his fellow men are making atonement for the sins of their fathers, yet in the next sentence, he takes a breathtaking leap of unfaith: "Or could it be perhaps that certain great truths are to be held suspect, that God does not care for mortal men?" Immediately driving such "foolish thoughts" from his mind, Petrarch goes on to assert that surely God does concern himself with human affairs, quoting in support, oddly enough, the pagan Roman Stoic philosopher, Seneca (4 BCE–65 CE). His conclusion is that "there is some reason, hidden and unknown to us, why down through all the ages we, who are the most dignified of Your creatures, seem to be the ones most severely punished." Unless humans are "the worst of all beings" in God's creation, God must be "reserving us for some future good the more He is exercising and purging us from these present evils, or [else] there is something there that we are altogether unable to conceive."

Despite their general concurrence with their more spiritually-minded colleagues, plague doctors and others sometimes joined in this protest against the assumed collective culpability for plague. In his treatise on the causes of the disease, the science writer and priest, Konrad of Megenberg, concluded that plague arose from the "natural course" of events rather than from "divine vengeance and indignation at the iniquities committed by men." His argument here rests on two grounds: first, that if God "made this plague for the correction of men" then he did so "to no purpose" (which is not to be admitted), because "experience teaches us that his people have in no way amended themselves of any vice"; second, God in his vengeance "would have struck down all mortal sinners," but again, experience shows this not to be the case. Around this same time, the Naples doctor Giovanni della Penna urged his colleagues to investigate "natural causes" for plague, "since [only] unskilled and ignorant physicians say that it proceeds from God or from the heavens." A century later, an anonymous Bohemian treatise of c. 1450 noted that patients often gave in to a sense of despair and lost hope during a plague because they believed "that it's God's vengeance or anger over them." Others, when they unexpectedly came down with plague apostemes or boils, simply resigned themselves to the disease, preferring "to die rather than to live" owing to their sense of guilt over their sins. These were among the six "contributory causes" of plague that defied the doctor's best efforts to help people avoid or cure the disease. A similar complaint, if for different reasons, was made in the same century by John of Saxony: In the course of listing 10 impediments to preserving people from the plague, he

gave as the first and fourth of these either a morbid resignation to death, in which patients simply believed that only "a fixed term of life and death has been established for each individual," or "a disposition and desire to die," in which people actually welcomed death, not out of a sense of despair or guilt, but rather the opposite—because "they hoped to go immediately to heaven, which is why they did not seek out doctors to prolong their life." In the latter instance, John of Saxony recalled "a certain great pestilence in Montpellier" when "many men chose to die because the pope gave absolution to those dying [from the plague] for their penance and their sins." If true, then the papacy, consciously or not, was leading Christians to subscribe to almost a Muslim interpretation of plague as a mercy and martyrdom for believers.

Also around this same time in Germany, Dr. Hermann Schedel was perhaps inspired by Renaissance humanism to quote the *Georgics* of Virgil as grounds for turning to Christ during an epidemic of plague. He also recommended prayer to plague saints such as St. Sebastian and cultivating one's virtues and turning away from vices, and he cited Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* as reason to hope that "prayers that are placed in God's hands are never frustrated, when these are properly done, nor can they [ever] be ineffective." Even when the Apocalypse comes and God's justice "reigns for all time," we still "ought not to fear too much what we cannot avoid." The worst thing to do is nothing, for then "we will undoubtedly pay the penalty." The Lübeck doctor of 1411 disagreed, arguing that when a pestilence came such as foretold in the Book of Revelation, "then it cannot be altered by cures, prayers, or other offerings," as it was the vengeance of a "nearly implacable God." However, he also noted that pestilences, unlike famines and wars, were conspicuously absent from the Old Testament, and he postulated that, instead of being "a punishment and torment" for humankind, the plague was God's way of gathering "unto Himself those pleasing to Him, that is, young boys and other good people, so that His host with its great numbers may be able to overpower the host of the devil." He enlisted the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great in support of his rather innovative explanation for why the innocent were made to suffer from God's anger during a plague.

Not even prelates of the Church were immune to these arguments questioning God's role in the plague. In a treatise that he wrote during the 1460s or 1470s, Dominico Amanti, bishop of Brescia in northern Italy, poses a remarkable challenge to the notion that plague always comes from God as a punishment for sinners, which he used to support his main proposition that everyone, even priests, should be allowed to flee before the disease. Like Petrarch, Amanti raises the question of why some are afflicted with plague and other disasters when they are undeserving of punishment, such as Job, the innocent children in Sodom and Gomorrah, or sons punished for the sins of their fathers, while others who are wicked nonetheless go uncorrected. However, Amanti did see a design in all this, such as that Job was made to be an example to others of the virtue of patience, or that the children of Sodom were saved from falling into the transgressions of their parents. Rather like the Lübeck doctor, Amanti claims that some indeed see the plague as a benefit rather than as a punishment, "in that they don't wallow in their sin, for in their wisdom, [they see that] one is carried off by the plague in order that no evil quality might change his soul". Another silver lining is that the disease forces one to turn to prayer and penitence so that God might save one from the plague, which he does by inspiring his elect to flee! Otherwise, the sin that provokes God's wrath to send down the plague is original, collective sin, whereas the

fate of each individual during an epidemic is up to God's judgment, which is unknowable. To succumb to fatal resignation, as the German doctors complained, is to deny one's free will to act according to reason and make the choice to save oneself by fleeing, which God in his clemency provides as a remedy for the disease, just as he also sends down plague in his anger.

Perhaps the most eloquent expression of an alternative vision for a religious explanation of the Black Death came from the mystical tradition of the late Middle Ages, which enjoyed immense popularity, judging from the number of copies produced of its works, and was especially associated with a feminine, affective piety ("Jesus as Mother") that stressed the bodily torments and sufferings of Christ, and in turn that of the mystic herself, as a way of taking on the sins of the world to spare others their shameful consequences. Mystics sought to penetrate, through prayer and spiritual preparation, the dark mystery surrounding God. If disasters such as plague were indeed the will of God, what better way to make sense of them than to acquire a mystical knowledge of God's will? Mysticism gave its practitioners a chance to understand, and ultimately transcend, all the trials and tribulations God placed in their path.

Most relevant to the Black Death were the mystical revelations of the English anchoress, Julian of Norwich, who lived through no less than eight national outbreaks of plague, including the first one of 1348–49, when she would have been about six or seven years old. Indeed, illness is at the core of Julian's *Book of Showings* or *Revelations of Divine Love*, and a sickness was the genesis of her mysticism. As she informs us herself, in May 1373, Julian lay near death in her bed in Norwich. When the priest brought her a crucifix and held it before her on what she believed to be her last day, she experienced the first of 16 "showings," or revelations, on Christ's passion. The showings proved to be the start of Julian's recovery, but what exactly her illness was we will never know. What is clear, however, is that sickness and suffering were an integral part of Julian's unique brand of theology. As a matter of fact, Julian desired to be ill, by her own account, in order to reenact Christ's suffering:

> There came into my mind … a desire of my will to have by God's gift a bodily sickness. I wished that sickness to be so severe that it might seem mortal, so that I might in it receive all the rites which Holy Church has to give me, whilst I myself should think that I was dying, and everyone who saw me would think the same; for I wanted no comfort from any human, earthly life in that sickness. I wanted to have every kind of pain, bodily and spiritual, which I should have if I had died, every fear and temptation from devils, and every other kind of pain except the departure of the spirit. I intended this because I wanted to be purged by God's mercy, and afterwards live more to his glory because of that sickness.

Instead of being concerned with her own individual death, Julian was intending to suffer and die, like Christ, for all humankind. Pain and suffering thus had a definite purpose, which was twofold, as Julian explains in a later revelation wherein she contemplates the existence of evil and sin in the world. On one hand, the experience of suffering reminds us of the passion of Christ, which was far greater and of far nobler a purpose. That is, we are reminded that we are part of a greater whole—that we do not suffer alone—and that our suffering could always be worse. On the other hand, suffering gives us the

opportunity for personal redemption, by which we can know the everlasting love of God, a redemption that will be shared by all humankind at the Last Judgment at the end of the world. The Apocalypse is key to Julian's religious outlook, for at that time God will reveal his mysteries, set everything right, and take away all our suffering. As she says in perhaps the most famous sentence in the *Showings*: "Synne is behovely [necessary], but alle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be wele, and alle maner of thynge shalle be wele." This mantra of optimism is explained more fully in revelation 15, in which Julian, speaking in the persona of God, relates it to sickness and suffering:

> Suddenly you will be taken out of all your pain, all your sickness, all your unrest, and all your woe. And you will come up above, and you will have me for your reward, and you will be filled full of joy and bliss, and you will never again have any kind of pain, any kind of sickness, any kind of displeasure, no lack of will, but always joy and bliss without end. Why then should it afflict you to endure awhile, since it is my will and to my glory?

In contrast to most chroniclers of the Black Death, who emphasized disease as a punishment for man's sin, Julian turned suffering into a message of hope and optimism. Rather than dwelling on psychological doubt and decline in the wake of plague, Julian's theology emphasizes the resilience and recovery of the human spirit after a long illness, whether of the soul or of the flesh. Especially in Chapters 46 and 49 of the long text, Julian specifically rejects the notion of an angry, vengeful God that we typically find in plague chronicles, in favor of a forgiving, loving one. Without obviating the inescapable fact that humans do sin, Julian nonetheless achieves her alternative vision of God through a mystical union with her deity:

> And from all that I saw it seemed to me that it was necessary for us to see and to acknowledge that we are sinners; we do many evil things which we ought not to do and leave undone many good deeds which we ought to do, and for this we deserve punishment and anger. And in spite of all this I saw truly that our Lord was never angry and never will be angry, for he is God: goodness, life, truth, love, peace; and his loving-kindness does not allow him to be angry, nor does his unity; for I saw truly that it is against the nature of strength to be angry, and against the nature of his wisdom and against the nature of his goodness. God is the goodness that cannot be angry, for he is nothing but goodness; our soul is united to him, unchangeable goodness, and in God's eyes there can be neither anger nor forgiveness between him and our soul; for through his own goodness our soul is completely united with God, so that nothing can come between God and soul.

How this was to be reconciled with the traditional teachings of the Church Julian claims not to know; at the end of the chapter, she hastens to declare that she submits "to my mother Holy Church as a simple child should do." Yet, a few pages on, Julian elaborates further on this theme with her long parable of the Lord and the Servant, which lies at the heart of her book and over which she tells us she had contemplated for nearly 20 years. In a nutshell, it instructs us both that there is no blame in Adam's original sin and that sin is part of God's

design, because it leads to the greater reward of redemption and resurrection through Christ's passion. All this is an astonishing rejection of how misfortunes such as plague were traditionally explained to the faithful, Julian's occasional feints at orthodoxy aside.

Even so, Julian was not alone on her path. In addition to the comments of some doctors as mentioned earlier, there is also the testimony of artistic representations of plague saints, such as St. Sebastian and St. Roch, during the latter half of the fifteenth century. Later representations of Sebastian, such as Sandro Botticelli's famous panel of 1474 (see next page), show the martyr pierced by multiple arrows yet still very much alive, fixing the viewer with his gaze, in spite of the fact that his legend has his executioners leaving him for dead. This emphasizes not only the arrows as a symbol for plague but that Sebastian is able to draw the arrows to his flesh and yet survive, delivering the clear message that humankind can triumph over disease and death. Though tailored specifically to plague, these images of Sebastian nonetheless evoke a more universal devotional theme, that of Christ as the Man of Sorrows, who is shown standing triumphantly from out of his tomb displaying the wounds of his former crucifixion. In the words of the art historian, Louise Marshall:

> By showing the dead Christ as capable of action and intention, the theme of the Man of Sorrows looks forward to the Resurrection with its promise of salvation. So, too, the image of Sebastian, martyred and yet alive, celebrates his resurrection as proof of his inexhaustible capacity to absorb in his own body the plague arrows destined for his worshipers.

Likewise, St. Roch was depicted displaying his plague bubo on his upper thigh in the very act of standing upright, clearly recovering from his illness. In a German woodcut of c. 1480 (see next page), the saint is shown being attended by an angelic doctor, while the dog that fed him bread as he lay alone prostrate from the disease is jumping onto his afflicted leg. Other images, such as a panel by Bartolomeo della Gatta from the 1470s that shows St. Roch interceding with Christ to spare the town of Arrezo in central Italy from the plague, showcase the saint's ability "to wrest clemency from an angry God." As Marshall states, through such intercession, late medieval Christians believed they could force a God determined "to exact punishment from a sinning humanity" to instead have "second thoughts."

It is often presumed that a culture of guilt and fear prevailed over Europe at this time, as people were wracked by anxiety and doubt over the fate of their souls, especially when confronted with a disease such as plague. However, by the end of the Middle Ages, a new, more optimistic and forgiving religious attitude toward plague may have been taking shape, which perhaps coincided with, somehow, a lower incidence or virulence of the disease. A faith that "alle shalle be wele" in God's plan for the world or that saints would intercede with and placate a vengeful deity must have given many the mental and physical fortitude to carry on no matter how much death and misery the plague wrought.

The Flagellants

The fact that plague, at least during its first outbreak in 1348–49, was interpreted as an extraordinary punishment for what was assumed to be extraordinarily sinful behavior

Sandro Botticelli, *St. Sebastian*, 1474. (Reproduced courtesy of bpk /Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Photo: Jörg P. Anders.)

St. Roch, German woodcut illustration, c. 1480. (Courtesy Granger Collection, New York.)

on behalf of humankind naturally would lead in the medieval mind to an assumption that this punishing disease could be taken away by extraordinary penance or atonement. That this atonement took the form of public, itinerant whipping ceremonies, known collectively during the Black Death as the Flagellant Movement, is not something that should be regarded as an entirely spontaneous, still less voyeuristic or frenzied, response by late medieval society. Dating back to at least the time of St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Benedict of Nursia during the fifth and sixth centuries, whipping had been prescribed by the Church as an acceptable form of both private and public reconciliation of the sinner, whether he be a layman or a monk. However, the tradition of voluntary flagellation, whether in imitation of Christ or of one of the early ascetic martyrs of the Church, more properly belongs to the eleventh century, when it was championed by the Italian hermit Peter Damian for use in his own order of monks and even among male and female laity. In 1260–61, a public, widespread, processional Flagellant Movement arose in central Italy that was to be an important precursor to the one nearly a century later between 1348 and 1350 during the Black Death. The movement started in the spring of 1260 in Perugia, under the influence of a Franciscan hermit, Raniero Fasani, then moved southward to Rome and Bologna before retracing its steps and passing through several northern Italian towns by the autumn. By 1261, the Flagellants had largely disappeared from Italy but now arose in apparently distinct processions across the Alps in Austria, Germany, France, and even Poland.

Many aspects of these early Flagellants can also be found later during the Black Death: their Christocentric piety, communal character—consisting of hundreds or even thousands of adherents processing two by two, the very public and even interactive displays of their extraordinary penance, and, especially when the movement came to Germany in 1261, an organized quality to their performances, including special uniforms or costumes, rituals, songs, and even a specified time limit of performance, such as 33.5 days, corresponding to what legend held to be the numbers of years Christ spent on earth. They also shared something of an apocalyptic or millenarian aura: the movement of 1260 naturally tied into prophecies for that year of a new Age of the Holy Spirit that were attributed to the twelfth-century Cistercian abbot and mystic, Joachim of Fiore, whereas Heinrich of Herford and Gilles li Muisis of Tournai tied the later Flagellants to the Cedar of Lebanon prophecy and to prognostications made by the astrologer, Jean le Murs. It is not clear, however, that the Flagellants themselves subscribed to these prophecies. A miraculous "heavenly letter" from Jerusalem that allegedly circulated in 1260 made its reappearance, according to chroniclers from Strasbourg and Flanders, during the movement of 1349. However, even though this letter, at least in its later version, threatens its listeners with apocalyptic disasters, it does not seem to be anticipating the end of the world.

At the same time, there were important differences between these two occurrences of the Flagellant phenomenon. Though famine or disease in Italy in 1258–59 may have played a role in the movement's start in 1260, it mainly took the character of a crusade, whether as a means of promoting peace and combating heresy, or directed against the Hohenstaufen ruler, Manfred of Sicily, or against a perceived threat from the Mongols. Because it was associated with the Guelph or pro-papacy faction in Italy, the earlier movement also seems to have enjoyed greater support from the Church, at least before it moved on farther north, and it also left behind a much more enduring legacy in the form of lay confraternities or Flagellant companies that were founded, with mendicant assistance, in several cities in central Italy

Flagellant procession in a fourteenth-century Flemish manuscript illumination of the chronicle of Gilles li Muisis of Tournai. Note the red crosses on the Flagellants caps and the flag bearing an image of their whips. (Courtesy Granger Collection, New York.)

in 1267, 1287, and 1335; this may help explain why large-scale Flagellant processions promoting peace and reconciliation continued to occur in Italy in 1310, 1335, and 1399, the last known as the Bianchi movement. By contrast, after 1348–50, plague seems to have inspired no more wide-ranging Flagellant processions. Contemporary chroniclers were not unaware of a possible connection between these two movements separated by a century: when Heinrich of Rebdorf noted that "Flagellants arose in a great multitude everywhere in Germany around the feast of the Lord's ascension [May 21] in 1349," he pointed to a similar movement during the reign of Emperor Frederick II, although he probably meant his son, Manfred, king of Sicily (reigned 1258–1266). The Strasbourg chronicler Fritsche Closener noted visitations of Flagellants to the city in 1261 and 1296 before proceeding to describe the "big incursion" of July 8, 1349. However, most authorities who commented on the Flagellants, including the 77-year-old abbot of St. Martin in Tournai, Gilles li Muisis, who was born just a decade after the movement of 1260–61, claimed that the phenomenon of 1349 was a "new rite" that posed an unprecedented challenge to the Church.

During the first outbreak of the Black Death, Flagellant processions are said to have begun in the autumn of 1348 in Austria and Hungary and progressed from there by the spring of 1349 into Bohemia and central Germany, then moving south and west before ending up in Strasburg in June or July and Flanders by late summer. Their last migration was apparently across the Channel to London in the autumn of 1349. Flagellants in the course of these travels are alleged to have become "radicalized," whether by passing through geographical regions that were overtly heretical or chronologically by anticipating plague from Austria to Thuringia and then following in its wake from southern Germany to Flanders. In reality there is little to recommend either theory. There was really no organized heretical movement, such as the supposed "Heresy of the Free Spirit," to influence the Flagellants in the regions through which they passed and, except for Thuringia, they seem to have

been just as orderly and disciplined in Germany as in Flanders. Nor can one be sure of the timing of the Flagellants relative to the plague: the Black Death probably invaded Austria from Venice in the summer or early autumn of 1348 and from there moved to Bavaria in southern Germany later in that year. When exactly the plague progressed farther north into Germany is not entirely clear; it may have lain dormant over the winter months and then have broken out again in the next spring. It is, therefore, just as likely that the Flagellants always closely shadowed the advent of plague in any given region; this seems quite likely, given that the movement's main rationale was excessive atonement for excessive sin, which would make sense only when the extent of that sin was made clear by the actual arrival of the plague. The itinerary traditionally ascribed to the Flagellants is also not entirely free from doubt: a Master Jean de Fayt, who preached against the Flagellants before Pope Clement VI in Avignon on October 5, 1349, alleged that the movement arose in Germany "from a certain religious [man] said to have lived there" and then crossed the border into Hungary, Bohemia, and "many other eastern provinces" before turning north and west. Fayt's assertion of a German origin to the Flagellants is supported by the chronicler Jean Froissart.

What happened during these remarkable processions of the Flagellants is easily retrieved from the lengthy descriptions of Heinrich of Herford and Hugo of Reutlingen in Germany, Fritsche Closener in Strasbourg, and Gilles li Muisis of Tournai in Belgium, supplemented with many briefer accounts. The coming of a Flagellant procession to town apparently caused quite a stir, for Muisis says that in Tournai, when word spread that the Flagellants had arrived, "all came running." The citizens had also been hearing rumors about this phenomenon, for they crowded around aspiring "to see the real thing." Processing two by two, often hundreds strong, they arrived with the church bells ringing, singing specially-composed songs, and preceded by crosses, banners, canopies, and long, spiraled candles. They wore a special kind of uniform, which included a hood or cap on their head and a mantle or tunic over their ordinary clothes, all embroidered front and back with red crosses (hence the name by which some knew them, *cruciferians*). This uniform generally seems to have been black, although in Valenciennes in Hainault it was also alleged to be white or yellow. Their performances usually took place in the market place or public square, but in Strasbourg they went out into the fields outside of town, perhaps for reasons of space. In Tournai they also used churches, cloisters, and other covered places in rainy weather.

When ready for their whipping ceremonies, the usually male participants had stripped off their clothes, entrusting these to a custodian, and put on a long pleated linen girdle or skirt that ran from the waist down to the ankles, leaving their upper torso exposed for scourging. They emerged with bare feet but their heads still covered by a hood or cap, carrying their whips or *flagella*, which an anonymous chronicler from Baudeloo in Belgium said were like "the whips [used to beat] young boys." A classic description, which can speak for many, is by the German chronicler Heinrich of Herford:

> Each whip consisted of a stick with three knotted [leather] thongs hanging from the end. Two pieces of needle-sharp metal were run through the center of the knots from both sides, forming a cross, the ends of which extended beyond the knots for the length of a grain of wheat or less. Using these whips they beat and whipped their bare skin until their bodies were bruised and swollen and blood rained down, spattering

> the walls nearby. I have seen, when they whipped themselves, how sometimes those bits of metal penetrated the flesh so deeply that it took more than two attempts to pull them out.

It may be that the whips became entangled in the flesh like this because the metal parts were hooked, in the manner of a swastika (an ancient and universal religious symbol): Hugo of Reutlingen implies this when he describes the whips as consisting of "two pieces of iron, with the sharpened upper end passing through the knots, [that] beat the backs of the penitents and caused a ring of four-cornered wounds." Others noted how the Flagellants beat themselves both front and back, but chiefly on the shoulder-blades, until the blood ran down their backs as far as "the loins" or kidney area. This was usually done three times (although the Baudeloo chronicler mentions five), interspersed with prostration upon the ground with the arms held out in the form of a crucifix, while processing in a circle around lead singers in the middle with whom the rest of the company sung responsively. The whole ceremony was performed twice daily, although in Prussia it was claimed that "they flagellated themselves three times a day," and Hugo of Reutlingen says that when the Flagellants fasted every five days they would also give three of their whipping performances. Nor was this the end of the scourging, for it was said that the Flagellants whipped themselves privately at night for as long as it took to say seven *Pater Nosters*, and the regulations for the Flagellants in Tournai provided that they beat themselves upon the death of a fellow member on three separate occasions, each for the space of time it took to say five *Pater Nosters* and five *Ave Marias*. The centrality of whipping to the Flagellant rite is indicated by the fact that an image of the scourge was affixed to their clothing and on their flags, but they also humiliated their bodies in other ways, such as by prostrating themselves in violent fashion, usually on a special signal during the song, such as mention of Christ's passion. According to Herford, they fell flat on the belly and face, dropping "like logs" upon whatever the ground happened to be, whether "on the earth or on mud or thorns or thistles or nettles or stones." Regulations also forbade the Flagellants from sitting on soft cushions or lying at night on straw and pillows, or else they were to sleep in the nude without linen bedsheets. If it is wondered how anyone could survive such a regime for 33.5 days, especially when Flagellants were allegedly not allowed to bathe their bloodied bodies or change their clothes, one has to remember that there also must have been times when the Flagellants went easy on themselves, for the regulations also state that "no one may scourge himself to such an extent that he falls ill or dies."

Considerable planning thus went into Flagellant rituals; these were not spontaneous outpourings of emotional angst. How well orchestrated they could be is indicated by Herford, who says that typically the Flagellants issued from the south door of the church in an elaborate order, with the "senior" member coming out first and prostrating himself on the eastern side of the door (i.e., to the left), then the second on the western side or to the right, "then the third lies next to the first, and the fourth next to the second, and so on in succession." Herford and Closener also state that they then got up in a certain order: at Strasbourg, the "master" led a sort of conga line, stepping over one and striking him with his whip as he did so, then the one on the ground got up and followed the master in doing the same to a second, until the whole company was on its feet, having "walked over each other." Yet all this does not mean that emotion wasn't occasionally on display, especially among the

spectators. Herford says, in a memorable phrase, that "one would need a heart of stone to be able to watch this without tears." Closener testifies that "whenever the Flagellants whipped themselves, there were large crowds and the greatest pious weeping that one should ever see," and Muisis states that the Flagellants' "prostrations and torments" amazed onlookers and was "most pious and horrible" for them to watch, to the point that they "wept and had compassion on their sufferings." Jean de Fayt claims to have seen how "old women and other simple people dipped pieces of linen cloth in the blood [pouring down the Flagellants' backs] and applied it their eyes and those of others like relics," an anecdote repeated in the chronicle of Froissart and the continuation of the chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis. At their most extreme, these displays apparently degenerated into miracle-working shows, which according to Closener included a never-ending barrel of wine, sweating statues of the saints or the Virgin Mary, talking cattle, exorcising demons from "mad people," and an unsuccessful attempt to resurrect a dead child dragged "about in a meadow around their ring as they whipped themselves."

The popular image of the Flagellants, derived from films such as Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957), is of a masochistic society who whipped and abused themselves almost for the sheer pleasure of it and who went about preaching the end of the world and everyone's death from the plague. Certainly, a large dose of punishment and humiliation for one and all is implied in the Flagellants' extravagant response to the Black Death, but this does not, by itself, explain the impressive popularity and support that the movement enjoyed. Muisis, who is perhaps the most open-minded and least judgmental chronicler of the Flagellants, attests to the fact that they recruited hundreds of new followers, including companies composed entirely of children and women, and that they attracted enthusiastic crowds to their performances, "people of both sexes, who had never seen such a thing, [and who] began to take pity on the performers and empathize with their sufferings and thank God for their great penance, which they judged to be most severe." For penance has another side to it, which is the mercy and forgiveness that it elicits from God, his son Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. Flagellants could never have achieved the success that they did if they didn't leaven any doom and gloom with a hearty dollop of hope and redemption.

Evidence for both is available from the songs and other aspects of Flagellant ceremonies that were recorded verbatim by contemporary observers. For instance, German songs recorded by Fritsche Closener of Strasbourg do make reference to Lucifer and his "hot hell" of "sulfur, pitch, and gall" reserved for various categories of sinners, but they also appeal to the Virgin Mary as intercessor and promise that he who "confesses right and repents his sins" will receive God's mercy and renewal. Songs in French recorded among the Flagellants of Flanders in 1349–50 seem to provide verbal cues for the entire ceremony, such as when to "beat" on their flesh in the name of the seven deadly sins, when to fall to the ground three times in remembrance that "we all will die," when to extend the arms in the shape of a cross, when to pray on bended knee with "joined hands holding the scourge," and when to get up. All the while, they make numerous addresses to the Virgin Mary, such as this one: "We pray to you, Virgin of praise / In this penance that we do / For all creatures born." At the beginning of the song, God is also asked to stay (literally, *croissiez* or "cross out") "Your vengeance." Naturally, these songs also make many references to the passion of Christ.

The Flagellants' "sermon," consisting of reading out a "heavenly letter" that supposedly came directly from Christ through an angel who inscribed it on a marble or stone tablet on

the altar of the church of St. Peter in Jerusalem, likewise contains this mixed message. In the longest version, as recorded by Closener, the sins of the people, chief among which was their failure to fast on Passion Sunday and Good Friday, are said to have brought in their train a whole series of apocalyptic crises, including war with the Saracens; a famine that forced people to eat dry wood, pinecones, and weeds; a "bloody rain"; and other environmental catastrophes such as earthquakes, thunder, lightning, floods, frosts, wolves and other wild animals that devour children, and an assault of other creatures including "locusts, rats, mice, vermin"; and, of course, plague. However, if the people reform, God also promises to "forget my anger" and show them mercy and blessing, so that they "can sally forth anew" on a fruitful earth full of God's power and joy, culminating in their heavenly reward at the Last Judgment. Allegedly, God had considered destroying the whole world and everything that lives in it "on account of the sins of Christians," which was slated to take place on September 10, coinciding with the Sunday after the nativity of the Virgin Mary (which last occurred in 1346), but that he was persuaded to relent through "the prayers of the blessed Virgin Mary and of the holy angels" who threw themselves down at God's feet. The very origins of the Flagellant movement are attributed to the angel who wrote out the letter, commanding the people to "go on a pilgrimage for thirty three and a half days" in memory of Christ's passion, during which they are to "never have a good day nor night and spill your blood," through which God "intends to forget his anger against poor Christendom."

However, the Flagellants' most potent appeal, indeed their trump card, was the redemptive power of their penance viz-a-viz the plague. A Flagellant song recorded by Closener begins with these lines: "Now we lift up our hands and pray,/O God take the great death away!" A French song in Flanders asks God to stay, delay, and defend them from a "death sudden." The Flagellant regulations also stipulated that each member must "persevere in your penance and your praiseworthy deeds and pray for all of Christendom, that God may cause this mortality to cease and forgive us our sins." According to the chronicler of St. Truiden in Flanders, the Flagellants asserted publicly "that through such affliction of the body [namely, their whipping], the epidemic disease would be evaded," and Froissart also states that the object of the Flagellants' penance "was to entreat God to put a stop to the mortality, for in that time of death there was an epidemic of plague." Hugo of Reutlingen says that when people came to see the Flagellants as they processed through the town gate accompanied by the ringing of its bells, they did so "either to gaze at the wounds torn by the terrible scourges or to pray to the Lord … not to continue to destroy the people by the sudden death of the plague." Jean de Fayt claimed to have seen with his own eyes that "the sick were brought to the Flagellants in order to be healed, and they laid their caps and the staffs [of their whips] upon the sick so that they might get well." His testimony is repeated by the anonymous Liège chronicle and the continuation of the chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis, and it may be why the Flagellants' regulations of Tournai specify that "no one is to lay aside his cross (i.e., sewn on his clothing) to anyone walking, sitting, or lying down who does not have a tunic or cap." Flagellants were also closely associated in the chronicles with the advent of the plague: the Baudeloo chronicler says that people in Germany and Hungary took up this penance "for fear of the mortality and other terrible things that happened there," whereas the Olivetan friar of Prussia echoes these sentiments by attributing the movement's origins there to the people's "horror of sudden death, which an infinite number of men incurred through this epidemic." The

Survivors burying the dead in coffins, as mandated by a city ordinance, during the plague at Tournai in Flanders in 1349. Such regulations most likely were adopted on the advice of plague doctors. (From an illustration of the chronicle of Abbot Gilles li Muisis. Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium / The Bridgeman Art Library.)

Dutch chronicler Jan van Leyden, after describing how "the Lord flagellated the people with a great pestilence" in 1349, goes on to describe how the Flagellants "arose in many regions on account of the same general pestilence in these times." Mathias of Neuenburg states that "once the pestilence began in Germany, a little later people began to flagellate themselves, traveling through the land."

Spiritual succor was not the only assistance Flagellants provided against the plague. Toward the end of their "sermon" of the heaven letter, as reported by Closener in Strasbourg, the Flagellants recited the progress of the "death" through Bern in Switzerland and Carinthia in Austria until it has arrived "here in Alsace." They then advised their listeners of three variations to the sickness: the first being the kind "when people feel headache with great heat" who die straight away; the second kind is simply described as "the cold one"; and the third gives rise to hazelnut-sized swellings in the "small glands" that grow "under both arms and in back of the knee" and from which "comes the death of many people in the land." The audience was also warned to not "take fright of the sickness," for "whoever does, dies anyway." In addition, some rudimentary medical advice was prescribed for the sick, such as lily oil applied hot with "a white woolen cloth" to the buboes and a diet of vinegar and sour foods. At Tournai, the Flagellants were said to be taking on the responsibility of carrying away and burying the dead, complete with funeral processions bearing crosses and candles, which normally was the province of the merchant guilds and local curates. Though this may have been providing a valuable and much-needed service that few others would want to lend their hand to during time of plague, the Flagellants at the same time also seem to have been profiting from these charitable impulses: according to Gilles li Muisis, "the dying were often brought [to the Flagellants] so that they might bestow upon them such things as used to be given to curates, chaplains, hospitals, and the poor." Indeed, this seems to be why the

town fathers ordained, on October 27 and December 8 of 1349, that the Flagellants cease their interrnment of deceased persons upon penalty of 15 days in prison.

That the Flagellants were responding to some heartfelt need or anxiety regarding the plague can be seen just from their very success. People of all walks of life joined the movement: in Prussia, these included "many counts and knights and other nobles and citizens and villeins," whereas in Flanders they were said to include "the rich as well as the poor, noble, and ignoble." Reutlingen alleges that their ranks included "priest and landgrave, knight and knave … even the masters of different schools…citizens, students, vagrants, and peasants," all "companions" in their scourging. Closener reports that "wherever they came, many people of the cities also became Flagellants, both laymen and priests." Despite regulations that forbade soliciting alms or hospitality, townsmen vied to do both to the point that, according to Jean Froissart, the Flagellants "spent very little money on their journeys, because the good people of the towns which they visited asked them to dinner and supper." Jean le Bel states that at Liège, where "everyone ran to watch in great wonder" as the Flagellants performed and afterwards gave them money, even those "who could not give them lodging were very ashamed, for it seemed to everyone that they were holy people and that God had sent them to give an example to the common people of [how] to do penance and make remission of sins." Reutlingen asserts that often large groups of Flagellants would split up, in order that their great numbers would not burden the "lay population," who would then continue to welcome them into their homes. Closener relates that in Strasbourg, "as many as they were, people invited them all and gave them everything, and there were many people who liked to invite them, as many of them as they could, they were that highly esteemed." Even money for the Flagellants' flags and candles was apparently provided from out of the town coffers.

Only fresh infusion of new members can explain how the movement was able to persist for such long periods of time in the places they visited: at Strasbourg, Closener said the "whipping pilgrimages lasted for more than a quarter of a year," i.e., at least three months from July to September, with a different band of Flagellants performing "every week," while in Tournai they seem to have continued from August 1349 right up until they were forcibly suppressed in February 1350. The Flagellants' recruiting prowess is most evident in Flanders. According to Jean le Bel, "some companions" of the Flagellants at Liège, who "approved their manners and marveled at their French songs," then assembled "a great flock of other companions, and they went through the countryside of Liège, Brabant, Hainault, and many other [places], imitating the aforesaid ceremonies and calling themselves brothers." So many followed their example, he said, "that all the good villages were full of these people," who formed a kind of "alliance" whose members helped or encouraged each other to perform their penance. Gilles li Muisis counted, from the first arrival of about 200 Flagellants from Bruges on August 15, 1349, to the coming of 450 from Valenciennes on October 3, a total of 5,242 Flagellants performing in Tournai in twenty-eight separate companies from twenty-two neighboring towns and villages. Some towns, such as Bruges and Sluys, sent companies on multiple occasions. Although often hundreds strong, the companies could also be as small as the all-female society of just twenty members that performed on the feast of St. Matthew, whipping themselves "like the men, [but] with their back only uncovered." This same day, September 21, saw 860 other Flagellants converging on Tournai from four other towns, whether performing together or separately we do not

know. The chronicler of Baudeloo claimed that "within half a year" 2,500 Flagellants came to the monastery there to do their penance, where they were also fed and put up for the night, while on one occasion the monks had to host 700 in a single day.

Yet in addition to this mass of local recruits, the Flagellants must also have included a hard-core group of members who were willing and able to transmit a uniform set of rituals from country to country, town to town. These itinerant members spreading the "gospel" of flagellation, in effect, cannot have stayed too long in any one location and obviously committed to the movement for more than the usual, month-long term. Fritsche Closener testifies that "some loved the brotherhood very much: after they had done it twice [i.e., the commitment of thirty-three and a half days], they started again." Jan van Leyden also observed how some Flagellants, "once the [30 or 40] days of their penance were completed, continued [with it], starting over again from scratch." Yet such was their transitory nature that he also complained that "no one could know who were the originators of this sect or from what country they came." A chain reaction may also have been set in motion. Mathias of Neuenburg, after relating how 700 Flagellants from Swabia came to Strasbourg "in the middle of June 1349," goes on to describe how a thousand of his fellow townsmen joined the Flagellant "fraternity," pledging their "obedience to the Swabian masters." They then divided along with their masters, "for one part went down [south], another part ascended [north]." At the same time, "multitudes" flocked to the Flagellants from every direction in numbers "that no one could count." An international character to the movement is attested by Muisis, who says that in Tournai, the Flagellants "marched and sang in their own language, the Flemish in Flemish, those from Brabant in German, and the French in French." Certain aspects of the Flagellant ritual in Strasbourg, such as the heavenly letter read out in their sermon, or a German song beginning with the line, "Now step up all who want to repent," were later recorded in a more abbreviated form or transcribed word for word into Dutch by Flemish and French chroniclers, indicating some kind of transmission between the two regions.

However, the Flagellants' promise of reprieve against the plague, eminently popular as it was, could also be their undoing. Especially when the movement persisted for long periods in one place, as it did in Flanders, there was always the problem of how they would continue to justify themselves if the plague did not go away or, even worse, began to afflict their own members in spite of their extraordinary atonement. One imagines that at some point, they must have had to face up to a, literally, do-or-die moment of truth. Gilles li Muisis noted that on the feast day celebrating the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14, the townsmen of Tournai not only hosted 582 Flagellants from five other towns, with 410 more from three other towns on the following day, but organized their own Flagellant procession that included more than 250 citizens and was to perform on the feast day itself and for eight more days in succession. Yet this was also the very time when "there was a grave mortality in the city, and it was growing daily." Other Flemish chroniclers were more explicit: one observed how the Flagellants, after attracting to themselves "an innumerable multitude of men and women who whipped themselves," came to believe "that those who performed this penance could not die from the epidemic of pestilence." However, this claim was a lie, the chronicler said, as anyone could see from the fact that many of the Flagellants "have died from the aforesaid pestilence and more continued to die, so that during the time of the dancers [i.e., the Flagellants], the mortality raged [even] more in Flanders." Another

chronicler noted that among the Flagellants, "many died straightaway from the plague," perhaps because they attracted the worst sort of people, including "those excessively burdened with alien air." He further observed that "this pestilence rages especially amongst them." The fact that the Flagellants' own regulations provided that "they ought not leave their sick in any village through which they pass, but take them with them" indicates that infection from plague was a real problem that drew some criticism. That Flagellants tended to draw great crowds at their performances would, of course, have drawn the consternation of plague doctors, but as inter-human transmission is not necessarily a factor in bubonic plague, this may not have been so much of a problem. Of greater danger was the fact that Flagellants were invited to dine or sleep in many different homes, each at risk of harboring plague-infested rats or fleas, which was perhaps exacerbated by their obligation not to spend more than one night with any one host. One also cannot discount the possibility that Flagellants inadvertently spread the plague from one village to another through infected rat fleas' hitching a ride on their clothing; if so, this would be a supremely ironic circumstance given that communities welcomed them with open arms as their saviors from plague.

There are, of course, other reasons why the Flagellants' popularity in any given town may have waned, other than that they seemed ineffective against, or just as susceptible to, plague. Closener raises the prospect that public opinion was shocked by the sight of women, and even "young boys and children," taking up the scourge and embarking on a Flagellant pilgrimage, wandering through the land whipping themselves. He says that in Strasbourg, "after that, the people didn't want to give them any more contributions for candles and flags."There also seems to have been an element of Flagellant fatigue, for he adds: "One also got tired of them, so that one didn't invite them into homes as one had done before. Thus they became a nuisance and one paid but little attention to them."As the movement carried on into the autumn and winter in Flanders, cold weather must have considerably dampened enthusiasm for watching, or participating in, ceremonies performed in the open air.

However, the final nail in the Flagellants' coffin was undoubtedly Pope Clement VI's bull, *Inter Solicitudines*, ordering their suppression and issued from Avignon on October 20, 1349. By the terms of this bull, Pope Clement ordered his archbishops and bishops to publicly denounce the Flagellants in their dioceses and proclaim that no one was henceforth to enter their "sect" or observe their rites and statutes on pain of "ecclesiastical censure," such as excommunication and of any "temporal penalties" that may seem expedient. Furthermore, any cleric, even if he be a member of one of the independent religious orders, who preached and proselytized on the Flagellants' behalf was to be physically taken into custody, invoking the aid of the secular arm if necessary. In a stinging rebuke to the Flagellants' claim to be a prophylactic against plague, the pope used them as a metaphor for a disease in need of a cure: he was applying his "salubrious antidote" to the movement, he said, before this "disease of some that is spreading like a lethal contagion to many others receives its medicine too late."

This may seem to be a straightforward denunciation of the movement, but actually Clement's attitude toward the Flagellants was more ambivalent than at first appearance. According to Louis Sanctus, when the plague first came to Avignon in January 1348, the pope ordered weekly processions that on occasion attracted as many as 2,000 men and women from the surrounding countryside who would go "barefoot, some in hairshirts, some sprinkled with ashes, weeping and wailing and pulling out their hair" and who "beat

themselves with very sharp whips until they shed their blood." The pope was said to be "personally present at some of these processions," which took place within the precincts of the papal palace. In fact, the position of the Church as a whole and of other observers toward the Flagellants is not always clear cut, as neither is that of the Flagellants themselves toward the Church.

The impetus for the suppression actually seems to have come from the French crown and the University of Paris. The former, according to French chronicles, forbade the Flagellants from entering the realm beyond Troyes and Reims around the same time as they had come to Flanders; perhaps King Philip VI still harbored memories of the Shepherd's Crusade of 1320, which had wreaked a path of violence through France during the reign of his cousin, Philip V. The Paris masters apparently had already issued their own determination against the Flagellants in full convocation on March 1, 1349. On October 5, one of their own, the Benedictine monk and master of theology, Jean de Fayt, preached a sermon against the Flagellants before the pope at Avignon that became a kind of blueprint for the pope's bull of suppression two weeks later. Fayt announced at the beginning of his sermon that he had been commissioned by both the king and university that "I might more fully explain this business [of the Flagellants] to your holiness," because the Paris masters had judged it to be "exceedingly great and arduous, on account of the copious multitude of adherents to this sect as well as the unaccustomed newness of the sect and its observances, from which it seems that a great change to the ecclesiastical rite is imminent." It seems that Fayt was chosen for this task because he had personally observed the Flagellants and could thus back up his arguments with his own "eyewitness testimony." After pursuing three general "themes" on the Flagellants—namely, their "hazy ignorance," great numbers "dispersed through all the provinces" of Christendom, and "their curious vanity" by which they seek "to change ancient laws and observances and introduce new ones"—Fayt went on to expound on 13 of his own, specific "observations" on the movement. Although Fayt does provide a few personal anecdotes, even in this latter part of his sermon he mostly supports his positions with, in true academic fashion, ample quotations from a variety of biblical and philosophical authorities.

While calling the Flagellant movement a "vain religion and superstitious invention" with "profane rites," Clement nonetheless stops short of condemning it as an outright heresy, even if he uses language that is reminiscent of the Inquisition. When the bull came out, there evidently was much contention on this point: according to Gilles li Muisis, members of the Church united against the Flagellants, but the people, both "men and women, noble and ignoble, being ignorant of the scriptures, approved of what they did beyond measure." In fact, Clement at the end of his bull was careful to say that he was not prohibiting all penance, whether done at the command of a priest or by one's own initiative, so long as it was done "with a right intention and out of a pure devotion … without the aforesaid superstitions, gatherings, associations, and conventicles" that had marred the Flagellant movement. As penance was an established sacrament of the Church and there was a long history of calling processions in response to disasters such as plague, it is easy to see how the University of Paris could attest that "several bishops and princes" were "very perplexed" by this phenomenon that had invaded their lands. The pope had to tread a fine line to not suppress legitimate religious responses to plague at the same time as he was condemning the Flagellants.

Nevertheless, there were aspects intrinsic to the movement that naturally would arouse concern among the clerical observers who mostly wrote about the Flagellants. Clement himself made reference to the heavenly letter from Jerusalem as one of their lies and deceptions with which they deceived "a profane multitude of simple men," and Closener, who transcribed the letter, was careful to include a damning passage that alleged that any priest who refused to read it out to his congregation was "an enemy of God and blocks his commandment."This was the cue for a general complaint about the priesthood, as composed of members who took up the cloth just so that they could "eat and drink well" but who didn't "want to preach God's word." Both Closener, an ordained priest and prebendary of Strasbourg Cathedral, and Heinrich of Herford, a Dominican friar at the convent of Minden, must have looked on appalled as the Flagellant master, who was required to be a layman, went among his followers and appeared to absolve them as they lay in various positions on the ground that corresponded to their own, personal sins. At Strasbourg, the master, after whipping the Flagellant sinner with his scourge, said, "Rise up from the cleansing pain/And stay away from sin from now on," whereas Herford reported the much more explicit response, "God grants you remission of all your sins, arise!" Several Flemish and French chronicles reported that it was a Flagellant article of faith that, at the end of their 33.5 days of penance, they were then purged of their crimes or sins, "as if," in the words of one, "these were washed away by a new sacrament of baptism"; Jean de Fayt charged them with granting themselves a "plenary remission of sins" or indulgence that was equivalent to the one the pope promised to all who went to Rome for the Jubilee of 1350. Ironically, the Jubilee may have been announced partly to wean people off the Flagellants, for Muisis says it was read out at Tournai at the same time as the order that the penitential processions should cease.

It is very difficult to argue that the Flagellants were more radical or heretical in any one phase or region, given that they seem to have attracted complaints wherever they went. The Erfurt chronicler is usually cited for evidence of a particularly revolutionary group of Flagellants in Thuringia, as there they were said to "have inflicted many evils upon the clergy through their preaching and disobedience" and to have even incited attacks in which individual clerics were killed or stoned. Another German chronicler, Heinrich of Rebdorf, alleges that, in addition to believing that they could "absolve themselves of their sins," the Flagellants preached from "the apocrypha and the like, on account of which the laity [are stirred up] to be greatly indignant against the clergy." Heinrich of Herford, after recounting an incident in which two Dominican friars were attacked at Meissen, leaving one "stoned to death," gives a sample exchange between a friar preacher and a Flagellant in which the latter quotes scripture to claim direct authority from God to preach, which would remind any learned reader of the dangers posed by proto-Protestant medieval heresies, such as the Waldensians.

However, what was cited as suspiciously heretical behavior or outright attacks against the Church in the heartland of Germany was also repeated in Strasbourg or Flanders. Fritsche Closener, for example, also alleges that Flagellants in Strasbourg claimed direct inspiration from God, such as by reading out their heavenly letter. Should any priest challenge them, asking "how one should recognize that their whipping pilgrimage was the right one," the Flagellants would respond, "Who wrote the gospels?" In this way, Closener complained, the Flagellants made the people believe their word "more than that of the priests" so that

they taunted clerical critics with the reply, "What can you say? These are people who know the truth and tell it." In Flanders, chroniclers such as Jean le Bel, Gilles li Muisis, and others charged that the Flagellants disrupted church services with their rites, which the common people began to value more than even the divine office. Muisis was particularly indignant about Flagellants performing their ceremonies within the precincts of churches, monasteries, and other "ecclesiastical places," where no blood was supposed to be shed, as this was seen as impugning the sacrifice of Christ as reenacted in the mass. Even though Muisis admitted that the Flagellants did do much good, he complained that, for this reason, people "very often derided churchmen who held [an opposite] opinion" and even attributed miracles to them. Jean le Bel, echoing a very similar charge made by Pope Clement in his bull of suppression, went so far as to allege that the Flagellants "killed priests and clerics for covetousness of having their goods and benefices." Among his 13 observations about the Flagellants, Jean de Fayt claimed that they did not show proper respect to "honest persons" or to the elevation of the host at the mass, such as by taking off their caps, a charge repeated in Flemish chronicles. These latter also tried to associate the Flagellants with known heretically-tainted groups, such as the Beghards, the "Cellani," and the Lollards (not to be confused with the later English followers of John Wycliffe).

In defense of the Flagellants, they do not seem to have intentionally sought out conflict with the Church, and any heretical leanings were inadvertent outgrowths of their unusually energetic penance. In fact, they seem to have made concerted efforts to seek approval from Church authorities, including the pope. Gilles li Muisis, on the eyewitness testimony of a "certain trustworthy person," reports that 2,000 German Flagellants came to Avignon to petition the pope and his court to approve "their deeds and other things." A collection of 35 articles from the "Flagellants' rule" was sent from Bruges to the cathedral chapter at Tournai, presumably for approval, and "certain superiors" or masters elected to lead the Flagellants also reported a similar set of statutes to Muisis, the influential abbot of St. Martin. Among the regulations recorded by the latter were that all novices inducted into the movement had to pledge "to defend, uphold, and preserve the rights, honor and liberty, faith, doctrine, and laws of holy Church." They also had to seek permission from their priest and spouse to join the movement and "make a general confession" of sins, presumably to a priest. The Bruges version also stipulates that "they give alms to poor clerics in all places." Other regulations, such as to promise obedience to the masters, to call one another "brother," to maintain silence at table, to not seek alms or hospitality (but also not to refuse these when offered), to avoid the company of women, and to not leave "the fraternity" without permission, seem to try to accord the movement a quasi-monastic aura, despite the temporary nature of each member's commitment. The requirement to fast or flagellate on certain days and not blaspheme for the rest of the penitent's life, and to hang "his habit" and scourge up over his bed as a reminder "of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ," are perhaps conscious attempts to counter the charge that Flagellants believe themselves automatically absolved of their sins at the end of their term of penitence.

Yet even these good intentions could be misconstrued by the Flagellants' critics, who might well argue, like Clement, that they abuse rather than use their regulations and statutes and that all that these demonstrate is a brazen attempt to make the movement permanent without Church sanction as a legitimate religious order. Certain aspects of the rule at Bruges, such as to lay aside cross-inscribed clothing whenever answering a "call of

nature" or to only accept water or a towel when it is laid upon the ground, were seized upon and portrayed as "superstitions" by Jean de Fayt and the continuator of the chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis. On the other hand, other "rules" that they reported, such as that the Flagellants had to redo their whipping penance if a woman or priest entered their circle and that they could not partake of bread unless broken by another, nor go to a house to which they were invited unless led there by the hand, are either not found in the Flagellants' own regulations or are gross distortions of them. Another instance of Fayt's misrepresentation of Flagellant rites is his observation that "they fast every Friday, asserting that to not fast on Friday is a sin for every Christian." In fact, the actual rule states that they are to abstain from meat only on Passion Sundays in Lent, while Good Friday is the occasion to discipline themselves "three times only during the day as well as the night," each time for the space it takes to say five *Pater Nosters* and five *Ave Marias*. It is implied that these particular rules become operative only after they leave the movement, when they are obliged to do so for "as long as they live."This also seems in keeping with the Flagellants' sermon of the heavenly letter, as reported by Closener at Strasbourg.

Some chroniclers, even those who are otherwise critical of the movement, do come to the defense of the Flagellants. Hugo of Reutlingen, who criticized the Flagellants for their "lying legend[s] and insipid doctrines," such as found in their sermons and hymns, nonetheless concluded, quite reasonably, that "some good there certainly was at the bottom of the fraternity; only thus is their great success and the high respect they enjoyed to be explained." Writing from St. Truiden Abbey in Flanders, one observer, who characterizes the Flagellant penitence as "heretical," nonetheless at the same time admits that they attracted in the diocese of Liège and elsewhere "a multitude of noble men, knights, and commoners, who at first flocked to them to such an extent out of great devotion"; in addition, monks, friars, and secular priests "would leave their sees [i.e., churches] and would administer the ecclesiastical sacraments to them." However, if this meant abandoning their flocks or other duties, perhaps this was not such a good thing. Jean Froissart noted that the Flagellants' rules "contained some quite reasonable and acceptable things, which agreed with such natural human inclinations as to journey about and do penance." Both he and Jan van Leyden also approved of their ability to settle old "hatreds and enmities" that had otherwise proved intractable, which recalls the earlier movement of 1260 in Italy. That the regulations themselves specified that they were to "live in peace … and show forgiveness to others" and "not bear arms nor go to war for whatever reason" seems to indicate that they deliberately cultivated a peace-making reputation. Even though he accused the Flagellants of almost literally whipping up "the whole populace" of Tournai to a fever pitch of the "greatest sedition," Gilles li Muisis nonetheless gives a whole list of devout conversions that he implies came out of their visits, which included: warring factions ceasing their strife; women setting aside outrageous attire, such as horned headdresses; blasphemers forbearing to swear religious oaths; revelers giving up playing dice, dancing, singing "lewd songs," and "many other levities and dishonest things"; and both men and women leaving off fornication and adultery, at least out in the open.

Yet another difficulty that the Flagellants faced, however, in terms of seeking the approval of the Church was the sometimes unsavory or radical quality of those who associated with them, which included some churchmen. An excellent example is provided by Muisis at Tournai, where on August 29, 1349, some 180 Flagellants arrived from Liège, bringing

with them a Dominican friar who preached a sermon the next day, Sunday, in defense of the Flagellants before a large crowd in the courtyard of the monastery of St. Martin. Although he obtained a license to preach from the cathedral dean and chapter and his sermon "pleased the [lay] community beyond measure," the friar apparently scandalized other members of the Church present with his words "that bordered on error." His most controversial contention was that "the fraternity of red knights," as he called the Flagellants, shed blood during their whipping ceremonies that was to be compared "to the blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ" and that aside from Jesus' own sacrifice, "there was no nobler shedding of blood as that which came from those [Flagellants] who whipped themselves." According to the continuator of the French chronicle of Guillaume de Nangis, the friar preacher went even further than this, tying the blood of Christ and of the Flagellants so closely that if one were in paradise or hell, so also was the other. Other shocking statements attributed to the friar by the latter chronicle included that the Flagellants did not need the authority of the pope to perform their penance and that by their whipping they were already saved; furthermore, if anyone contradicted these assertions, he ought to be burned, more so than a Jew who harmed only Christians' bodies. This last is presumably a reference to the pogroms against Jews accused of poisoning wells to spread the plague to Christians that had already taken place further east. Even more outrageous, perhaps, is the allegation that the preacher had boasted he would throw his own father into the fire if he spoke ill of his "red knights."

An element of mendicant rivalry seems to have worked its way into the sermon, for the French chronicle alleges that the Dominican accused any "false preachers" who kept silent about the Flagellants of deceiving the people, and according to Muisis, this is exactly what the people had been murmuring all week against the Franciscan, Gerard de Muro, who had failed to mention the Flagellants in his prayers at the end of a sermon he had preached in the same spot the Tuesday before last. However, it seems that the Dominican maligned any member of the mendicant orders who attempted to suppress the Flagellants, calling them "scorpions and the Antichrist," a term that some chroniclers used of the Flagellants themselves. Only adding fuel to the fire was that the Dominican, according to the French source, also incited his audience to rise up and compel any fellow preacher to stop speaking should he "not say the truth" and contradict any of the preceding. According to Muisis, the Dominican's words did have an impact, perhaps unintended, for immediately after his sermon "nearly everyone began murmuring against the mendicant orders [i.e., both Franciscans and Dominicans] and even against the whole clergy." There was enough consternation that the dean and chapter of the cathedral, acting in place of the bishop since his see was vacant, convened a meeting of friars, "several experts," and "many other learned and venerable persons" to examine the Dominican preacher's words, which had been duly recorded. However, if there was anything heretical, there seems to have been some debate about it, for instead of any sanctions, the chapter ordered that a procession of reconciliation between the clergy and people, in bare feet and shirtless, take place the following Tuesday. Yet another sermon was then preached, this time by a lector from the Augustinian order, a Brother Robert, who attempted to make peace between the two factions, for and against the Flagellants. However, when he came to accuse his predecessor "of comparing the blood of our lord Jesus Christ with that of men who whip themselves," he was rudely interrupted by some who cried out, "Sir, you are badly informed, because the friar preacher did not say such things." Brother Robert's only response was to say that he was only repeating "what has

been entrusted to me", and, in spite of his soothing words, "there was that whole day a great uproar throughout the whole city against the said [mendicant] orders and against the whole clergy." It required yet another sermon from Brother Robert on the next Sunday before the people were "somewhat pacified."

This incident had repercussions beyond Tournai, for surely Pope Clement had it in mind when he said in his bull of suppression that he was "more bitterly disturbed and more persistently anxious" about "certain religious men, especially from the mendicant orders" who associated with the Flagellants than about the Flagellants themselves. This was because these friars "whet their tongues so that they might draw others into error" and "strive to lead others away from the truth of the Catholic faith … by preaching and proselytizing in persuasive words of [merely] human wisdom." The incident was also emblematic of the "dissension," "commotion," "various opinions," and "murmurings" that both Muisis and the Baudeloo chronicler claim marred the Flagellants from the very beginning, for some "very much approved of what they were doing" or else "said that it is good," whereas allegedly cooler heads disagreed, citing their failure to hitherto receive a stamp of approval from the Church. Although Muisis portrays the dividing lines as simply between churchmen on one side and laity on the other, his anecdote of the Dominican supporter of the Flagellants (which contrasts with Herford's portrayal of Dominicans as the Flagellants' enemies in Germany) speaks otherwise. As the Flagellants sought some kind of approval from the Church, it seems that they themselves were very much aware of this divided opinion about them.

Other associates of the Flagellants were alleged by their critics to be either unscrupulous, self-serving, or simply stupid. Jean de Fayt claimed that "no literate men and also very few higher-ranking laymen who have a vigorous intellect adhere to this sect, but they are nearly all commoners," whom he characterized as "unlearned, ignorant, and rude." If any priests or friars joined the movement, then they were what Fayt called "crowned asses" who were "ignorant of God's law" and who followed the Flagellants out of an unholy desire for "gain and food." As an example, he cited the case of a friar who was interrogated in his presence as to why he adhered to the Flagellants, "when he heard and knew that their deeds and rites were displeasing to the bishops and greater clerics"; in reply, the friar said: "Surely, we need to live off the goods of the burghers of this town, and whether it be good or bad what [the Flagellants] do, it is necessary that we yield ourselves to them." Evidently, the very success of the Flagellants in attracting alms and hospitality was draining resources away from the secular and regular clergy, and though some of the latter must have looked on, envious or indignant, others like this friar seem to have taken a more practical "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" approach. Indeed, friars may have tended to be more sympathetic to the Flagellants because a century earlier, during their heyday, much of the same criticisms were made about them. In Strasbourg, Fritsche Closener admitted that "many well-meaning men" joined the movement but that they did so in a "simple-minded way," because they could not see through its "falsehood." They were accompanied by "many a proved scoundrel" who later "turned nasty." As an example of the Flagellants' sheer gullibility, Closener described how some Flagellants believed that they made cattle talk in Ersthein, when in fact a man there whose surname was Rinder, which was also the German word for cattle, had recovered his voice after an illness. Pope Clement provided his own anecdote along these lines, claiming that the Flagellants believed their heavenly letter had appeared to the

patriarch of Jerusalem, when in fact Jerusalem did not have such a leader "for a long time." Hugo of Reutlingen said that

> although among them were many wise, sensible men, swindlers and madmen had joined their ranks, people ripe for the hangman's rope, as they were teeming with lies, and they often annoyed the clergy and their own companions who were endeavoring to spread what is good and to avoid what is bad.

Flemish chroniclers also alleged that the Flagellants were joined by a wide assortment of unsavory types, including murderers, thieves, highway robbers, adulterers, fornicators and whores, traitors and "seditious" men, exiles and fugitives, and bankrupts. All these apparently expected to be able to simply whip themselves into absolution without having to make amends or restitution for what they had done.

Yet this unflattering depiction of the Flagellants' associates is belied by other testimony that portrays their supporters as no slouches. Heinrich of Herford says that among their spectators (and presumably admirers) were "wise and honest men and even bishops, such as the bishop of Utrecht," although these were also joined by "by common folk and even by lewd men." Whereas Herford claims that "princes and nobles and more powerful men of the cities" kept their distance from the Flagellants, in Flanders they attracted, according to the Baudeloo chronicler, a diverse sort including "sons of dukes and princes" and "priests and clerics" and a "multitude of women." In Prussia, they were apparently joined by "many devout and good men" who whipped themselves with "great devotion," whereas in Flanders, "many honest women and devout matrons" performed the penance, "processing and singing through the villages and churches." However, we have even more specific evidence of respectable support for the Flagellants. On August 24, 1349 from Courtrai, the count of Flanders, Louis de Mâle, issued an order to all his officers to allow free passage through their respective "towns, jurisdictions, and districts" to the Flagellants of Ypres, who carried with them "letters of permission and consent" from the dean and chapter of Tournai, acting in lieu of the vacant bishopric. In Tournai itself, Gilles li Muisis names the four men who, by statute, "were elected by the consent of all [the Flagellants] as their leaders and captains." These were apparently "discreet men" who included one John de Lyaucourt bearing the rank of squire, or *armiger*, and they were also chosen "at the request of the provost and governors of the city." According to the Flagellants' regulations, those wishing to join the movement had to be free of debt, whereas Closener says that each entrant had to be able to put up four pence for each day of service, or eleven shillings and four pence, which would have been roughly equivalent to a week's worth of wages for the average town artisan or tradesman. That Flagellants could be men of substance is indicated by the rule that "no one, no matter how rich or exalted in status, ought to refuse alms that are offered for the love of God." The social composition of the Flagellants and of their supporters was, therefore, not so easily stereotyped as their critics wished it to be.

Pope Clement, in suppressing the Flagellants, may have missed a valuable opportunity to make the Church more responsive to people's fears about plague. He may well have been in two minds about what to do about the Flagellants, for he was very much aware of people's anxieties about dying without extreme unction. According to Muisis, around the middle of March 1349, he issued a plenary absolution to "all shriven and contrite" persons

who "happened to die at this time," which was to last until Easter. This was also when Clement was giving a free hand to Christians to choose a confessor, echoing the concerns of churchmen like Ralph Shrewsbury, bishop of Bath and Wells, about lack of priests to confess to in time of plague. The Flagellants, in part, solved this problem by claiming to perform their penance on behalf of all believers. This was recognized by Mathias of Neuenburg at Strasbourg, who recorded how three "precentors" would stand and sing in the middle of the Flagellants' circle, admonishing the others "that they should pray to the Lord for clemency for the people, also for all their benefactors and malefactors, and for all sinners and those in purgatory and many others." Regulations stipulate that a member say 15 *Pater Nosters* and *Ave Marias* when entering a house and five when leaving it for the benefit of their hosts. The Flagellants also seem to have tapped into a heightened sense of the miraculous among lay folk during the Black Death. Just before giving an account of the Flagellant movement in Tournai in 1349, Muisis recounts several false miracles that occurred in his vicinity that same year, including a 14-year-old peasant girl who claimed to speak with female angels dressed in white while watching her parents' cows, a wetnurse who saw a "great light" appear over her sleeping infant charge and heard the voice of the Virgin Mary proclaim her Son's ire against "his people," and images of the crucified Christ and of the Virgin Mary sweating tears in a church and leprosarium in Tournai. If the Flagellants were indeed "a race without a head," as Heinrich of Herford prophesied about them, the Church missed its chance to impose its own leadership upon the movement, as they were to do later with the Bianchi of 1399 in Italy.

As it was, Pope Clement waited an entire year from the start of the movement in the autumn of 1348 before suppressing the Flagellants. Yet when it came, the pope's bull was cited by a number of chroniclers as signaling a turning point in the fortunes of the movement. Jean Froissart claims that a number of their clerical supporters were excommunicated and deprived of their benefices, and Fritsche Closener says that their opponents now became bolder, attacking "the falsehoods and lies they were spreading," including the heavenly letter, whereas before "the Flagellants had brought the people to their side so much that no one dared speak out against them," to the point that "any priest who spoke against them could hardly save himself from the people." Some towns, such as Tournai and Strasbourg, tried fascinating experiments with more moderate forms of flagellation. At Tournai, a group of 250 men was enlisted to perform just nine days of penance beginning on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14, 1349. Led by Brother Robert, the Augustinian friar who had mediated in the controversy caused by the Dominican preacher of just two weeks before, the procession allowed the penitents scourges, a linen girdle, and a black hood and cap like other Flagellants, only their clothes were not to be embroidered with red crosses and they were not to carry candles, flags, or a cross before them on their circuit. After hearing mass, they put on their "penitential habit," said the *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria* on bended knee before an image of the Virgin May, and then processed two by two around the town, whipping themselves but without shedding "an excessive amount of blood." Upon their return to the "church of the Blessed Mary," they put back on their regular clothes and "everyone went about his business." On the first day, they were preceded by the friars, canons and monks, and finally the guilds bearing "a reliquary of the blessed [Virgin] Mary," in that order. However, this experiment seems to have had mixed results: after the nine days were up, "a great part of the said society" went in their penitential habits to Mt. St. Aubert,

about five miles north of the city. Though this group came back on the same day "bearing themselves most devoutly and whipping themselves [only] a little," many others were said by Muisis to have remained on this journey for the full 33 days. At Mülheim in Germany, Closener reports that "some artisans" established a special "brotherhood" that "whipped themselves only in town, in Herr Erberlin's garden." This was apparently around the time that Flagellants were being forbidden to go abroad or perform their penance in public.

Authorities in some towns, such as Erfurt and Osnabrück in Germany, shut their gates against the Flagellants from the very beginning, even though in the latter instance the citizens' "wives and other women called for them most impatiently." Though Herford claims that the movement quickly petered out and disappeared, "almost as suddenly as they had come," in some places, complete suppression of the Flagellants took some time. A royal order to suppress the Flagellants in Tournai was not issued until February 15, 1350, some four months after Pope Clement's bull, and the town fathers had to order a halt to the processions on three separate occasions, on February 19, March 8, and May 26. As late as 1353, the archbishop of Cologne, William von Gennep, was still threatening excommunication against any clergyman or member of the religious orders who was found to be among "the Flagellants' sect or their imitators or followers" within a month of his admonition. A radical sect of Flagellants allegedly went underground in Thuringia, where it is said to have retained an anti-clerical and apocalyptic character. It was periodically persecuted by the German Inquisition down to the end of the Middle Ages, with the largest round-up occurring in 1414–16, when 300 Flagellants were burned in a single day. A combination of persistent strong-arm tactics from the Church and perhaps disillusionment with the movement's effectiveness against plague, therefore, seems to have been responsible for the Flagellants' demise. Yet Italy showed that local, small-scale Flagellant processions against plague could still be organized and conducted in an orderly manner when led or sanctioned by ecclesiastical and civic authorities, such as occurred in Genoa in 1384 and Perugia in 1476 and 1486.

A word here must be said about the supposed connection between the Flagellants and the pogroms against the Jews that also occurred during the time of the Black Death between 1348 and 1351. One of Pope Clement's justifications for why he was suppressing the Flagellants in October 1349 was that "many of them or their adherents, cruelly extending their hands to works of impiety under the color of piety, seem not in the least afraid to shed the blood of Jews, whom Christian piety accepts and sustains." Once again, the pope was taking his cue from Jean de Fayt, who alleged that "everywhere [the Flagellants] strive to kill Jews, thinking that it pleases God to exterminate them." After countering this with a host of authorities, including St. Augustine and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who urged that Jews be preserved as witnesses to the ultimate triumph of Christianity at the Last Judgment, Fayt went on to explain that one reason why the Flagellants sought the Jews' destruction was that they blamed them for the "great mortality" that began three years ago and which "still flourishes in several parts" of the world. Specifically, he said, Jews were charged with having "infected the water in springs and wells, upon which a great part of human nourishment depends, by throwing poisons into them." However, this went against the standard medical explanation that epidemics were caused by "an infection of the air created by the heavenly bodies," which "astronomers have been saying for a long time beforehand would happen, based on [their reading of] the course of the stars." Fayt thus enlisted both religion and

"science" against supposedly Jew-hating Flagellants, but he did not cite one specific piece of evidence in support of his accusation that they incited Jewish massacre.

Some Flagellant songs do make overt or oblique reference to the Jews: a French rhyme from Flanders mentions that Christ "was hung on the cross by the Jews," whereas a German one sung in Strasbourg condemns usurers (the typical profession of the Jews) to "the bottom of hell." The Flagellant "sermon" also calls the Jews a "hellish people" whom God favored in the Old Testament, but it actually praises them for keeping the Sabbath while Christians neglect their holy days. All this is hardly a call for rabid persecution. Most chronicles that discuss both the Flagellants and the Jewish pogroms during the Black Death make no explicit connection between them. A Dutch verse chronicle from Brabant claims that Flagellants were responsible for killing Jews there in 1349 or 1350, but again, no specific examples are given. The same goes for the allegorical poem written by Simon of Corvino at Liège in 1350. Other allegations that Flagellants participated in attacks upon Jews at Cologne or Frankfurt are made second-hand by chroniclers from another town or living in another century. Jean Froissart says that Jews did fear the Flagellants' coming to their communities owing to an ancient prophecy of theirs that they would be destroyed by leaderless knights coming from Germany "bearing links of iron who will be very cruel." If true, this would explain why at Bamberg in Germany, according to Heinrich of Rebdorf, the Jews "unexpectedly attacked" the Flagellants there, killing 14 of them along with some of their local supporters and setting fire to the town. However, if local opinion was already divided about the Flagellants, as Rebdorf attests, the Jews themselves may also have had their sympathizers on this particular occasion.

A somewhat more subtle analysis of the Jewish prophecy regarding the Flagellants is provided by Gilles li Muisis of Tournai. He asserts that Jewish astrologers, in addition to predicting the arrival of the Black Death, "also saw from the course of the stars that a [religious] sect would be destroyed," which they "hoped" meant the Christians, and that at the same time "men bearing red crosses would appear," at which point "they were unsure as to whether it would be their [own] sect that would be destroyed." Muisis then proceeds to provide an anecdote from the duchy of Brabant, but it certainly does not support the verse chronicle's claim of a connection between the Flagellants and the Jews. A "very rich" Jew who had allegedly "feigned baptism" as a Christian lived in Brussels and was "for a long time on very familiar terms" with the duke of Brabant, John III, who in turn "esteemed him highly and confided in him." When the Jewish convert saw the Flagellants come to town as the astrologers had predicted, he apparently interpreted the prophecy as portending the Jews' imminent destruction, including his own, and bemoaned their fate to the duke, who promised to protect them all "for the sake of his friendship with the aforesaid Jew and for money." Meanwhile, the commonalty of the town went to the duke's eldest son, Henry, to ask for his help in their plot to slaughter the Jews, which they hatched once they had "heard rumors about the poisoning" of wells by Jews in other places. The son, who was said to be motivated in all this by his "Catholic faith," then "encouraged and enjoined" the plotters to proceed with their plan "that all [the Jews] should be slain, notwithstanding his father's will," because he promised that "he would reconcile them well to his father" once the deed was done. The result was that reportedly more than 600 Jews in Brussels were killed, but the rich Jew who was the duke's favorite was taken alive for trial. Before being burned at the stake, he confessed not only "that he had consented to disseminating poison" as part of

Jewish pogrom as depicted in a fourteenth-century Flemish manuscript illumination of the chronicle of Gilles li Muisis of Tournai. (Courtesy Granger Collection, New York.)

a Jewish conspiracy "to do malice to Christians because they trusted in the planets, hoping that the Jews would prevail", but also that "he had taken up [Christian] baptism maliciously" and on three separate occasions had pretended to receive the communion wafer, only to send these on to the Jews of Cologne (where another massacre had taken place), who had stabbed the hosts until they bled. That his accusers appended a "blood libel" completely unrelated to the charge of well poisoning demonstrates that this particular Jew was targeted not because of the presence of Flagellant strangers, as he is said to have feared, but owing to smoldering resentments and political tensions intrinsic to the community. The purpose of the trial seems to have been to discredit the duke's favorite (undoubtedly with the duke himself being present) as a Christian convert suspected of "Judaizing," perhaps because his influence with the duke was deeply resented by the town elders and members of the duke's family. It also may have represented a power grab by the eldest son at the expense of his father; if so, it came to naught. Henry died, it seems of the plague, on October 29, 1349.

The simple fact is that the timing is not quite right in many places for the Flagellants to have instigated Jewish pogroms. Jean le Bel claims that Flagellants indirectly implicated Jews wherever they went, because

> when people saw for sure that the mortality and pestilence did not at all stop in spite of the penitence that they did, a rumor and opinion went around, and people said that this mortality came from the Jews and that the Jews have put venom and poison in the wells and fountains throughout the whole world in order to poison all Christians.

Yet often it was the other way around: Jews were persecuted *before* the Flagellants even arrived. Strasbourg, the site of the largest Jewish massacre to occur during the Black Death, burned its Jews in February 1349, four or five months before the Flagellants came the

following June or July. Mathias of Neuenburg says that at the end of August, some Flagellants from Moravia came and started spreading "a rumor against the Jews through cutpurses and the people's gullibility." However, by then it was too late, as Strasbourg already had killed all its Jews. Constance was also said to have burned most of its Jews in January and March 1349, well before the Flagellants arrived in June, even though some remaining Jews were allegedly burned there later on September 11.

Jewish pogroms

However, if the Flagellants did not instigate the persecution of Jews during the Black Death on the specious accusation that they poisoned wells to give the plague to Christians, how did this tragedy come about? The chance survival of a very detailed record of the "trial" and execution of some Jews at Chillon and Châtel in the county of Savoy in September and October of 1348 may help to answer this question. A total of 11 Jews, 10 men and one woman, who implicated more than 20 others as their accomplices, were brought before a special tribunal convened under the auspices of Count Amadeus VI and confessed to an alleged plot to poison not only local springs and wells in the county but those located far to the north, in Brussels and Hainault, and to the south and east, in Venice and the Calabria and Apulia regions of southern Italy. These lengthy confessions were wrung from their victims by torture, which was identified as "the wheel," consisting of tying the victim's limbs to the spokes of a wagon wheel and then beating him or her with a rod or club, a procedure that was also commonly used as a method of execution for hardened criminals. Six of the accused required only being "put briefly to the question" before they confessed, sometimes "after a long interval" in which they were apparently allowed to think over the matter. Three others needed a "moderate" application of the torture, and one, Mamson of Villeneuve, refused to confess anything on the first day of his torture but then "voluntarily" confessed without any further persuasion the following day. The lone female, Belieta, was also the only one tortured twice, the first time "briefly" and the second time 10 days later for an unspecified period of time, after which she changed her story from one wherein she gave the poison to a husband and wife team to put into the local springs to a later version wherein she herself put it in "so that people using the water would fall sick and die." When Aquetus, son of Banditon of Villeneuve, was accused by his namesake, the son of Belieta, he at first denied the charge to his accuser's face but then almost immediately confessed when the other persisted in his accusation. Although he is not mentioned as being subjected to any torture, he undoubtedly saw or heard what had happened to both his father and his accuser, which was terrifying enough. At the other extreme, one brave soul, a Jew by the name of Bona Dies (literally, "Good Day"), survived four days and nights on the wheel in a separate trial in Lausanne without, apparently, confessing to any crime.

As if all this wasn't enough to completely discredit these confessions, there were plenty of conflicting or even impossible circumstances to arouse suspicion. For example, all 10 victims who confessed to personally spreading poison invariably said that they were ordered to commit the crime by someone else, who also provided them with the poison that they used: these accessories included a foreigner, Rabbi Jacob from Toledo in Spain, and more local partners-in-crime who were identified as Rabbi Rubi Peyret of Chambéry, Salamin the Jew of Le Pont-de-Beauvoison, a Jew named Provenzal who had a criminal

record in Vevey, and Abuget, described as "one of the richest and most powerful Jews in Bas." Motives for spreading the poison were listed as acting on written orders, being bribed with money, or doing it simply on a lark, "for the love of a joke" (*dilectio ludi*). The poison itself was variously described as red and black, green and black, just plain black, or white; it was contained either in a leather bag or paper cone in the amount of a "large nut" or an egg; and it was acquired either 10 weeks ago in the previous June, a year ago, or even two years previously. By far the most unbelievable detail was Balavigny's suggestion that the poison came from a basilisk, a mythical creature described in medieval bestiaries as akin to a snake that was able to kill with a single glance and left a deadly trail of venom in its wake. Yet, as we will see, even this could be credited by some medical authorities in support of the spread of plague by poison; that Balavigny undoubtedly confessed it in the throes of torture would not obviate its validity in most medieval men's minds. However, the most striking feature of these confessions is the way that some of them were framed to implicate the entire Jewish community. The first three victims to be tried and executed by early October were induced to swear "by the faith of their religion … that all Jews from the age of seven on could not acquit themselves of this charge, since they all alike know and were guilty of the said matter." One of them, Mamson of Villeneuve, confessed that his fellow Jews in the neighborhood of Évian-les-Bains (ironically where the famous bottled spring water now comes from) had consulted each other about the poisoning, whereas Aquetus, son of Banditon, later confessed that in Villeneuve itself all the Jews, whether great or humble, knew about the crime because they "always take counsel among themselves outside the upper gate of Villeneuve."

From these depressingly auspicious beginnings, the pogroms spread in a kind of chain reaction primarily throughout the German-speaking lands of Europe. (Earlier pogroms had also occurred in northeastern Spain and southern France.) Word of mouth spread news of a persecution in one place, which then instigated another pogrom elsewhere, and so on. For instance, our knowledge of the Chillon and Châtel trials comes from a letter sent by the castellan of Chillon to the town council of Strasbourg, in which he was replying to a request for information that Strasbourg had apparently sent out to all towns from the Rhineland to Switzerland and the Savoy that had held trials against Jews in the months leading up to its own reckoning in February 1349. The Chillon castellan not only reported on his own trials but included information on proceedings in several neighboring towns, and he seems to have been in communication with other communities besides Strasbourg: Bern, for example, both had a report of its own trials relayed by Chillon to Strasbourg and in turn received news from Chillon once its Jews were tried and executed; Bern then passed on what had happened at Chillon to other towns in Switzerland and along the upper Rhine. Meanwhile, in November 1348, it sent a report to Strasbourg on the persecutions in Sölden, which according to the chronicler Heinrich of Diessenhofen was the first town in Germany to take action against its Jews. Bern ended this letter on a particularly ominous note by observing, "Know that all the Jews in all the lands know about the poisoning." Strasbourg likewise served as a clearinghouse of information to other towns equally eager to know what to do about their Jews, in addition to soliciting and receiving news in its own right. After Bern had communicated what it knew about Sölden, for example, the town of Cologne wrote to Strasbourg in December, requesting the information it had received

from Bern. Thus, a complex web of information both reinforced actions already taken and spurred on new measures in all the towns caught up its net.

Of the various replies Strasbourg received from 17 towns whose letters it kept in its city archives, Chillon's is by far the longest, and it must have gone some way to convincing its citizens that something had to be done about the Jews. All the other towns that wrote to Strasbourg also supplied what they regarded as definitive "proofs" of Jewish well poisoning, based on trials and executions carried out according to what were the perfectly legitimate legal protocols for their times: Cologne, as we will see later, was the only one that expressed any kind of doubt about the charges or willingness to protect and defend its Jews. Subsequently, it is estimated that 80 Jewish communities were wiped out in Bavaria alone, and a total of 342 towns in German-speaking lands stretching from the Low Countries, Alsace, and Switzerland in the west to present-day Poland, Czech Republic, and Austria in the east, are thought to have seen some kind of attacks upon their Jews during the first outbreak of the Black Death. This has been called the greatest massacre of Jews in Europe prior to the modern, twentieth-century Holocaust.

Strasbourg has the dubious distinction of having committed one of the largest pogroms, in which Fritsche Closener estimates that 2,000 Jews were sentenced to death, the execution of whom, according to Diessenhofen, took six days to carry out, beginning on February 14, 1349. Strasbourg's slaughter, it seems, was to be superseded only by the thousands massacred at Cologne, Mainz, and Erfurt the following August. As already mentioned, the buildup to the point of no return at Strasbourg took months, during which the town council seemed to be in a quandary about what to do with their Jews; in the meantime, citizens began taking matters into their own hands. Wells were disabled of their buckets so that no one could drink from them, and the town council tried to forestall a lynch-mob attack upon the Jewish ghetto by posting an armed guard to seal off the entrances. In addition, a preliminary investigation was held against some Jews who were tortured by thumbscrews and the wheel, which produced confessions, but not to well poisoning.

The pogrom at Strasbourg, like the movement of the Flagellants, is usually interpreted (again quite wrongly) as a product of class conflict, in which pressure from below among the common folk gathered steam until it eventually exploded and overwhelmed top-down efforts by authorities who tried, in vain, to contain it. In this case, the authorities trying to protect the Jews at Strasbourg were the mayor, Peter Swarber, and his fellow burghermeisters on the town council, Gosse Sturm and Conrad von Winterthur, who were said by Closener to be attempting to uphold a letter of protection the town had issued to the Jews, guaranteed by Jewish goods held as collateral. Strasbourg's saviors of the Jews were undoubtedly motivated less by any feelings of altruism and more by a desire to maintain economic exploitation of their charges and public order among would-be persecutors, and they were lumped by Mathias of Neuenburg with authorities elsewhere, who also encountered popular resistance for shielding their Jews, such as Albert II, duke of Austria. However, the situation in Strasbourg was actually more complicated than simply a clash of one social group against another. When the end for the Jews came in February, it was facilitated by a power struggle *among* the bourgeois elites that typically ruled the city. According to Neuenburg, the guilds, led by the butchers, made an intimidating show of force in the courtyard of the mayor's residence and later at the cathedral, where they came armed and carrying their banners and were accompanied by some knights or noble allies.

Although Mayor Swarber made a brave effort to face down his enemies, the two other members of the council, Sturm and Winterthur, were not so well backboned and resigned immediately, inducing Swarber to do the same. A new council was then chosen for a year-long term, which according to Closener consisted of four burghermeisters, each serving a quarter session, and a lord mayor, who was "Betschold the butcher." Events then happened very fast: the day after being sworn in, the council had all the Jews taken into custody, and the next day, a Saturday, February 14, they were burned, hardly enough time for any sort of trial or legal process. The bishop of Strasbourg, Berthold of Bücheck, who had a history of extorting money from Jews on trumped-up charges, including the alleged ritual murder of an 11-year-old boy found crushed under a millwheel at Mutzig in 1330, also endorsed the pogrom.

Behind the rather banal descriptions of torture and death are some truly heart-rending details. One can only imagine the horror of the scene as perhaps hundreds of Jews were herded into a make-shift wooden house that was specially erected in the Jewish cemetery of Strasbourg and then set alight; even then, "many were killed," Neuenburg says, "as they leaped out of the fire," presumably by onlookers who had gathered to witness the conflagration. This Holocaust-like execution was probably inspired by a similar measure taken against 600 Jews of Basel, who on January 16, 1349, were burned "in a house newly built for this purpose on an island in the Rhine." Then on March 3, 330 Jews met an almost identical fate at Constance, according to Diessenhofen. As they went to their execution, some Jews were subjected to further humiliations: at Strasbourg, Neuenburg says that "two hundred of them were completely stripped of their clothes by the mob, who found a lot of money in them." Some "beautiful" Jewesses were persuaded to accept baptism, presumably to become concubines, whereas those "who refused this invitation" had their children "snatched" from them to be baptized, which most medieval Jews would have considered a fate worse than death. However, another apparent witness to such horrific scenes, the German science writer Konrad of Megenberg, says that not even beauty spared Jews from the ugly, beast-like violence of the mob:

> You would have seen maidens and wives with an unforgettable look upon their angelic faces being slaughtered by stupid rustic men with axes and nailed clubs and other instruments of war without mercy, as if they were slaughtering pigs or strangling chickens that were destined for the kitchen.

His countryman, Heinrich of Herford, apparently witnessed similar scenes, for he mentions that they "were slaughtered most severely and barbarically like swine."

Yet in spite of the overwhelming odds ranged against them and the implacable, almost palpable hatred that enveloped them, some Jewish victims made notable and courageous acts of defiance toward their persecutors. Megenberg says that as some went "weeping and wailing" to their fate, others could be seen "hissing between [their] teeth." Diessenhofen describes how, as the Jews of Constance were taken to their cremation house set up in the fields outside of town at sunset, "some processed to the flames dancing, others singing, and the rest weeping." Similarly, Heinrich of Herford notes that the Jews of Germany "hastened to their death, rejoicing and dancing, first the children, then the women, giving themselves

up to the fire in order that nothing in the way of human weakness might be alleged against Jewry on their account." The Parisian chronicler Jean de Venette commented:

> The insane constancy shown by them and their wives was amazing. When Jews were being burnt, mothers would throw their own children into the flames rather than risk them being baptized and would then hurl themselves into the fire after them, to burn with their husbands and children.

It is left up to the Flemish chronicler, Jean le Bel, to provide perhaps the only Jewish perspective in these Christian accounts of their massacre, for he relates the foregoing behavior to a Jewish conviction in their own righteousness and salvation. The fact that Jews "would go to die all dancing and singing as joyously as if they were going to a wedding" no doubt would be quite perplexing to many a Christian onlooker, some of whom might even be provoked by such infuriating indifference to impending doom that they spontaneously committed random and brutal acts of violence, of the kind witnessed by Megenberg and Herford. Equally puzzling would be their unwillingness to save themselves or their children by accepting baptism, as Neuenburg said a few did at Strasbourg. However, le Bel readily explains all this as owing to the prophecy the Jews believed in relating to the Flagellants, that as soon as this sect "rushed through the world, all Jewry would be destroyed by fire"; rather than fearing this, however, Le Bel says the Jews welcomed it as an opportunity for martyrdom and spiritual reward (much as the Muslims viewed plague), so that "the souls of those who were to die should go gladly in their firm faith in [winning] paradise." Thus, it should be no surprise that, "as soon as they saw the fire, [Jewish] women and men leaped therein, all singing, and they carried with them there their little infants, because they had no doubt that they would be taken away to be Christianized."

Wittingly or not, Le Bel has tapped into an authentic medieval Jewish belief in self-martyrdom known in Hebrew as *kiddush ha-Shem* ("sanctification of the Divine Name"), which played itself out most famously in May 1096 in several Jewish communities along the Rhine and Mosel rivers in Germany during the First Crusade, as recounted by the contemporary Jewish historian, Solomon Bar Simson. Intended as a sublime statement of faith in the One God, in the manner of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son Isaac from the book of Genesis (22:1–18), *kiddush ha-Shem* was committed by as many as 1,300 Jews at Mainz between May 25 and 29 of 1096, when they allowed themselves to be cut down by the crusaders' swords or imitated Abraham and took a knife to disembowel or slit the throats of their loved ones before turning it on themselves. As in 1349, the act was both an assertion of the promise that Jews would thereby "merit eternal life" in which their souls would forever "abide in the Garden of Eden" and was also an open refusal to accept Christian baptism even at sword point, as this would mean acquiescing in the idolatry of worshipping Christ, the "bastard son of a menstruating and wanton mother," as god.

By leaping into the flames (because cremation was one of the four methods of execution permitted by the Talmud, along with stoning, beheading, and strangulation), the Jews of Le Bel's narrative were sending a defiant message that they were choosing their own fate instead of accepting it from the hand of another. According to Megenberg, some Jews during the Black Death also reenacted the Mainz method of *kiddush ha-Shem* last seen in 1096, for he says, "sometimes in some places they shut themselves up in a house with the doors barred

and, after setting the house on fire, they died by their own hands by slitting the throats of their children, along with their own." Undoubtedly, most Christians did not understand the religious significance for the Jews of the desperate acts they were committing but tried to make sense of them in terms of their own beliefs. Thus, Megenberg described the *kiddush ha-Shem* performed by parents on their children as "a wicked and detestable crime" that fulfilled Christ's prophecy of doom to the "daughters of Jerusalem" in Luke 23:28–30. In a similar way, Diessenhofen rationalized a searing incident said to have taken place at Horw, wherein the Jews were burned in a pit filled with wood and straw that did not entirely finish the job, for after all the flammable material was consumed, "some Jews, both young and old, still remained half alive." At this point, the Jews themselves completed their own execution, as "the stronger of them snatched up cudgels and stones and dashed out the brains of those trying to creep out of the fire." Diessenhofen apparently concluded from all this that the Jews were overwhelmed by guilt for their alleged crime, for he says simply that by this act they condemned each other to hell, and he ends with a quote from that part of the book of Matthew—"His blood be upon us and upon our children" (27:24)—whereby the Jews seemed to acknowledge their responsibility for Christ's crucifixion, after Pontius Pilate had washed his hands of the whole affair.

Yet later in his chronicle, Diessenhofen also recounts an incident at Constance that is more typical of the *kiddush ha-Shem* rite that is recorded by Megenberg. A month after the mass cremation of 330 Jews in March, a Jew by the name of Terasson, who had saved himself by accepting baptism, along with his sons, and who took the Christian name of Ulrich, locked himself up in his house with his family before midnight on April 2 and set it on fire. As his dwelling was burning down around him, people heard him cry out through the window: "I have burnt my own house, so that I, along with my boys, may die a Jew, not a Christian!" Forty more dwellings on this street called Mordergass also burned in the process, which Diessenhofen implies Terrason had intended, "paying these dwellings back like a mouse in a bag, a fire in a pit, and a serpent in a bosom are accustomed to show to their hosts." However, if this was the Jewish ghetto, the other houses may well have been unoccupied owing to the previous massacre, and in any case, by burning down dwellings with all their vermin (which was almost unavoidable owing to their close proximity to one another and the highly inflammable materials of which they were constructed), Terasson may unknowingly have spared his neighbors the plague. Less vengeful, perhaps, was the self-immolation of another baptized Jew who "burned himself alone in a hut outside the city [walls]." These very public and dramatic acts of self-sacrificing defiance had a wider impact and an even more tragic denouement, for it was said that "due to the aforesaid burnings, there arose a great indignation against [all] Jews who had been baptized at the time of the [great] cremation." The end result was that no Jews in Constance, even those who had sought to save themselves by conversion, could escape, as "all were proscribed," or sentenced to death.

A more straightforward, and what Christians might consider a more typically courageous, show of resistance by the Jews to their persecutors took place at Cologne. Initially, Cologne was prepared to protect and defend its Jews: even after it had apparently received news of Jews tried and executed in other towns for well poisoning, the councilors of Cologne wrote to Burghermeister Winterthur at Strasbourg on January 12, 1349, urging him "to proceed sensibly and cautiously in this Jewish business" and in the meantime to take

measures to safeguard the city's Jews, as they were doing. Their main concern was not the potential threat posed by well-poisoning Jews, nor even the "unexpected and unparalleled mortality of Christians" that was rumored to be raging "in various parts of the world" but which had yet to penetrate the heartland of Germany. Rather, it was the actions of the lynch mob that drew most of their fear, for more than the Jews could be caught up in its fury. A massacre of the Jews, the councilors warned, "could lead to the sort of outrages and disturbances which would whip up a popular revolt among the common people—and such revolts have in the past brought cities to misery and desolation." Yet they also left open the possibility that Jews could be targeted even in Cologne if they were no longer "found to be innocent" of well poisoning.

The accumulating list of pogroms in town after town, including former holdouts such as Strasbourg, must have convinced many in Cologne that the Jews were, in fact, guilty as charged. Yet Cologne was one of the last towns in Germany to burn its Jews, according to Diessenhofen, for its pogrom of August 23, 1349 was bested only by the slaughter on September 18 of 330 Jews who had taken refuge in the castle of Kyburg, whose citizens issued an ultimatum to Duke Albert II of Austria to either burn the Jews "by his own judges or they would burn them themselves." (Albert, no doubt wishing to retain some semblance of control, chose the former option.) Also in August, 3,000 Jews were slain at Erfurt and 6,000 at Mainz, whose massacre took place just two days before Cologne's and where Jews also made a show of resistance, killing 200 of their persecutors before immolating themselves by setting fire to their barricaded ghetto, which was slowly being starved into submission. By this time, the Black Death had also taken firm hold of the German interior, including Cologne. However, ironically, the final nail in the coffin for Cologne's Jews was the town's formerly tolerant attitude that it had exhibited in its letter to Strasbourg. For this seems to have encouraged Jewish refugees from other towns where pogroms had occurred to pour into Cologne's Jewish ghetto and swell its already large numbers.

As Flemish towns such as Brabant apparently had been in contact with Cologne about its own trial and massacre of Jews, the chronicler from Tournai, Gilles li Muisis, is able to finish the story. According to him, it was the rapidly growing size of the town's Jewish population that began to seriously alarm Cologne's Christian citizens and other inhabitants, who held counsel among themselves and decided that "unless they are to be destroyed [by the Jews], they should [first] destroy them," a stark point of no return that had been reached in so many "other places." Yet the Jewish ghetto must have gotten wind of its changing fortunes, for its inhabitants began to barricade the ghetto and arm themselves with weapons that had been left in hock to them by Christians. Smoking the Jews out would have no more success than storming them, their persecutors concluded, because "if a fire were to be set in their houses," it was feared that it would then spread and "the whole city could be destroyed." So instead, the Christians resorted to skullduggery. Once again, as in Strasbourg, butchers played a leading role (perhaps because they resented that the Jews didn't eat pork?), and they were sent as spies to the ghetto to feign that they were siding with the Jews. They learned that the Jews were preparing to invade the Christian quarter of the city, perhaps in a bid to seize control or perhaps simply because they were running out of supplies; thus, when the day for the Jewish assault came, the Christians were ready for it, "and there was then a great war, but by the will of God the Jews were vanquished." The aftermath of

this remarkable pitched battle in the middle of a major medieval city was that "more than 25,000 Jews" were reported to have been killed, but "many of the Christians [also] fell and lay dead." Cologne's citizens then decided to completely obliterate the Jewish ghetto, for "the place was destroyed and the Jews' dwellings and houses were totally burnt."

There may be many more brave acts of resistance in which the Jews fought back against their persecutors that we simply don't know about, perhaps because Christian chroniclers did not want to admit to them. Heinrich of Rebdorf briefly alludes to another incident in Moravia, "where the populace, acting upon a sudden impulse, began stirring itself up against the Jews" but then "300 Jews armed themselves and without warning attacked defenseless people, killing 200 Christians." The enraged citizenry used this supposedly unprovoked attack as justification for a subsequent massacre of no fewer than 12,000 Jews. A threatened pogrom in Franconia was also temporarily warded off by "a great show of force" led by "John, the burgrave of Nürnberg." Whether John recruited Jews into his army we do not know, but it was enough "to drive off the persecutors, both noble and serf, as they assembled in a field." Yet this ended no more happily for the Jews as anywhere else, for Rebdorf concludes that "in the end, even these Jews were killed, after they were dispossessed and then abandoned and cast out everywhere."

Traditionally, scholars of Jewish history have viewed the pogroms of the Black Death as marking a watershed in Christian–Jewish relations in Europe. Anna Foa sums up this tradition well when she states, "for the medieval Ashkenazic world, the material, cultural, and psychological consequences of the dramatic events of 1348 were truly a point of no return." However, I believe that the Black Death pogroms had little to do with the long-standing Christian religious hatred and bias toward the Jews, as exemplified by the "blood libels" that alleged that Jews killed and tortured Christian boys or communion wafers (which Catholic Christians believe embody the flesh of Christ) that date back to the twelfth century. In fact, I would say the exact opposite of scholars such as Foa and argue that the pogroms were of almost no consequence in terms of the evolution of Christian attitudes toward the Jews, like a stone that drops in the water, makes a big splash, but causes no ripples. Instead, I believe that what lay behind the pogroms was a quite rational attempt to avert or end the plague, an unprecedented and unexpected catastrophe the fear of which trumped all other considerations. This does not mean that blood libels could not be rational, too, in their way, but they largely occurred within a religious context, whereas the accusations of and executions for well poisoning took place almost exclusively within a medical, even "scientific," understanding of the disease known as the Black Death. Therefore, it is not enough to state that Jews were targeted in 1348–51 simply because they were Jews, the natural enemies of Christians who, as reputed "Christ-killers," were blamed by Christians for allowing Jesus to be condemned to crucifixion and death. Rather, the victims' Jewishness is really a secondary consideration in terms of explaining why the pogroms occurred: their perpetrators wanted above all to escape the plague, not use it as a pretext for killing Jews. Religious prejudice against Jews naturally made them prime suspects but for an entirely secular crime, one that actually could have been committed by anyone.

That plague acted like a poison once one of its causes, such as bad vapors in the air, had entered the body was a notion already accepted by some in the medical community. In his *Long Consilium* or Casebook written early in 1348, Gentile da Foligno championed

the idea that "the immediate and particular cause" of the plague in individual patients was a "poisonous matter" that he believed to be "generated around the heart and lungs" and acted like other poisons in that it killed from its very "property of being poisonous" rather than from an excessive accumulation, as in an imbalance of the humors. It, therefore, should be no surprise that Foligno recommends, among his 11 "special medicines" to ward off plague, Lemnian earth and seven herbs that were said to be especially efficacious against poisons. Although Foligno considered the origin of the plague poison to be irrelevant, as he was concerned only with how to resist or destroy it, he did not rule out a human source. Using the analogy of a burning house, he said that it suffices to know only that the house is on fire and is therefore a threat to our lives, not "whether it be the result of a [naturally occurring] fire or a [human] act." This also was not without grave consequences for, like a fire, once the plague poison was established in one person, it could spread "not only from man to man but also from region to region" by means of contagious "poisonous vapors" breathed out by the sick. For this reason, Foligno recommended in one of his short *Consilia* that "no sick man from contaminated parts should be permitted to enter the city." In another short casebook dedicated to the college of physicians of Genoa, Foligno emphasized that, even though he was now convinced that the present plague was unheard of among ancient authorities (in contrast to his earlier position in the *Long Consilium*), nonetheless the writings of the likes of Galen and Avenzoar made it clear that the pestilence of his times "is of a poisonous nature, [and] that it can be generated in our case is not to be doubted." What was more, entire cities "can be eradicated by its evil," but because the nature of the poison was unknown, he was recommending powerful, year-old theriacs and antidotes.

Not all doctors, however, concurred with Foligno on his poison thesis, for an Italian colleague, Giovanni della Penna of Naples, wrote his own casebook in 1348 as a rejoinder, he said, to Foligno's own. Penna declared the idea that poisonous matter could be generated in the body and thus give rise to the pestilence to be "impossible." Instead, he advanced his own theory that the plague was caused by "choleric matter" (i.e., the humor of cholera or yellow bile), which is naturally "dry and irksome to human nature" and which, owing to the external causes of plague, now "ferments" to the point of a "burning" or "raging heat" that "boils over here and there" and gives rise to a "very foreign corruption" that then mixes with the blood and, especially in the region of the heart or chest, causes the symptoms associated with plague. Even though the effects of this choleric matter were "near and similar enough to those of poisons," nonetheless Penna claimed that the plague "carbuncle" or boil was full of matter that most closely resembled that of the raging choleric humor.

Yet Foligno was no means alone in subscribing to the poison thesis. Konrad of Megenberg, who deviated from most colleagues in ascribing the plague primarily to an earth-bound, natural cause, as opposed to God's vengeance or a conjunction of the planets, explained his preferred source of the plague contagion as a "poisonous earthy exhalation" released by earthquakes. This was due to the fact that when air is "enclosed and shut up for a long time in the prison of the earth," it becomes "so corrupted that it constitutes a potent poison for men," and one of Megenberg's "pieces of evidence … securely grounded in natural science" that he advanced in support of his position was what happened when wells "sealed up for many years" were finally opened to be cleaned: "The first man to enter is suffocated and sometimes in turn those who follow him." The earth's poison is, in fact, so potent that men mistakenly believe that there is "a basilisk lurking inside" the well.

The anonymous medical practitioner of Montpellier who in 1349 championed the spread of plague by sight, which was endorsed by a fellow colleague from the city's university, the papal surgeon Gui de Chauliac, also used the concept of poison to explain his rather unusual theory. He said that a "poisonous moisture" was generated in the body by the bad digestion of grain that was not allowed to ripen under Saturn's frigid influence prevailing at the time and that eventually this poisonous moisture or matter was drawn up by the brain, which expelled it through the optic nerves of the eyes, infecting anyone who happened to be in the sick person's line of sight. Unlike Megenberg, he enlisted the example of the basilisk *in support* of his proposition, pointing out that the basilisk also kills by sight by means of a "poisonous vapor" issuing from its eyes, which is why men seeking to capture the basilisk hold a lantern above their heads to distract it and why the weasel fortifies its eyes with rue before fighting the snake. Curiously, this doctor bolstered his theory with another fantastical legend, this one from the *Secretum Secretorum* (*Book of the Secret of Secrets*), a very popular encyclopedic work in the Middle Ages that was alleged to be a letter written by Aristotle to his pupil, Alexander the Great, but in reality was a twelfth-century Latin translation of an Arabic treatise dating to the tenth century. One of the anecdotes in the book, as cited by the Montpellier physician, is Aristotle's warning to Alexander against the "poisonous virgin," a girl nourished her whole life on poison and sent by a queen to kill Alexander "by look alone" and also by having sex with him. However, the girl's eyes gave her away to Aristotle "that she was poisonous," and Alexander, forewarned, had another sleep with her in his place who "died straightaway," thus proving her true nature. Therefore, it may not have been entirely the torturer's ministrations that made the Jewish surgeon Balavigny confess, when he was being interrogated at Chillon in September 1348 for the supposed crime of well poisoning, that he believed "the poison to come from the basilisk, because the aforementioned poison cannot act except with the basilisk's intervention, as he has heard tell and is certain is the case." That both Megenberg, a forward-looking empiricist who relied only on what he observed in nature, and the Montpellier physician, who was prepared, it seems, to accept almost anything as true and use it as evidence so long as it was part of a respected tradition, could subscribe to the poison thesis demonstrates just how powerful and entrenched a theory it had become among a certain circle of authorities about the plague.

Poisoning by the plague, in fact, seems to have become something of a specialty among the Montpellier school of doctors, even long after the first outbreak of the Black Death. During the 1370s, John of Tornamira and John Jacobi, rival physicians who both coveted the chancellorship of the medical school at Montpellier and who both practiced at the papal court of Avignon, contradicted each other directly in their respective plague treatises about whether the plague primarily proceeded from a "higher source" and was "apostemic" in character (Tornamira), or if it instead came from a "lower origin" and was a "pestilential fever" (Jacobi); both claimed that those who disagreed with them were "deceived." Yet despite their differences, both doctors agreed on one thing: plague was generated in the body by a "poisonous fume" that attacked the heart, caused by breathing in poisonous or corrupted air, and apostemes were caused by "poisonous matter" collecting in the emunctories; moreover, the disease was contagious because the patients themselves gave off "poisonous fumes" that then infected others. A late fourteenth-century pupil of Tornamira's nonetheless agreed with Jacobi that pestilential fevers were caused by "a poisonous and putrid vapor of the air" infecting the heart, rather than by "a putrid humor."

It is likely that a plague treatise occurring in a fifteenth-century German manuscript and attributed to Giovanni della Penna is also authored by a student of Tornamira, for it mimics him in describing plague as an "antracal" disease characterized mainly by the presence of *antraces* or carbuncles, in which fever merely occurs "as one of its symptoms"; in fact, he seems to have Tornamira's rival, Jacobi, in mind when he declares that true plague "is by no means a pestilential fever that [other] medical authors have described." This author also follows Tornamira in declaring that the plague "kills by its insidious and ensnaring poisonousness" that results from a "boiling over" or "corruption of the blood" (as opposed to an excess of "feverish matter" that can kill in one, two, or three days). If the treatise is Penna's (and there are some similarities with the other treatise addressed to Foligno), it must have been written later and would represent almost a complete reversal on previous positions, such as that plague is not a poison or to only bleed on one side of the body, close to the apostemes. Another Montpellier physician working at the papal court, Raymond Chalin de Vinario, gives in his treatise of 1382 "a poisoning of the humors" as one of his "three reasons for pestilential diseases," which was the only one not posited by ancient doctors but "modern" ones, "such as Master Gentile da Foligno and Master [John] Jacobi."

The only doctor to perhaps rebel against the poison thesis in Avignon at this time was the Jewish physician, Rabbi Isaac ben Todros, in his Hebrew plague treatise, the *Well of Life*, written in c. 1376. Although Todros does mention that the plague fever comes from a "foreign heat" that "has decayed and been changed to poisonousness" and is best counteracted by vinegar, he seems to prefer to describe the corrupt air and its effects in the body as a "decay" rather than as a poison. It should also be noted that Todros sides with Jacobi against Tornamira in describing plague as primarily a fever attended by "pustules" as its symptom, even quoting from Tornamira's treatise at one point to say that he is "very, very surprised" by it and does not "fully understand" his colleague's opinion, as it goes against the authority of Averroes. Even though Todros admits of the opposite case, that the pustule is the "sickness in itself" with fever following on from it, in either circumstance the ultimate cause was "decayed material" pushing on the heart and the emunctories. Nonetheless, Todros' Jewish colleague, Abraham Kashlari, who also wrote his treatise on "pestilential fevers" in Hebrew, agreed with the mainstream of doctors that plague was spread by a "poisonous corruption of the air" that when inhaled poisoned the vital spirits. For Kashlari, the poisonous vapors could be caused by either celestial or terrestrial sources, of which the latter could include the contagious breath of "diseased persons" or lepers, special kinds of plants and trees that give off a "plague poison," and "rotting poisonous animals" or plant matter.

Beyond the Montpellier school of physicians, the poison explanation of plague also lived on in the late fourteenth-century treatise of Francinus "the Fat" of Bologna, who illustrated the effectiveness of using radishes in plasters for treating plague apostemes by retailing the story of "two fellows, one of whom gave to the other some poison or toxic substance to drink." However, the intended victim took the precaution of having a bath prepared and entered it with two cooked slices of radish "under his armpits and two on the groin near his testicles," and with the remaining slices "he had his whole body wiped off and rubbed down, from which he was very red upon leaving the bath, and he was cured." When he gave some of the used radish slices to his companion to eat, "he immediately died," thus proving they had soaked up the poison. Francinus testified that he himself has proven the radish's curative powers on poison, for he says, "I have tested it on poison and poisonous apostemes,

and it has never failed me when joined with other precautionary measures." He claimed that another of his plasters was strong enough to draw "the poisonous matter [of the plague] forcibly away from the heart."

Also writing in Italy during the latter half of the fourteenth century, Master Cardo of Milan, Mariano di Ser Jacopo of Siena, Master Gentil Dapulit of Pisa, Master Franciscus Dinanilus of Bologna, and an anonymous colleague all believed that a poisonous vapor, matter, or some such quality caused plague in the body, which it then tried to expel through the emunctories or else coughed up from the chest in the form of poisoned blood and exhaled in the form of a contagious "poisonous breath." Jacopo compared his remedy of flight from the "poisonous air" to spitting out a "poisonous drink," and like Megenberg, he retailed an anecdote, which he alleged came from Avicenna, of a "water well" shut up for a long time that when opened released a vapor "so poisonous" that it killed those nearby "faster and more powerfully than any poison in the world." Jacopo also followed the Montpellier physician in citing the story of the poisonous virgin from the *Secretum*, but he did so to demonstrate how some people, such as gravediggers and surgeons, become so used to working around stenches that they are less disposed to plague when it happens than others. Meanwhile in Spain, Juan de Aviñón, a physician practicing in Seville from 1353 until at least 1382, explained in his *Regimen against the Pestilence* that a "contra-natural" change in the air during a plague could make various crops and animals "poisonous," which when ingested were converted into "bad blood" that damaged and killed human bodies. In this, he was doing no more than following in the footsteps of his fellow countryman to the north in Lérida, Jacme d'Agramont, who in 1348 had also defined a pestilence as a contra-natural change in the air that infected grain growing in the regions affected, to the point "that they are like poisons to all those who eat them." Both Agramont and Aviñón chose to write their treatises in their native languages, Catalan and Spanish, respectively, presumably to make their ideas more accessible to readers. Finally, a plague treatise written by three Strasbourg doctors between 1360 and 1370 gave numerous prescriptions—including ingesting "chicken droppings"—against air, drink, or food that had been "poisoned with the plague."

In the next century, Theobaldus Loneti of Besançon in France characterized plague as caused by a "pestiferous poison" that originated in the heart and then established itself in the "glandular swellings." If this "poisonousness" made its way back to the heart, indicated by the patient's vomiting up of theriac, Loneti gave up hope of curing the patient. An anonymous Bohemian treatise on pestilential fevers of c. 1450 made much the same point, arguing that when "hot apostemes…send to the remote members a great poisonous matter," the body's "natural constitution cannot endure it, because such [matter], by its very poisonousness, kills off [the patient]." Peter de Kottbus; Johannes Martzacaro of Mainz; Hermann Schedel; an anonymous German treatise of 1481; and a Master Matthew of Geneva writing at the end of the fifteenth century all seem to also subscribe to the idea that a "poisonous matter" expelled by the principal members settled in the apostemes, which then likewise became poisonous. Sigmund Albich of Prague, writing in 1406–07, seemed to be trying to reconcile the positions of both Foligno and Penna when he explained how a patient who had been "delivered" from pestilential fever could nonetheless suddenly die "by means of a very great crisis": This happened when the choleric humor was corrupted and converted by "poisonous air" into "the essential qualities of poison," which could kill "in a few days or

[even] hours"; by monitoring the patient's pulse, one could determine when this "wicked poison" infects and attacks the heart and from there "goes out to the other members."

Later doctors also deferred to their colleagues who wrote during the first, great outbreak of the Black Death in terms of accepting the poison thesis. In his treatise of 1381, Master Bernard of Frankfurt quotes extensively from Konrad of Megenburg's *Buch der Natur* (*Book of Nature*), citing this as why water flowing into the earth stews "just like a porridge" until it is released by earthquakes, when it is "called the poison of the earth" because its "make-up is unlike that of anything else," poisonously cooling down and prohibiting growth "in vegetables and sentient things"; this is why Bernard favored a hot, sweating remedy instead of a cool one advocated by most of his colleagues for patients' fever. To demonstrate that the plague is poisonously contagious, a Master Berchtold in 1448 quotes word for word from Alfonso de Córdoba's explanation of how cities can be poisoned by brewing an airborne infective agent in a glass amphora (discussed later), whereas at the end of the century, Johannes Widmans seems to be reciting from Gentile da Foligno's *Long Consilium* when he says that a "poisonous matter generated around the heart and lungs" causes the plague in human bodies "in accordance with its property of being poisonous." In 1411, the Lübeck doctor seemed to be channeling Konrad of Megenberg, Alfonso de Córdoba, and the anonymous Montpellier medical practitioner all at once. For instance, he noted that during a plague, "air is infected by poisonous moistures" that emanated from the earth, "putrid water," and other "suffocating places," such as wells; he also said that a pestilence could come "from some poisoned herbs or from a poison invented by the 'learned Pole,' as appears in his book where he instructs how to make such a confection, by means of which a city or a whole region could be poisoned." Finally, he pointed to the fact that Sir John Mandeville and Galen both testify to miraculous sources of poison, such as trees bearing a poisonous flower in India that quickly kills when tasted, or a basilisk that finished off three knights at once with its poisonous breath, because the lances of each of the knights happened to be touching the others' horses.

That the poison thesis was just as much a part of the consciousness of the laity is demonstrated by the *Livre de Seyntz Medicines* (*Book of Holy Medicines*), an allegorical prose work written in 1354 by Henry of Grosmont, duke of Lancaster, cousin and favorite of King Edward III of England and the "king's lieutenant" in his war with France until Grosmont's death during the second outbreak of plague in 1361. Taking a cue from the moralizing sermon tradition of medieval preachers dating back to at least the thirteenth century, Grosmont at one point in his religious allegory compares his sins to a "poison" or "venom" that he must cure with the "medicine" or "treacle" of "holy sermons" and other "good instruction and true examples" drawn from his own "prayers and from good people and good books." Despite the religious focus, Grosmont is well acquainted with the medical principles behind his allegory of the "treacle" or theriac that acts as an antidote to poison or venom: the treacle, Grosmont says, must be "made and blended from the strongest venom that man can find anywhere, and if it is stronger than the venom which is within the man, it will by its strength and potency repel the poison within, and thus the man will be healed and saved from death." However, if it is not strong enough to overpower the existing poison, the victim will only die faster, for then the treacle itself "is turned into venom, and thus the man is twice poisoned and envenomed to death." Even if most lay people were not as well up on medical theory as the good duke, they would have been warned by almost any plague

treatise to seek out wholesome, unspoiled meats and clear, running water taken from "rocky" stream beds, prescriptions that would at least have suggested that being poisoned in some fashion was an ever-present concern during a time of plague.

If most of the medical profession could be said to be less than culpable on the issue of whether they contributed to the pogroms, one doctor during the Black Death of 1348 was quite explicit about the connection between poison and human ingenuity as a cause of plague: Alfonso de Córdoba, a Spanish physician based, it seems, at the medical school of the University of Montpellier in southern France. Alfonso perhaps wrote his *Letter and Regimen concerning the Pestilence* in response to the astrological explanation of the plague put forward by the rival medical school at Paris in October 1348. Though not denying a conjunction as the cause of the plague, Alfonso noted that the spread of the Black Death throughout Europe did not always accord with the "strength and vigor" of the conjunction nor with local causes such as an earthquake. Instead, he postulated that in addition to these "natural" causes there was a human one, which he was setting down "out of compassion for the [Christian] faithful" and so that "pious and good people…may know how to prevent the great dangers and evils that especially threaten Christians in this pestilence." This danger was none other than the deliberate poisoning of food and drink, especially "non-flowing water because this can most easily be infected," which "proceeds out of a deep-seated malice through the most subtle artifice that can be invented by a profoundly wicked mind." This was Alfonso's defense for "why the wise counsel of doctors does not profit or help those in the grip of this most cruel and pernicious disease." Aside from guarding against such contamination, Alfonso's best advice was to flee the area or take one his special electuaries, theriacs, or pestilential pills that "may preserve one from the venom and poison," a main ingredient of which was Lemnian earth, the same antidote recommended by Foligno.

Alfonso next proceeds to discuss in depth how the poisoning could be accomplished. Oddly enough, instead of infecting the water, against which he particularly warned, he gave as an example the poisoning of the air, which perhaps was a better sample of just how devious the poisoner could be, as it required first brewing "a certain formula" in a "glass amphora," then waiting for "a strong and steady wind" to come up, walking against the wind and throwing the amphora downwind against some stones "opposite the city or town that he wishes to infect." The advantage of this method, from the poisoner's point of view, was that it was virtually indistinguishable from the "pestilential air" that medical authorities typically blamed for causing the plague that came from natural sources, making the crime almost undetectable. To contemporaries, this clearly demonstrated both the potential rewards and dangers of natural philosophy, in which man was able to magically exert his power over nature, instead of the other way around (as was usually demonstrated with famines, plagues, and even wars, as higher causes such as God's will or planetary conjunctions could set in motion all three, sometimes concurrently). One branch of the magical tradition of the Middle Ages, alchemy, undoubtedly provided Alfonso with the inspiration for his imagined conspiracy: a long tradition going back to antiquity explained the fermentation process, which was mediated by Arabic alchemical treatises and Latin translations of them beginning in the twelfth century. Most significantly, as the medical historian Jon Arrizabalaga points out, Alfonso provided "a rational interpretative basis" for the well-poisoning charge against the Jews.

It must be no coincidence, then, that Montpellier was in the very thick of both the first accusations of poisoning and the first attacks against the Jews recorded during the Black Death. These occurred in the Languedoc and Provençal regions, at Narbonne, Carcassonne, Grasse, and Toulon located on either side of Montpellier as one travels along France's southeastern coast bordering on the Mediterranean. The Black Death came to these regions early: it was reported at the port city of Marseilles in November 1347, and the surgeon Gui de Chauliac noted its arrival in Avignon the next January. By February, the plague's presence was acknowledged in Montpellier and Carcassonne, and it was recognized in Narbonne around March 1, 1348. Therefore, the inhabitants had already been pondering the arrival of the disease in their towns before these incidents occurred later in the month of March or in April. Writing to the *jurés* or sworn men of Gerona in northeastern Spain, André Benedict, vicar of Narbonne, informed them that for all of Lent, which in 1348 extended from March 9 until April 17, the last coinciding with the date of his letter, the plague had killed off a quarter of the population in Narbonne, Carcassonne, Grasse, and their environs and that at the same time "many poor men and beggars of various nationalities" had been arrested and punished for the crime of spreading "what seemed to be powdered poisons … in the water, houses, churches, and foodstuffs in order to kill people." Confessions were obtained, some freely, some under torture, in which the accused alleged that "they had received those [poisons] in diverse places from certain persons, of whose names and identities they say they are ignorant" and that they were also bribed to do the deed. Benedict could only speculate that the supposed masterminds behind this plot were "the enemies of the kingdom of France, although one still cannot be absolutely certain of this." Though powdered substances of some kind seem to have been found on the persons of the accused, the fact that these were poison was merely taken for granted on the basis of "what they said." Four suspects who confessed to the crime at Narbonne were executed in a particularly horrible fashion, being first "pulled apart by red-hot iron pincers," then "quartered, had their hands cut off," and finally were burned. Five others were put to death in Carcassonne and two in Grasse. All this probably took place well before the date of Benedict's letter, for enough time had elapsed for rumors of the entire affair to have circulated throughout Catalonia: In addition to writing to Gerona, Benedict had also communicated with the governor of Rousillon and Cerdanya, who passed on his information to King Pedro IV of Aragon on April 10. Evidently the men of Gerona intended to act on Benedict's report, for the latter praised them "as prudent men who wish to withstand future dangers," in other words, other plague poisonings such as Narbonne's.

Perhaps the most revealing part of Benedict's letter comes toward the end, wherein he explains the justification behind all the arrests. Even though "some natural philosophers still may assert that this mortality naturally proceeds from two planets now reigning [i.e., a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter]," this still does not obviate the human origin, for Benedict also says, "we believe it to be certain that the planets and the poisons go together and brought on the said mortalities." Moreover, the mortality, once established, is now contagious, for it was noted that once "one person is dead in any home, the servants, family members, and parents are struck down in that same way and with a similar sickness, and within three or four days they all die." This is precisely what Córdoba and, with regard to contagion, other doctors like Foligno were saying in their treatises; it is even possible that Córdoba wrote his *Letter and Regimen* before the Narbonne trial got underway, so that it

helped inspire Benedict and his colleagues to bring poisoning charges against their victims. Otherwise, it is more than likely that Córdoba or some other physician was advising Benedict, just as Foligno was advising the citizens of Perugia to take quarantine measures in their city, for it is hardly credible that Benedict would have come up with these theories on his own.

As if more proof were needed of the connection between the medical explanation of plague and the accusations of poisoning, the chronicler Jean de Venette reported from Paris that "men ascribed the pestilence to infected air or water," as the abundance of food then available made its contamination less likely, and that "one result of this interpretation was that the infection, and the sudden death which it brought, were blamed on the Jews, who were said to have poisoned wells and rivers and corrupted the air." Word of what had happened at Narbonne reached Avignon by April 27, for in his letter, Louis Sanctus wrote of how "wretched men were found with certain powders and were accused, whether justly or unjustly God knows, of the crime that they had poisoned the waters, for men, being afraid, did not drink from the water from wells." Fear of well poisoning was connected with other types of infection, because at the same time men also refused to eat fish caught from the sea or spices recovered from the Genoese galleys that had returned from the East. Also writing from Avignon, Gui de Chauliac said that fear had reached such a pitch that "guards were posted in cities and towns, and they permitted no one to enter, unless he was well known. And if they found anyone with powders or unguents, they made him swallow them, fearing that these might be poisons." That the Narbonnese targeted foreign itinerant beggars seems taken right out of one of the short casebooks of Foligno, where he recommends that city authorities be particularly suspicious of strangers coming from contaminated places. Moreover, when Foligno's colleague and rival, Giovanni della Penna of Naples, stated that poor persons, especially women and young boys, were more likely to be victims of plague, this by the same token made it more likely for people to associate the origins of the plague with them, even if they were dying in greater numbers from it.

It must have been shortly after these accusations against the poor were made and acted upon, and while rumors of them were still circulating, that the first Jewish massacre occurred 150 miles along the coast east of Montpellier, at Toulon on April 13, Palm Sunday. Around 40 Jews and Jewesses were killed in their beds as they lay sleeping during the nighttime hours of "first sleep," which in olden times usually took place between nine o'clock and midnight (after which people back then would wake for an hour, then go back to bed for their "second sleep"). The attackers stormed the Jewish quarter, broke down the doors of the Jews' houses, and apparently stabbed and beat them with various "drawn" weapons, after which they threw their bloodied bodies and clothing out into the street. A similar incident seems to have taken place around the same time at Hyères, a town just 12 miles down the road from Toulon, but no comparable details are available. It was not recorded what motivated the cowardly perpetrators of the massacre at Toulon, although it was certainly premeditated, for they were said to "have held consultation among themselves beforehand, by day as well as by night," and when they assaulted the Jewish neighborhood they did so in a "warlike manner" accompanied by "many accomplices associated with them." Although they despoiled the Jews of "their moveable goods, such as money, robes, silver plate, jewels chased in gold and silver, books, [debt] instruments and orders containing the names of their debtors, and diverse other things," this does not seem to have been the

main object of their attack but rather an afterthought to the massacre, in which, being "not content with [committing] the aforesaid acts," they were simply "accumulating evil upon evil." We know that all this occurred from a commission issued some months later by the countess of Provence, Queen Joanna of Naples, to her seneschal, Raymond d'Agout, to investigate "the sons of treachery and disciples of iniquity" who, "inspired by a diabolical spirit," had committed such outrages. As at Strasbourg and Cologne, the authorities' main concern was to maintain public order and be indemnified for the loss of income from the Jews, for the end result in 1352 was for the citizens of Toulon to pay 1,000 gold florins into the queen's treasury in exchange for amnesty, though how much, if any, of that sum ever found its way into the hands of the victims or their survivors we shall never know. From similar types of records, we know that massacres and attacks against Jews took place in nine other communities north of the coast of Provence between the end of April and the middle of May in 1348.

It was not long before these mob attacks and random lynchings were given the more legitimate stamp of official legal proceedings: In July, two judges over the space of 10 days tried a group of seven Jews and a Jewess at Vizille near Grenoble in the Dauphiné province of France, located to the north of Provence and bordering on the Savoy. The Jews were accused of having put "poison and poisonous powders into the rivers, fountains, wells, and food that Christian consume"; although the outcome of this trial is not recorded, other Jews throughout the Dauphiné were burned or massacred on similar charges. Under pressure from his subjects at his capital of Chambéry, Count Amadeus VI of Savoy had a notary obtain a copy of the Dauphiné trials, whereupon he and Ludwig, lord of the neighboring Pays de Vaud in present-day Switzerland, each ordered official investigations the next August into the charge that Jews "had poisoned the springs, waters, and very many other things." By this time, the Black Death had already well penetrated the Savoy, having perhaps invaded the region as early as the previous April. Eventually the count's actions resulted in the detailed trial confessions obtained in September and October at Chillon and Châtel, which we have seen helped continue the chain reaction of Jewish pogroms further north and east into Strasbourg and Germany. Elsewhere in the Savoy, before the year was out, massacres unaccompanied by any trial process occurred at Yenne and Aiguebelle, whereas in Chambéry itself a lynch-mob stormed the prison where the Jews were held despite a 40-man guard and put them to death before their scheduled trial could begin. However, 11 Jews who somehow managed to escape the massacre at Chambéry were duly tried and burned alive in an old barn specially purchased for the purpose, after which their goods, as at Aiguebelle, were tallied and confiscated.

Meanwhile, to the west, in Catalonia, at the time part of the kingdom of Aragon in northeastern Spain, anti-Jewish riots or massacres occurred in several communities beginning in the second half of May 1348, the bloodiest being at Tàrrega, Barcelona, and Cervera, where, respectively, 300, 20, and 18 Jews were killed and their houses ransacked. The plague had already arrived in the northeastern corner of Aragon, at Rousillon, on April 20 from the island of Mallorca; by the beginning of May, it was also reported in several cities farther down the coast, at Gerona, Barcelona—where religious processions were organized against the "great mortality"—and at Tarragona. As at Toulon, we know only about these incidents in Catalonia from administrative records written down long after the fact, such as King Pedro IV's order of December 23, 1349 to his notaries and scribes to help surviving

Jews at Tàrrega reconstruct their debt instruments destroyed in the massacre. The details revealed in this record of the pogrom at Tàrrega, the largest such massacre to take place in Catalonia, are highly reminiscent of those at Toulon: no motive is given for the attack, but the perpetrators, "after whipping up the populace to a fever pitch" and "spurred on by a diabolic spirit," invaded the Jewish quarter or *aljame* "in a warlike manner" and broke down the gates of the street that had been "secured and defended by all kinds of armed men." Taking up the cry of "Kill the traitors!" ("*Muyren los traydors*!"), they then "wickedly broke into the houses of the Jews with lances, stones, and bows and arrows" and "foolishly killed many" and "cruelly beat and even wounded" others. Here again, despoiling the Jews does not seem to have been their main intent, for although they "carried off all their goods and possessions and tore up and also burned many debt instruments and records," they were described not as thieves but as behaving "*like* hypocritical robbers" (emphasis mine). And just as at Toulon, robbery was characterized as an afterthought to their original aim of Jewish massacre, for it was only after they broke into the *aljame* bent on slaughter that they were described as being "not content with this, but going from bad to worse" and began breaking and entering Jewish homes.

Rather than the plague's being, in Carlo Ginzburg's phrase, simply a "backdrop" to this early "wave of anti-Jewish persecutions" in Catalonia and southern France, I believe that, no less than in the later pogroms in German-speaking lands, the massacres here were primarily motivated by fear of the Black Death, which in these communities had already made its long-awaited arrival, and that they were not an inevitable efflorescence of medieval anti-Semitism. Generally speaking, there are three ways in which the Black Death pogroms deviated from the usual patterns of blood libels against the Jews, such as ritual murder, which only cropped up in association with the well-poisoning charge in the Dauphiné and in Belgium. First, the Black Death pogroms had a far more rational, jurisprudential justification behind them, as opposed to the heavily faith-based, miraculous character to the blood libels, such as when blood was alleged to issue forth from communion wafers supposedly stabbed by the Jews. Even in cases where the pogroms were characterized by spontaneous mob violence, such as in Catalonia and Provence, these were bracketed by formal trial proceedings, such as in Languedoc, the Dauphiné, and Savoy. Sometimes a lynch-style massacre succeeded only after a long deliberative process, as in Strasbourg and Cologne. And in still other instances, it is not clear what exactly happened, as in the case of Basel: Diessenhofen says that here, "Christians and Jews who confessed that they had spread poison were brought to judgment and punished in accordance with justice," whereas Neuenburg alleges the exact opposite, that "all the Jews of Basel were burnt without a judicial sentence in accordance with popular demand."

It surely must be no coincidence that the first Jew to be arrested and tried at Chillon was a surgeon from Thonon, Balavigny: owing to his medical expertise, he was able to testify at his trial that once "someone gets sick from the poison," the plague was then spread by contagion by means of touch or breath, which Balavigny asserted had been explained to him "by expert physicians." This not only lent an air of scientific authority to the proceedings but made the charge much more serious, because it implied that once the poisoning was started, there was no stopping it. Balavigny was then required to verify his confession by being "taken in a boat across the lake from Chillon to Clarens in order to look for and identify the spring in which he had put the poison." Once located by Balavigny himself, the

spring was searched until "a linen rag or cloth" was allegedly found by the public notary, Henry Girard, "at the outlet of a stream that issues from the spring." This was duly shown in the presence of many witnesses to Balavigny, who "confessed and confirmed that it was the linen rag or cloth in which he had wrapped the poison and which he had put in the public spring, adding that the poison has the appearance of two colors, black and red." The linen rag or cloth was then taken away to be kept "in safe keeping," the most important piece of evidence in the prosecution's case against the Jews. Even though, significantly, the actual poison was never found, the trial authorities now had an "exhibit A" to perhaps help persuade the remaining ten victims to confess.

Yet in a later investigation at Zofingen in present-day Switzerland the next December, the city councilors apparently did find the poison they were looking for, "in the house of a Jew called Trostli." The authorities tested the poison on "a dog, a pig, and a chicken" it seems "by mixing it with something edible, namely bread or meat," with the result that "the animals succumbed to a most swift death and their life was snuffed out as in a moment." This became the basis for further prosecutions, under torture, of two Jews and a Jewess and for eventually putting to death even the Jews taken under the protection of the local lord, Duke Albert II of Austria. This "evidence" also played a role in pogroms elsewhere, for the city councilors sent a brief report of their investigation to their counterparts at Strasbourg on December 23, and its notoriety is evidenced by the incident's inclusion in the writings of Heinrich of Diessenhofen and Konrad of Megenberg.

This was not the end of the pogroms' appropriation of rationality, for the astrological explanation of plague, even if it was clearly differentiated from the human agency of poisoning, nonetheless provided a convenient motive for the Jews' supposedly collective involvement in a poison conspiracy. The Flemish chronicler Gilles li Muisis, immediately after relating the "common talk and rumor" that Jews had "secretly thrown poison into wells, springs, and [other] waters" to "maliciously destroy the Christian people," lays out the motive as arising among "cunning and expert astrologers" of the Jewish sect "who by following the course of the stars foretold to them this future mortality, and in this way they hoped to carry out their malice in safety and with guile." Likewise the German author, Konrad of Megenberg, even though he staunchly and convincingly defends the Jews from the well-poisoning charge in his *De Mortalitate in Alamannia* (*Concerning the Mortality in Germany*), nevertheless plays devil's advocate at the beginning of his discussion of the issue by relaying how "it is commonly believed in Germany" that Jews were poisoning Christians "chiefly in order that, once the people of the Christian religion are dead, the kingdom of the Jewish race and their status as the Lord's anointed may be restored, which was taken away from them by the word of God [i.e., the coming of Christ]." Both Muisis and Megenberg were indeed indebted to the work of an actual Jewish astrologer: one Levi ben Gerson, a Hebrew scholar based in Orange, France, who before he died in 1344 wrote a prognostication based on a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn expected to take place in March 1345. This was Gerson's only surviving treatise on astrology (he was, in fact, better known for his contributions to the science of astronomy), but it achieved wide circulation owing to the fact that it was translated from Hebrew into Latin with the help of Gerson's brother, Solomon, who was physician to the pope at Avignon. In both the Hebrew and Latin versions, Gerson states repeatedly that the conjunction will bring about many deadly diseases, but he also predicts that there will be "a severe war" or "great battles" between nations or peoples "of different

religious faiths," as a consequence of which there will arise a new king who will reign with "truth and justice" or "uprightness." It is quite likely, therefore, that this is the basis not only for the rumors reported by both Muisis and Megenberg with regard to the Jews and well poisoning during the Black Death, but also for Jewish predictions about the coming of the Flagellants, as reported by Muisis, Froissart, and Le Bel. However, if so, it is equally likely that somehow a garbled version of Gerson's original prediction reached all these authors. Earlier in his chronicle, Muisis paraphrases from another prognostication on the same conjunction, this one made by a Christian astrologer, Jean le Murs, who wrote his around the same time as Gerson and seems to have been heavily influenced by him: for example, Murs states in his own text that the conjunction will have "great signification" for the Jews who "will expect the Messiah" before another conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in 10 years' time. However, even though Jews may indeed have interpreted Gerson's forecast of the coming of a righteous king in this way, this probably distorts his original intent (especially if, as seems likely, his prognostication was commissioned by the pope). Gerson and Murs also undoubtedly inspired the astrological explanation of the plague that was issued by the medical faculty of the University of Paris in their *Consultation* of October 1348.

However tragically misinterpreted, the medical and "scientific" foundation behind the poisoning charge during the Black Death had consequences that were far more disastrous for the Jews than a typical blood libel. For it meant that Jews were seen to be targeting not just one or two Christian victims (typically young boys, in the case of the ritual murder charge) but in fact the entire Christian community, which in turn led inexorably to the conclusion, as we have seen with the Chillon trials, that all Jews must be involved in such a grand plot and are guilty. As a consequence, we get massacres on a scale not seen since the First Crusade of 1096. The legal aura surrounding many of the Black Death pogroms also made it difficult for the Jews' would-be defenders, such as Pope Clement VI, to mitigate the spread and extent of future massacres. On July 5, 1348, just as trials were getting underway in the Dauphiné directly to the north of Avignon, the pope reissued a standard bull of protection to the Jews, *Sicut Judeis*, which dates back to the reign of Pope Calixtus II in the twelfth century. However, this clearly was not enough, for he issued *Sicut Judeis* a second and third time, on September 26 and October 1, with the addition of new arguments in defense of the Jews that were tailored to their current predicament of being charged with well poisoning. Significantly, the pope did not try to counter the poisoning accusation with the Church's long-standing religious argument that Jews must be preserved as witnesses to Christianity's triumph at the end of days, as Master Jean de Fayt was to do a few days later on October 5 when he connected the Flagellants with the Jewish pogroms. Instead, he marshaled to his cause a quite rational piece of reasoning, namely that

> it does not seem credible that the Jews on this occasion are responsible for the crime nor that they caused it, because this nearly universal pestilence, in accordance with God's hidden judgment, has afflicted and continues to afflict the Jews themselves, as well as many other races who had never been known to live alongside them, throughout the various regions of the world.

Yet at the end of his bull, Clement left open the door for further persecutions by asserting that his mandate was not intended to

> deprive anyone of the power to proceed justly against the Jews, which they may do concerning this or any other excesses committed by them, provided that they have grounds for proceeding against them … and that they do so before competent judges and following judicial procedure.

This is, in fact, what was happening at this very moment in the Savoy. Clement thus eviscerated his own bull by declaring, in spite of his protection, that "we would wish that the Jews be suitably and severely punished should perchance they be guilty of or accessories to such an outrageous crime, for which any penalty that could be devised would barely be sufficient." Worded in this way, the bull could actually be seen as an endorsement for future pogroms, as long as they followed the model set by Narbonne, Chillon, and anywhere else that a legal gloss was given to the attempt to isolate the human agency behind the Black Death. Moreover, this was an explanation far more psychologically satisfying than Clement's "angry God striking at the Christian people for their sins," or the astrologers' tracings of the course of the planets and the stars, for it gave people a greater sense of empowerment and control over their own destiny: simply find the culprits responsible for the poisoning, and the plague will end.

A second difference between the Black Death pogroms and previous persecutions due to blood libels is that the former caught up many more people than the Jews in its net, owing once again to the non-religious origins of the charge. The most obvious example is the one we have already mentioned, the "poor men and beggars of various nationalities" reported by André Benedict to have been arrested and executed for disseminating powdered poisons in Narbonne, Carcassonne, and Grasse. Konrad of Megenberg seems to have these men in mind when he mentions the "sack-bearers" or "sack-porters" (i.e., vagabonds who carried all their belongings on their backs) who were tortured into confessing the poisoning crime and who maintained their confessions even "in the midst of an all-consuming fire." Although his statement that it was the Jews who bribed these unfortunates does not jibe with Benedict's testimony, it may be that the Christians alleged in other accounts to be in league with the Jews also happened to be poor and were believed, as Megenberg says, to be easily "seduced into this evil by everything delectable in this world, nor could they restrain themselves in any way from their hearts' desire for these delights." Some months later, a Christian was burned in the Dauphiné for allegedly being in league with well-poisoning Jews, and another, a Master Gerard, was accused of stealing a Christian infant and handing it over to Jews, presumably for purposes of ritual murder, but his fate is unrecorded. A connection between Jews and Christians in terms of culpability for the poisoning is also made by the chroniclers Jean de Venette, Heinrich of Herford, Heinrich of Rebdorf, Heinrich of Diessenhofen (with specific reference to pogroms at Constance and Basel), and the anonymous biographer of Pope Clement VI, but it is only Mathias of Neuenburg at Strasbourg who backs up Megenberg's monetary motive for why Christians were said to have joined the Jews in their conspiracy. He asserts that "many Christians confessed under torture that they had taken money and received instructions from the Jews, in which they promised to willingly kill all Christians by poisoning them, which approaches

severe madness." Even with the seduction of money, Neuenburg evidently has a hard time understanding how anyone could be persuaded to commit such a horrible crime, but the Olivetan friar of Prussia has an answer for this: He alleges that, in addition to taking money from the Jews, the "bad Christians" who were privy to the poisoning plot in Germany and Poland were also seduced by the Jews' "diabolical words, which they whispered into their ears, turning them mad and kindling in them a hatred of Christians to the point that, if they could, they would have willingly wiped out the whole of Christianity." Perhaps this plays into old fears of Jews "unconverting" Christians by casting doubts upon Jesus as the real messiah, but it certainly would have made the non-Jewish element of the poisoning charge that much more disturbing to contemporaries, if these Christian accomplices were not doing what they did just for the money.

In fact, it was not just Jews and their poor Christian allies who were said to be responsible for the plague. Gui de Chauliac claims that "many were uncertain about the cause of this great mortality," and so "in some places" they blamed the disease on a belief that "Jews had poisoned the world" but, in "other areas," they fingered the "deformity of the poor and they chased them out," and in still others, people said "that it was the nobles, and so they [i.e., the nobles] hesitated to go out into the world." In Sicily, Michele da Piazza reports that several communities scapegoated Catalans from Spain, in a spate of anti-foreigner violence that recalls the Sicilian Vespers of 1282, which had targeted the French presence. That indeed anyone at all—Jew, Christian, poor, rich, holy or profane—could be accused of the crime of poisoning wells to spread the plague is demonstrated by a compelling personal narrative related by the German mystic, Heinrich Suso, in his autobiographical work, *The Life of the Servant*. Suso entered the Dominican convent of Constance at the age of 13 and, five years later, had a mystical conversion, pledging himself to become the "Servant of Eternal Wisdom." When in his twenties, he studied theology at Cologne under Meister Eckhardt before returning to Constance. Suso was famed as a preacher and spiritual director and was a member of an order renowned for its loyal service to the Church, but this did not stop him from being nearly lynched by an angry mob for allegedly poisoning their wells.

This terrifying incident happened in a village unnamed by Suso, at an unspecified time when "there were great rumors of poisoning abroad." Suso was simply passing through a village located along the Rhine River in the course of a "journey" whose destination was somewhere in Alsace, and he was reluctantly accompanied by a lay brother described by Suso as "mentally unbalanced." This is about all that we know for sure of the circumstances surrounding the incident, but we can hazard a guess at some further details. It is likely that the journey took place in the waning months of 1348 or in early 1349, and Suso was probably traveling from Ulm, where he had recently been stationed, to Strasbourg, where there resided a fellow Dominican, mystic, and student of Eckhardt's, Johannes Tauler. This journey would have taken Suso and his companion through the heartland of German-speaking areas that are mentioned by Diessenhofen as experiencing Jewish pogroms. The incident started when Suso's wayward fellow traveler retired to a tavern almost immediately upon entering the village "before breakfast" or daybreak, where he was first accused of stealing a cheese by his "rough" drinking companions and then arrested by a group of soldiers and accused of being an "evil monk" who was "a poisoner of wells." At this point, the lay brother panicked and betrayed Suso, feigning to be "a fool and an ignorant man" but that his superior, who was "wise and experienced," had been entrusted by his order with

"a bag of poison to sink in the wells, here and there in the country as far as Alsace, whither he is now bound." He also claimed that Suso had already poisoned the local well and that "proof" of his charge could be found in the "large sack" on Suso's person that he alleged was "full of these bags of poison and with the gold pieces that he and his Order have got from the Jews to pay him for committing these crimes." A lynch mob then formed armed with pikes, axes, and other weapons and began searching "houses and monasteries," even thrusting their "naked swords through bedding and straw," to find Suso. The crowd was swelled by people from other towns in for a fair, some of whom, however, were "honorable men" who knew Suso and who therefore "came forward and persuaded the mob that they were doing him an injustice, that he was a very pious man who was incapable of committing such a crime." Although this seems to have quieted down the crowd, Suso's traveling companion and accuser was nonetheless carried off to the local judge to await trial.

To Suso's great credit, he did not abandon his treacherous companion or pay him back in kind when he learned what happened after entering the tavern for breakfast. Instead, at great risk to his life, he negotiated the lay brother's release from custody by agreeing to pay "a heavy fine" to the judge who was determined "to commit him to prison for his crime." Yet, as Suso says, this was only the beginning of his troubles, for it was by now vespers, or around sunset, and enough time had elapsed for a rumor to have spread "among the common people and young boys that he was a poisoner." As Suso attempted to escape through the village, people pointed him out and discussed various ways in which to put him to death, such as drowning him in the Rhine, which was rejected only because it was feared that "the unclean murderer will pollute all the water," or else to have him burned alive. One "huge peasant with a sooty jacket" pushed through the crowd and proposed running Suso through with the pike in his hand, just "as one does to a venomous toad that one impales," and leaving his corpse hanging on a fence for all who pass by to see and curse as a "vile scoundrel." For the rest of the evening, Suso seems to have been shadowed by this fearsome mob, going from house to house begging tearfully for lodging but being "cruelly driven away." Even those who were sympathetic to his plight, weeping bitterly or beating their breasts and holding their hands over their heads in their compassion, did not dare to speak up, "fearing the dreadful rabble would attack them also." Some "kind women" also "would gladly have given him shelter" but "did not dare to do so." Eventually, after Suso had sunk to the ground in fear and exhaustion and uttered a prayer for deliverance to his "heavenly Father," a priest came to his aid, "dragged" him out of the hands of the crowd, and kept him in his house overnight and helped him escape the next morning.

Suso's story is worth dwelling on for a number of reasons: it demonstrates how no one, not even a holy friar with a wide reputation, could be immune from the wrath of a mob convinced it was under threat from the plague in the form of a stranger bearing a sack full of poison. It likewise shows how everyone could be swept along by the tide of fear, even if their consciences or better natures urged them otherwise. Yet it also illustrates how an entire community, headed by the judge, felt itself justified in acting upon its suspicions to head off what it perceived to be a credible threat to its well-being. The trial record compiled by the castellan of Chillon of proceedings in the Savoy mentions that Christians discovered to be in league with the Jews were quartered, hanged, or flayed alive, as happened to three victims at Augst, where he was personally present. These brutal executions, reminiscent of those at Narbonne, suggest that the Jews' accomplices were judged to be guilty of a

treaon-like offence. This much is suggested by the French poet, Guillaume de Machaut, in his *Judgment of the King of Navarre*, written in 1349:

> There was Jewry: shameful,
> Wicked, disloyal,
> That loves nothing good and everything evil,
> That gave and promised so much gold and silver
> To Christian people,
> Who then poisoned rivers and fountains,
> Which were clear and wholesome,
> In several places
> Where many ended their lives;
> For one can testify that those who used them
> Died suddenly enough.

Yet, as the poem suggests, the Jews themselves could be judged guilty of treason and punished accordingly, so that, when not burned alive or "indiscriminately" butchered and slaughtered, chroniclers also reported that they were beheaded, drowned, or "killed by some other means." Machaut testifies to this as well when he writes:

> All the Jews were destroyed,
> Some were hung, others flayed,
> One was drowned, the other was beheaded,
> With an axe or a sword.

Along with cries of "Kill the traitors!" at Tàrrega, all this strongly suggests that people thought of the poisoning, whether committed by Christians or Jews, as a particularly heinous secular crime, not just a religious one.

Finally, we have already seen how in Catalonia and Provence an economic opportunism accompanied the Black Death pogroms, which for obvious reasons was not quite as compelling in the case of poor Christians who were also victimized. In contrast to King Pedro's and Queen Joanna's efforts to secure some kind of financial restitution, the new town council at Strasbourg, according to Fritsche Closener, took what undoubtedly was a more popular course after their pogrom of February 1349: they simply distributed any "cash and belongings" seized from the Jews proportionately among the guilds according to how many members were in each one, whereas "whatever was owed to the Jews was considered paid up, and all pledges and notes which they held were returned to the people who owed them." Heinrich of Herford noted that wherever the Jews were "cruelly and inhumanely annihilated" in Germany, that this was done

> either for the sake of their most abundant riches, which very many men, both nobles and the poor and indigent or also their debtors, wished to usurp … or on account of the poisoning of waters wickedly and maliciously done by them everywhere in the land, as very many assert and common rumor has it.

Herford added that the former motive was also "said with regard to the Templars," which re-emphasizes that the Jews' persecutors were tainted by greed, for it was widely rumored that King Philip IV coveted the wealth of this crusading order (which doubled as international bankers) for his depleted treasury when he ordered the arrest of all its members in France in 1307. In his reissue of *Sicut Judeis* of October 1, 1348, Pope Clement likewise assumed the obvious behind this economic aspect to the pogroms: "And it is the assertion of many," he said, "that some of these Christians are chasing after their own profit and are blinded by greed in getting rid of the Jews, because they owe great sums of money to them."

Nevertheless, as I have already indicated, I do not believe that this pecuniary motive was the main one behind the pogroms: recent research indicates, for example, that Jewish moneylending where pogroms later occurred was mainly patronized by noble creditors in the countryside rather than the poor and middle-class inhabitants of the cities, and the urban elites who mainly carried out the pogroms do not, by and large, seem to have benefitted economically from their actions. Neither do I believe that this economic motive, such as it is, can be so easily separated from the well-poisoning charge, as both Herford and the pope imply. If poor men were rumored to have been bribed into poisoning fellow Christians, the mobs who ransacked houses as they rampaged through the Jewish quarter may not have seen themselves as greedy despoilers but actually may have been convinced that they were justified in appropriating the Jews' money and other means by which they carried out their wicked designs.

The Jew as a poisoner of Christians is not a new stereotype: it can be traced back at least as far as the thirteenth century, when secular and ecclesiastical authorities in both France and Spain began legislating against Jewish doctors prescribing medicines or potions for Christian patients, apparently on the grounds that they might poison them, although such legislation seems to have had little practical effect. However, the only large-scale pogrom to occur on the basis of a well-poisoning charge before the Black Death—the so-called "Leper's Plot" of 1321 that was focused primarily in the south of France and the kingdom of Aragon in Spain—demonstrates two things: (1) such a pogrom did not necessarily have to target religious out-groups, such as Jews or Muslims, and (2) such a pogrom was intrinsically bound up with medieval conceptions of disease.

As the name obviously implies, the Leper's Plot mainly targeted lepers when it first broke out in Languedoc in February 1321. Confessions subsequently extracted under torture were to prove remarkably similar to those made by vagabonds and Jews some two and a half decades later in 1348: that bags of powdered poison were received from superiors in the leprosaria with orders to deposit them "in the fountains, waters, and rivers of diverse areas." Although Jews were later attacked as alleged conspirators behind the plot and eventually exiled from the kingdom of France, these attacks apparently were of more limited extent and were more nebulous in their details than those against the lepers, and the king was even more reluctant to give his legal imprimatur to what had already been achieved by the mob. In Aragon, where the Leper's Plot finally took hold by the next summer, the main targets aside from lepers were foreigners and victims of local grudges; attempts to link Jews or Muslims to the poison accusation were few and far between and invariably rejected by the crown.

Even if famine and its attendant ills in the north had little to no impact, the plot did nonetheless revolve around the concept of leprosy as both a physically venomous disease and "a disease of the soul," signifying a sinful corruption of one's morals to match the corruption of one's blood or humors. The concept of leprosy as contagious was first introduced to Spain during the thirteenth century, whereas its metaphorical implications go back even further, to the seventh-century encyclopedic work of Isidore of Seville, the *Etymologiae*, which also argues for a connection between lepers and Jews. Even though the events of 1321 were isolated incidents not to be repeated until the arrival of the Black Death, the fact that poisoning charges and Jewish pogroms did recur in roughly the same areas strongly suggests that a memory of the precedents of 1321, however dim, may have played a factor in what happened in 1348.

The Jewish pogroms that occurred early in the Black Death in Catalonia are nonetheless taken to be an exception to the pattern of well poisoning being ascribed to the Jews. David Nirenberg has argued forcefully that attacks upon the Jews here were simply an eruption during the plague of an ongoing, normally low-level status quo of violence that usually manifested itself every year during Holy Week processions commemorating Christ's betrayal and crucifixion (for which the Jews were held to be at least partly responsible), when Christians would typically run riot through the Jewish *call* or quarter. This "sacred violence," Nirenberg argues, had two faces: though obviously indicative of some strong underlying hostilities between Christians and Jews, it also was, paradoxically, essential to maintaining the *convivencia*, or tolerant "living together," of—by this stage—a Christian majority with Jewish and Muslim minority groups that made up the unique, multi-ethnic society of medieval Spain. By periodically acting out such violence as a kind of safety valve for its latent antagonism toward the Jews, the Christian majority was able to keep the body politic of *convivencia* healthy, and the acting out should not necessarily be taken as a sign that it was becoming a progressively intolerant or "persecuting" society.

As well poisoning is not specifically mentioned by the crown of Aragon in the aftermath of the pogroms, as we have seen with King Pedro IV's order to recover the Jews' debt instruments in Tàrrega, Nirenberg interprets the Catalonian massacres as exclusively motivated by Christians' sense of their own guilt and sin in tolerating such "deicides" as the Jews in their midst, for which they are being punished, as all sinful people are, by God in the form of the plague; instead of being a straightforward instance of a majority scapegoating the minority for its misfortunes, this would then be a case of the majority scapegoating itself, using the minority to mediate its atonement. Among other evidence that he marshals in support of his argument, Nirenberg cites a papal bull of protection for the Jews of Aragon dated 1356, which was being granted, it said, because

> Christians without any reason injure, harass, stone, and even kill Jews living in the said realms and lands, saying that because of the sins of the Jews come mortalities [and] shortages of grain, and committing the said evils against the Jews in order that the said pestilences might cease.

This seems to correspond with a *takkanoth* or accord drawn up by leaders of the Jewish communities of Catalonia and Valencia in 1354, in which, with the king's blessing, they resolved to seek a bull of protection from the pope that was eventually granted two years

later. In it, the Jews themselves allege that their Christian neighbors, "on the day when any plague or famine has occurred, make the earth tremble with their cry: 'All this is happening because of the sins of Jacob [Israel]; let us destroy this nation, let's kill them!'"

I still contend, however, that accusations or suspicions of poisoning played a role in the Jewish pogroms of Catalonia during the Black Death, even if it was only the spark that ignited the pogroms into something more than the ordinary riots during Holy Week (which in any case ended in 1348 on April 19, well before the pogroms started in Catalonia). Christians here were certainly being made aware from various sources that human poisoning of water and food was a plausible cause of the plague invading their lands. Aside from the fact that municipal authorities in Narbonne and Carcassonne were keeping their colleagues in Gerona and Rousillon up to date on their trials, which anticipates the chain reaction of persecutions spread by word of mouth in Switzerland and Germany, other lines of communication seem to have been open, such as between doctors in the respective regions. For example, Jacme d'Agramont, the Lérida physician who published a preservative regimen against the plague in his native Catalan dialect on April 24, 1348, shortly before he himself was to die of the disease, had somehow heard of the poison accusations against the poor in Languedoc, because in the same breath as he mentions the "many deaths" from the pestilence there, he points out that: "Another cause from which plague and pestilence may come is from wicked men, children of the devil, who with venoms and diverse poisons corrupt the foodstuffs with evil skill and malevolent industry." The "barony of Montpellier," which is one of the regions Agramont lists as already affected by plague—in addition to Collioure in Rousillon, Carcassonne and Narbonne in Languedoc, and "Avignon and the whole of Provence"—was at this time controlled by the crown of Aragon until James III of Mallorca sold it to King Philip VI of France in 1349. Therefore, it is quite likely that physicians at the medical school of Montpellier, such as Alfonso de Córdoba who, as we have seen, was a great champion of the explanation of plague as caused by the human agency of poisoning, were in communication with their colleagues in Catalonia. Agramont seems to adopt a position similar to André Benedict's in that he views human poisoning as a concurrent, but at the same time separate and distinct, cause alongside the more usual explanations of plague, such as that "it is sent by God because of our sins," the conjunction of the planets, corruption of the air from unburied dead bodies and earthquakes, and so on.

Nirenberg claims that the "argument from silence" with regard to the Aragon crown's not making a connection between poisoning or the plague and the Jewish pogroms in Catalonia is "stronger than it may seem," because otherwise it was very aware from all the foregoing sources that a well-poisoning charge could be brought against the Jews. However, if we are to be persuaded by this argument from silence in the case of Catalonia, we must be equally so in that of Toulon and elsewhere in Provence, where we have seen very similar types of royal administrative records describe Jewish pogroms there also in vague terms that omit any reference to the plague. Yet the pogrom at Toulon was bracketed, in both time and space, by trials for poisoning whose outcomes, like the alleged poisons themselves, were disseminated far and wide. Although the pogrom at Toulon occurred on Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, which would exactly fit Nirenberg's paradigm, we have also seen that it was a planned affair, quite unlike the spontaneous massacre that occurred on May 17 in Barcelona, where thatch from the wall surrounding the Jewish quarter fell onto a funeral procession, whose incensed members then began inciting a riot against the Jews

in retaliation. It is very hard to believe that in Lérida and Gerona at least, where pogroms were said to have occurred and where citizens were directly informed by Agramont and Benedict, respectively, about the possibility of poisoning during the plague, the common run of people would have been unaffected by such rumors when attacking the Jews. That they were guilty of sin and being punished for tolerating their Jews seems an awfully abstract concept to incite their rage. Couldn't the "sins of Jacob" and the "sins of the Jews," cited in the Jews' petition and the papal bull of protection in the aftermath of the plague, equally well refer to their supposed plot to annihilate Christianity by poisoning in fulfillment of their astrologers' predictions, which Jews hesitated to state explicitly because it seemed so plausible to Christians? For that matter, couldn't royal authorities in Aragon and Provence have omitted to mention plague or poisoning because this would have weakened their case for indemnification, as perpetrators may have justified their financial depredations of the Jews on those grounds? There is one final piece of evidence that Nirenberg does not consider: the Strasbourg chronicler, Mathias of Neuenburg, states in the course of describing his own city's pogrom against the Jews that:

> And all the Jews were found to have committed some kind of evil, even in Spain, where an assembly [córtes] was convened not long ago concerning these poisonings and also concerning the slaughter of many boys, counterfeit letters and money, theft, and many other matters which were an offense to his most high majesty [King Pedro IV of Aragon].

It may well be that Neuenburg was simply projecting what happened in Strasbourg onto Spain (although he cites other business that seems unrelated to the Jews or poisoning), but it may also be that he had access to sources we don't know about, especially because Strasbourg at this time was soliciting information from anywhere that had taken actions against the Jews.

Even if Nirenberg is right about the particular dynamics of Christian–Jewish violence in Spain, I do not believe that his model has any validity (if such was his intent) in helping us to understand Jewish pogroms that took place elsewhere during the Black Death, not even when massacres happened to coincide with Sundays and holy days. Quite the contrary, in Strasbourg and parts of Germany, I believe that the exact opposite of what Nirenberg describes in Spain in fact occurred, owing to the timing of the pogroms there relative to when the plague actually arrived. At Strasbourg, for instance, the massive pogrom that wiped out the Jewish ghetto took place in February 1349, but then five months later, plague struck the city in early July, around the same time as the Flagellants came to town. Similar timings may have operated in other parts of the German Empire—such as Stuttgart, Cologne, and Nuremberg—owing to the fact that the plague's entry into most of Germany along its borders with France, Switzerland, and Austria was delayed by the onset of winter in 1348–49. Indeed, much of the country, especially to the north and east, was not to experience the Black Death's presence until 1350. What, then, would citizens think when the plague arrived even after they had gotten rid of all their Jews? Could this not be the sin for which they believed they were being punished in the form of the plague (especially when the pope, and indeed all of Church tradition going back to Augustine, had urged their

preservation)? Could not the Flagellants' popularity in areas where they coincided with the plague in fact owe, at least in part, to people's guilt over what they did to the Jews?

Konrad of Megenberg suggests as much in his spirited and comprehensive defense of the Jews against the charge that they poisoned wells during the Black Death. Megenberg was by no means the only author writing about the plague who was sympathetic to the Jews: others who came to their defense and thought the charge unlikely were Heinrich of Herford, Jean de Venette in Paris and, of course, Pope Clement VI. Clement, as we saw, pointed to the fact that Jews were dying in numbers equal to those of Christians; Venette noted that other causes, such as "the will of God or corrupt humors and the badness of air and earth," must have been responsible for "so great a plague" that "killed so many people"; Herford observed the erratic spread of plague, like a chessplayer, even "to places that were not commonly accessible by foreigners, where [the pestilence] was said not to [be able to] reach [and] which should have been nearly untainted by poison."To these, Megenberg added perhaps the most persuasive argument of all, that even when people purified or blocked up their springs and wells and used only freshly flowing water, as people living in Bavaria along the Danube did, and "even after all the Jews in many places have been killed and completely driven out for nearly two years prior, the Death now first strikes these same places with a strong hand and [then] powerfully conquers the men who remain there," as happened in Nuremberg and its environs in Swabia. Moreover, among the few Jewish communities that remained, such as in Vienna or Ratisbon in Bavaria (where they were protected by Duke Albert II and Emperor Charles IV), they "died in droves from the same exact cause of this common mortality."

Perhaps arguments such as this persuaded people of the futility of scapegoating Jews during times of plague, for subsequently pogroms rarely coincided with outbreaks of the disease down through to the end of the Middle Ages, with the exception of a massacre in Kraków in Poland in 1360, when the plague seems to have struck here for the first time. Indeed, even in Spain with its endemic sectarian violence, Jews were actually to collaborate with Christians in trying to ward off later recurrences of the Black Death, such as when the Jews of Seville marched alongside Christians in a procession to intercede with God to halt a plague there in 1449. In many areas where they were massacred during the Black Death, Jews were also invited back to resettle on favorable terms within a decade or so of the pogroms, as happened at Augsburg, Neuberg, Speyer, Mainz, and the territories of Bavaria, Alsace, and Swabia.

Yet even so, contemporary defenders of the Jews did not provide a completely unqualified brief against the poisoning charge. We have already seen how Pope Clement left the door ajar for further persecutions should these be done in a legally acceptable manner. Likewise Venette, although subscribing to other causes of plague, admitted that "perhaps such poisonings, where they did occur, were a contributory factor." And Megenberg emphasized just before making his elaborate defense of the Jews in *De Mortalitate in Alamannia* that "the Jewish people are justly detested by us Christians in accordance with the fundamentals of the Catholic faith…which they [the Jews] stubbornly deny." Along with plenty of medical authorities on the plague, he did not deny the conceptual possibility of poisoning, as this could happen naturally, even if particular circumstances were not quite right for human agency. Elsewhere, in his *Buch der Natur* and *Planctus Ecclesiae in Germaniam* (*Lament over the Church in Germany*), Megenberg's main argument against the poison accusation was that it

could lead to unrest and unleash mob violence; this also would ultimately prove ineffective in protecting the Jews, as was demonstrated in the case of Cologne.

Market regulations adopted by many towns that forbade Jews from touching foodstuffs on display in public places seemed, at least implicitly, to keep suspicions of poisoning against the Jews alive down to the early modern period. The same could also be said of secular and ecclesiastical legislation that regulated or even banned Jewish physicians from treating and prescribing medicines for Christian patients, where fear of poisoning was made more explicit. For example, a Provençal law enacted during the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1349–50 specified "that a Jewish surgeon ought to taste of the wine he is giving to the sick," in case the surgeon was trying to prolong the sickness through an "intemperate consumption of wine." This was to be done in spite of the apparent Jewish custom "of not drinking among Christians," which nonetheless was something that was asserted to be not forbidden by the "written Jewish law." Yet these regulations were often relaxed or even set aside altogether, as happened in Avignon in 1341, owing to the shortage of trained physicians available to tend to all the sick. This held true down to the fifteenth century, when papal dispensations were granted to Jewish physicians to practice among Christians even as popular preachers were inciting municipalities in Italy to expel them.

Meanwhile, the Wrocław astrologer and physician Heinrich Ribbeniz, in his plague treatise of 1370, continued to champion the human agency of poisoning as one of "the chief causes of pestilences" but did so in a way that broke dramatically with the position of earlier, like-minded colleagues, such as Córdoba and Agramont. Instead of arguing that concurrent natural and human sources of the plague operated independently, Ribbeniz believed that they were casually linked, which only occurred during a "maximum conjunction" of Saturn and Jupiter that came around every 90 years. Such a conjunction was actually happening now or would shortly do so, he said, which seems to have led him to predict that an epidemic of bubonic plague would befall Wrocław from the autumn of 1371 until early 1372. Among the "many effects" produced by this conjunction's "impressions on these lower parts" was a greater propensity of men to "sin against their gods," such as by making war and, apparently, by poisoning their fellow men. To prove his point, he cited the Jews of Milan, whom he claimed knew "of a mountain lying near the city" on which "there grows an herb which is called *napellus* (monkshood), and it is the worst poison among all poisons, and it kills a man in an instant." This was why, he said, that the citizens of Milan do not pasture their animals on the mountain nor "even permit the Jews to go to this mountain, in order that they may not acquire for themselves this herb and perchance kill the whole world, or at least many Christians, with this poisonous herb." It should be noted that, like Kraków, Milan seems to have gotten off lightly during the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1348: according to the Sienese chronicler, Agnolo di Tura, when the plague first entered the city, authorities resorted to drastic quarantine measures, including walling three families in their homes and passing food to them until they either survived or died. If both Ribbeniz and Tura are to be believed, the Milanese were convinced that human ingenuity and resourcefulness could both start and end a plague.

Yet plenty of other doctors, including those of the Montpellier school, whom we have seen championed the idea of plague acting like a poison inside the body, followed in the footsteps of their illustrious colleague, Gui de Chauliac, in pooh-poohing the notion that Jews were responsible for the disease. Writing in 1363 and reflecting upon the "great

mortality" he lived through in 1348, Chauliac, after raising the poison accusation against the Jews, firmly rejected it, asserting that "regardless of what people might say," the true cause of the plague was both the "universal active cause" of the planetary conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars, which had been propounded by the medical faculty of the University of Paris, and a "particular, passive one," in which some individual bodies were simply more disposed to receiving the disease, among whom Chauliac counted "the common people, laborers, and those who lived evil lives." It should be no surprise that the Jewish physician, Rabbi Isaac ben Todros, also writing from Avignon, should strongly defend his fellow Jews from any hint of causing the plague in his treatise of 1376. Having had the experience of just living through a plague in 1373, he stated that his "nation" was distinguished, if anything, by being among the "first and foremost" to receive the "pestilential mark" and the "mighty and all-inclusive blow" from God in the form of the plague, for "the suffering started with them [the Jews] and after them the Christians." If plague does indeed come from "the arrangement of the stars" and the "celestial movements," the Jews would also be the first and most to suffer, because the recent epidemic "resulted from the conjunction of Saturn and Mars" in Aquarius, and of the various dominions that planets have over the nations here on earth, Saturn rules over the Jews "and over the poor and the lowly and over all things that are scorned and belittled." This opinion was widely shared at the time by other, Christian physicians and astrologers: for example, Simon of Corvino called the Jewish law the law of Saturn, and he described the poor as "Saturn's throng" who were so prone to dying of plague that "for such men life is a [kind of] death."

The Montpellier-educated papal physician, Raymond Chalin de Vinario, concurred with Todros when writing in 1382 that not only were the Jews equally prone to die of plague, they were more likely to do so: he cited his own statistic that "one out of [every] five Jews passed away, but among Christians not one [out of five] died, the reason for which is that Jews were infected more forcefully than Christians." However, Vinario explained this as owing to the fact that, like the "common folk" or the poor and the Spaniards, Jews "lived uncleanly," many of whom were gluttonous in their eating and wine-drinking habits. However, if medieval Christians also believed that sinful behavior brought on disease as a form of God's punishment, it could be argued that Vinario's defense of the Jews could equally well make them a scapegoat for plague as much as its victims; however Vinario, like Chauliac, does not seem to be making any moral judgments on plague's victims but simply describing what he regarded as the medical fact of who was most disposed to the disease. Nonetheless, other medical authorities supported Vinario in characterizing the Jews as more susceptible to plague. An anonymous fourteenth-century German plague regimen lists Jews as among those of weak constitution—to also include infants, those suffering from other diseases such as phthisis and dropsy, people "who persist in their drunkenness," and menstruating women and others who bleed copiously—who should not be phlebotomized during a plague.

During the fifteenth century, defense of the Jews from the well-poisoning charge continued with the likes of John of Saxony, who seems to have studied or practiced at Montpellier for a time. He lists as his seventh reason why people fail to preserve themselves during a plague the fact that they abstain from drinking water, which "men cannot go without on a daily basis," owing to "a foolish presumption concerning wells and waters poisoned by the Jews and others." However, this presumption, even if foolish, evidently still enjoyed a

certain amount of currency for John of Saxony to be responding to it. Nonetheless, the Lübeck doctor writing in 1411, in the midst of his discussion of various proofs of how plague acts like a poison, seems to view associating the Jews with plague poisoning a thing of the past, for his only source for this accusation is Gui de Chauliac's *Great Surgery*, in which he read that "the Jews had been at one time defamed of having poisoned Christians, when there was that first great pestilence [of 1348]."

The one contrarian note struck at this time was by a German professor of medicine in Paris, Primus of Görlitz, who in c. 1464 argued, in the first part of his treatise that addressed certain "problems" or questions "of much speculation" about the plague, that "Jews die less than Christians" owing to the fact that "they don't expose themselves [as much] to the air morning and evening nor walk around as often in the outside air, which is worse during a pestilential time [and] when the stars exert bad influences." In addition, he said, "the Jews are Saturnine, the complexion of which planet is cool and dry, the opposite to [what gives rise to] pestilential disease, and thus the Jews are more resistant and less susceptible to this infected air and die less." This directly contradicted what previous authorities, such as Corvino and Vinario, were saying during the fourteenth century, although Vinario did admit that "a melancholic temperament or complexion [i.e., cool and dry] suffers least" from a pestilence "because it is most resistant to putrefaction," but he omitted to mention whether he considered the Jews to be of this same complexion.

However, contradictions abound even in Görlitz's own treatise, for in the first of his questions or problems he asserts that the corrupt air spreading the plague does so by "a certain poisonous quality caused in the air" rather than that the air "is infected in any of its primary qualities," which would seem to make human complexions irrelevant. Indeed, Görlitz says as much, for he notes that very often men die "in this mortality," as they have in the past, "within the third or fourth day" of the onset of symptoms, whereas many patients who "have great heat" are now seen to "nonetheless live for a long time after." Moreover, "many die by cohabitating with the sick, who do not cool down or heat up," whereas other diseases, such as apoplexy, have a "poisonous cause" that has nothing to do with "great heat or coolness." Nor does Görlitz seem to agree with late fifteenth-century Jewish chroniclers that the ability to avoid plague is evidence of cultural superiority, for he notes that "pestilential air" tends to corrupt the "humors and vital spirits" of men more than "brute animals," because the former are "finer and clearer, for which reason they are more disposed to receiving the aforesaid infection of the air." Yet he also admits that this could be because "something is a poison to one individual species and not to others, like it is said that *napellus* is a poison to men and is food to thrushes." If so, this raises the possibility that Jews poisoned Christians knowing they would better survive the resulting plague. However, nowhere does Görlitz actually state this; instead, despite his adherence to Avicenna, he ascribes a higher cause to plague, such as the conjunction of the planets, in which he defers to the "doctrine of astrologers." Indeed, it was the "conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn" in the sign of Pisces that occurred in March of 1464 or 1465, forecast by the "aforementioned famous astrologers," that Görlitz saw as responsible for why the current pestilence "reigns more in the north than in another part" of Europe. It is by no means certain, therefore, that Görlitz's speculations are evidence of a "heightened anti-Semitism in the fifteenth century," as the historian Séraphine Guerchberg wishes to interpret them, nor that he is allegedly trying "to deprive the defenders of the Jews of their most plausible

argument." The professor's own argument is too convoluted and conflicted to come down clearly one way or another.

Whatever legacy doctors of the Middle Ages left with regard to attitudes toward the Jews, the idea that men could be poisoned by the plague was not to be denied, for as a concept, poison was ideally suited to the way plague seemed to behave, killing everyone regardless of status or complexion and striking at a distance or in delayed fashion through its occult or magical properties. As John of Tornamira states in his treatise, *Concerning Fevers*, "poison is a matter of the most horrible quality." And even as accusations against the Jews or the poor died out with the first wave of the Black Death, new scapegoats emerged in the form of witches to serve the poison conspiracy during the late Middle Ages, as the historian Carlo Ginzburg observes. Such a transition was already being suggested from the very beginning of the Jewish pogroms: at the trial at Chillon in 1348, it was rumored that the poison used by Balavigny and others was composed of spiders, frogs, lizards, human flesh, the hearts of Christians, and host wafers. The Franciscan friar Hermann Gigas reported in 1349 that not only were Jews alleged to be attempting "to destroy all of Christianity" by poisoning "wells and springs everywhere" but that many had confessed under torture "that they bred spiders and toads in pots and pans"; likewise the World Chronicler of Cologne charged that "Jews wished to extinguish all of Christendom through their poisons of frogs and spiders mixed into oil and cheese." Such accusations are fairly typical of the kind of conspiracies imagined during the coming witch-hunt. Pope Clement recorded as well that Jews accused of poisoning in 1348 were "said to be in league with the devil," a central tenet of the witch conspiracy. This connection between Jews and witches continued into the fifteenth century: Among the "sorceries" (*sortilegia*) with which the Jews of Chambéry were accused in 1466 was a very bizarre incident that took place on July 6, when two Jewesses and a "tall, thin black Jew having a large and fine nose" allegedly attempted to sacrifice by fire a Christian serving woman, all the while urged on by a talking monster lying on a straw-laden litter accompanied by two fat toads; meanwhile, their accomplices, apparently Christian women and children, went around town carrying a "very badly made" cross along with buckets of water and stones, which they were said to be throwing at people, all the while chanting "rat, rat, rat!"

Charges that witches magically conspired with the aid of demons or the devil to inflict disease or illnesses upon their victims occur in the last two decades of the fourteenth century and then in almost every decade of the fifteenth, becoming more and more frequent as the Middle Ages comes to a close. These charges never mention a specific disease, such as plague, and rarely do they associate the witches' activities with a known historical outbreak of an epidemic, as was also true in the case of accusations related to famine and bad weather. Yet sometimes the means by which witches were alleged to be inflicting illnesses is highly reminiscent of the well-poisoning accusations against Jews during the Black Death. For instance, around 1460 in the Lyonnais in France, an unspecified number of accused witches were tried by an ecclesiastical court on 30 counts of alleged diabolism and sorcery, among which was that they received "powders made up by demons through [wicked] artifice, which they secretly sprinkled into food or drink [and] caused diverse and grave infirmities, which indeed frequently inflicted deadly and very long lasting illnesses."

Usually, witches seem to have been charged with targeting only specific individuals with their magical poisonings, as was the case with one Antonia who, in 1477 before the French

Inquisition at Villars-Chabod, confessed after two turns at the strappado that she used an ointment given to her by a demon "for doling out infirmities" to sicken the four-year-old daughter of Louis Fabri of Filliez merely by touching her on the hand with the ointment, after which the victim came down with a "sudden infirmity" in which she languished for 15 days and from which she allegedly died six years later, all because "Louis asked the accused to pay for a certain dowry." Antonia also confessed to receiving "powders made up from the bones and intestines of boys [exhumed from cemeteries] in order to dole out *maleficia* and infirmities to persons and animals." Many of the women so accused may have been practicing healers, as was the case with Maria "la Medica," or "Doctress," who was tried as a witch before the Italian Inquisition in 1480 in Brescia. She confessed to worshipping the devil, whom she called "Lucibel," and making a pact with him to magically cure diseases. As medical cures did not always work, as we have seen in the case of plague doctors, Maria must have faced the ever-present danger of being accused of both killing her patients and healing them. Relative to other witches, she got off lightly with only life imprisonment, instead of death at the stake. This kind of accusation could also be leveled against Jewish healers and physicians: during a witch-hunt in the Dauphiné in 1433, a Jewish doctor named Abraham, who converted to Christianity and took the name of Jean of St. Nicholas, was tried and burned at the stake for, among other crimes, poisoning patients with a toxic herb called *saragalla* while practicing in Apulia in Italy. Moreover, he was induced to confess that "the Jews very much hate Christians and have among their constitutions that their doctors should heal no one, but should kill as many as they can." In 1466 at Chambéry in the Savoy, two Jewesses and a male colleague were accused of giving potions to their patients that either killed them or induced abortions, and a Jewish doctor named Rufus Lentilosus (literally "the red-haired and freckle-faced") was charged with selling fake magical remedies, such as powders made from the head of a dead Christian, which he instructed his gullible patient to dig up from a grave.

In at least two cases during the Middle Ages, witches were believed to have caused wide-ranging epidemics of disease. One is related in an anti-heretical work known as the *Errores Gazariorum* (*Errors of the Cathars*), dating to the late 1430s, which tells of a "synagogue," or witches' assembly, at which members make powders from "the internal parts of children mixed with parts of poisonous animals" that are then "scattered through the air by a member of that society on a cloudy day." All who are touched by the powder "either die or suffer serious and lingering illness," and this is said to be "the reason why in some villages of a region there is great mortality." Except for making the poison out of children, this sounds almost like it was lifted right out of the plague treatise of Alfonso de Córdoba. A deadly, disease-producing ointment was also said to be made from the "fat of children" mixed with "the most poisonous of animals such as serpents, toads, lizards, and spiders," one touch of which alone was said to produce a lingering illness or else immediate death. Then in 1453, in Marmande in southwestern France, about a dozen women were lynched by a mob of hundreds after a "great mortality and epidemic" had descended on the village, from which "many persons died." In a scenario reminiscent of what happened at Metz in the 1450s and 1480s in the context of weather-related incidents there, a "great murmuring" arose "among the people of the said village, saying that the said mortality came about by reason of sorceresses and that in the said village there were many who used the diabolical art of sorcery and made the said people to die."

It all started when two consuls were approached by a fellow villager who accused one Jeanne Canay of being a sorceress on the information of a man from Armagnac. After the magistrates, along with the *bailli* of the village, went and arrested Jeanne, villagers came running to the prison and demanded the apprehension of still more alleged sorceresses. When the three refused this request and retired for the night, a mob of more than 200 took matters into their own hands and carted off 10 or 11 other suspects to join Canay in prison. They also threatened on the morrow to seize Péronne de Benville, the stepmother of one of the consuls, at which point the two magistrates began to turn against the entire proceedings. By then, however, it was too late, for the next day the mob took matters into its own hands and, "without any interlocutory sentence or other preceding information," commenced to torture the women until three of them confessed "that they were sorceresses" and used their art to kill "several infants." They were promptly condemned by the *bailli* and burned; however, he refused to do the same to Benville and Canay, who had retracted their confessions. However, the enraged mob, threatening to put the *bailli* to death, led them off anyway to be burned with the others. Two more women were tortured to death, but the remaining six, who had refused to confess anything, were eventually freed.

For much of the early modern phase of the witch-hunt, plague continued to recur on a regular basis throughout Europe, averaging roughly one epidemic every 13 years between 1535 and 1683, which coincided with the height of the "witch-craze" or panic. Plague's associations with the early modern witch trials developed into the accusation of the "plague spreader," who was believed able to spread the disease through a special ointment or "grease," hence the name *engraisseurs* (literally, "greasers") in French, or *untori* in Italian. Like the pogroms against the Jews during the Black Death, the plague-spreader prosecutions seem to have been an exclusively urban phenomenon: Geneva knew no fewer than three major "conspiracies" of plague spreading that coincided with outbreaks of the disease, in 1530, 1545, and 1571. Here plague spreading could be prosecuted as almost an entirely secular crime, as it was in 1530 and 1545, that was allegedly perpetrated mainly by low-level medical personnel who tended to be foreigners hired on a temporary basis to attend patients in specially set up plague hospitals or to disinfect the homes of plague victims. Significantly, these were some of the very people the city relied on to help stop or contain the spread of plague as part of quarantine and sanitation measures that were by now a standard feature of urban responses to plague, using the health boards set up early on in Italy as a model. (With hindsight, not all of these measures were effective, such as the order to kill dogs and cats as potential transmitters of the disease, when in fact they would have helped keep down the rat population.) Yet plague workers were also the ones with the best access to the raw materials of the disease (such as the "plague secretions" or pus) with which to concoct their poisonous grease or powders, which could be done naturally without recourse to magic or devil worship, and they were also the ones in the best position to carry out and benefit from plague-spreading activities. Their alleged motive was likewise completely rational and plausible: the age-old desire for material gain, in this case in the form of gaining access to wealthy households to plunder them of their riches or to persuade authorities to keep them in employment even after the plague was over. Plague spreaders were thus not so much accused of starting or engendering the disease as prolonging it, the exact opposite of what they were hired to do. However, when these accusations were mixed with or subsumed under those of true witchcraft, such as gathering at the sabbath, worshipping the devil, making pacts with

demons to receive potions or poisons, and so on, the prosecutions for plague spreading could approach those of a real panic, ensnaring in its net many more individuals beyond the usual suspects of cleaners, fumigators, and hospital staff. Indeed, all of the rationally plausible elements of the plague-spreader stereotype enumerated earlier began to break down, to be replaced by the more supernatural, religiously-based witch stereotype typical of most trials, which did not necessarily have to be associated with plague. This happened in Geneva in 1571, when 115 people were prosecuted for the crime, and 44 were executed. Plague-spreading conspiracies that tended to be of the latter type also spilled over from Geneva into neighboring territories such as the Suisse Romande, or French-speaking part of Switzerland, the Lyonnais, Piedmont, and Lombardy: a major panic hit Milan in 1630 during an epidemic that wiped out nearly half its population. It was also in Italy that suspicions revived against the Jews as possible plague poisoners (whether intentional or not) who, along with prostitutes, beggars, vagabonds, and other foreigners, were often exiled, sequestered, or forbidden entry to cities on these grounds.

By such means, the poison accusation that started with the Jews and poor transients during the Black Death was allowed to continue and flourish well into the modern period. Is it any wonder that, in the build-up to Nazi Germany's war on the Jews and other minorities as part of its second war on the world, Adolf Hitler should talk of "racially poisoning" Jews in *Mein Kampf*; that a Nazi propaganda film, *Der Ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*), released in 1940, should show images of teeming, "massive hordes" of rats as a voiceover narration compares their spread around the world to that of the Jews, bringing "diseases and plagues" in their wake; that the famous Swedish filmmaker, Ingmar Bergman, should remember part of a childhood upbringing in Germany in 1934 listening to a teacher recite over and over, "*von den Juden vergiftet*" ("poisoned by the Jews"), from the Nazi newspaper, *Der Stürmer*? Can it be any surprise or coincidence that the Zyklon-B gas used to asphyxiate (some would say poison) more than one million victims in the gas chambers of the infamous Auschwitz death camps was originally developed as a pesticide to control vermin (ironically, by a Jewish chemist, Fritz Haber, in the 1920s)? The immense tragedy of the Holocaust in the twentieth century had its origins, however remote, in the fourteenth-century pogroms against Jews and others during the Black Death.

Social and economic impact

Perhaps the most dramatic social impact of the Black Death was its effect on family life. The classic account is by the Florentine author, Giovanni Boccaccio, from the introduction to his *Decameron*. After describing in general terms the various ways in which the people of Florence were reacting to the plague, he turns to the more intimate subject of how fear of the disease led even close family members to abandon each other in the midst of the crisis:

> It was not merely a question of one citizen avoiding another, and of people almost invariably neglecting their neighbors and rarely or never visiting their relatives, addressing them only from a distance; this scourge had implanted so great a terror in the hearts of men and women that brothers abandoned brothers, uncles their nephews, sisters their brothers, and in many cases wives deserted their husbands. But

> even worse, and almost incredible, was the fact that fathers and mothers refused to nurse and assist their own children, as though they did not belong to them.

Judging by the number of times this observation is repeated in some form or another by author after author, this was a nearly universal social response to the Black Death: One finds it, for example, in no less than nine other contemporary Italian chronicles, including those of Boccaccio's fellow Florentines Matteo Villani and Marchionne di Coppo Stefani; in the writings of three residents of Avignon: the letter writer Louis Sanctus, the papal surgeon Gui de Chauliac, and an anonymous biographer of Pope Clement VI; and in the poems by Simon of Corvino and Guillaume de Machaut. Gabriele de Mussis of Piacenza provides an interesting variation on this theme, giving vent perhaps to an authentic cry of the people even as he imaginatively recreates the heartrending last words of the dying as they lay in bed with no one daring to come near them, not family, friends, physician, nor priest:

> Have mercy, have mercy, at least [let me hear] your voice, my friend, for the hand of the Lord has touched me.
>
> O father, why do you desert me? Do not forget that I am seed of your loins.
>
> O mother, where are you? Why are you now cruel to me when yesterday you were kind? You nursed me with the milk of your breasts and carried me in your womb for nine months.
>
> O my children, whom I raised with much sweat and labor, why do you flee?

Husband and wife reached out to each other as they lay in bed, bemoaning their separation as if "by a dissolution of marriage," and even as they breathed their last, the sick still allegedly cried out to anyone who would listen:

> Come close beside me. I'm parched, give me a drink of water, I'm [still] alive. Don't be afraid. Perhaps I'll be allowed to live a little longer. Touch me. I beg you, caress my wasted body, for surely now you ought to touch me.

It has been argued that these authors were merely repeating an earlier, classical source on the plague, or perhaps even copying one another. Paul the Deacon, an important fixture in the eighth-century Carolingian Renaissance, wrote of an epidemic that occurred in Italy sometime around 565, during the First Pandemic of plague, when allegedly "sons fled, leaving the corpses of their parents unburied; parents forgetful of their duty abandoned their children in raging fever." Even those who stayed behind out of "longstanding affection" to bury relatives were themselves unburied and unmourned. All this was happening, Paul said, because "common report had it that those who fled would avoid the plague," and so "dwellings were left deserted by their inhabitants, and the dogs only kept house." Likewise, the East Syrian monk John bar Penkayē observed during a plague in North Mesopotamia in 686–87 that "no brother had any pity on his brother, or father on his son; a mother's compassion for her children was cut off." Surviving family members were also compared to dogs and wild animals in terms of how they treated the dead.

However, though an educated humanist like Boccaccio or Louis Sanctus (who was friends with Petrarch) might want to impress readers with their knowledge of ancient

authors, it is hard to see how this would motivate Chauliac in a practical surgical manual. This is not to say that a university-trained physician would not be familiar with the classics: Gentile da Foligno mentions Thucydides in his *Consilia*, and Chauliac himself quotes from Hippocrates, Galen, and Pope Gregory the Great, but they do so only to note how their experience of plague is *different* from that of the ancients.

Whatever the histrionics of the Black Death accounts, they ring true because, as we have seen, it was widely believed that plague was highly contagious (which we now know is not always the case in bubonic plague) and that the best remedy was to flee or avoid the sick, as both doctors and chroniclers noted how once one member of a household came down with the disease, everyone else seemed to follow suit. Boccaccio claimed that the sick were able to transfer their disease not only to other persons but even to their belongings, which then also became contagious, illustrating this with his famous example of two pigs rooting around in the rags of a pauper and then dying on the spot. For Boccaccio and Simon of Corvino, plague was just like a fire in the way it was able to spread by contagion, as if it was "racing through dry or oily substances that happened to be placed within its reach" or as if "lit with straw."

Yet this was also, in a sense, a self-fulfilling prophecy, because one of the most important consequences of this "wholesale desertion of the sick" was that there was a much higher mortality rate from plague than one might expect from modern, controlled studies of the disease, such as during the Third Pandemic. Lack of some form of nursing care probably robbed what chances there were of recovery from bubonic plague, so that, as Boccaccio observed, "a great many people died who would perhaps have survived had they received some assistance," an opinion in which we have seen some plague doctors concur. That only rough, crude men and women were available to attend the sick in their last days, typically only providing the bare necessities, or else to cart away the dead is borne out by Dr. Wu Liande's experience of fighting an outbreak of pneumonic plague in Manchuria in China in 1910–11, when he and his medical team could find only alcoholics and "morally unfit" persons to staff the disinfecting and burial squads. Likewise, there is a similarity between how chroniclers of the Black Death were shocked by their fellow humans' being treated as no better than animals, thrown out into the streets in "countless numbers" like dogs or goats, and Dr. Wu's observation during a second outbreak of pneumonic plague in 1921 that all sorts of people, even the educated and well-to-do, were deposited at the curbside unclaimed to be picked up and incinerated, like so much garbage. Ironically, it was Dr. Wu's anti-plague measures that were helping to create this response, as relatives feared, with good reason, isolation in stark railroad boxcars herded together with other contacts should they report their dead. (Similar fears operated at the height of health boards' anti-plague measures in seventeenth-century Italy.) Complaints about this kind of treatment did not die out with the first outbreak of the Black Death: in November 1463, for instance, Dr. Hermann Schedel "sorrowfully" reported how during a plague at Augsburg, the "common folk" would bring their sick out into the streets and leave them to die in "the open air," after which they would be buried in mass graves piled high with the dead "like barns that are filled up with grain."

The historian Shona Kelly Wray has shown how the entirety of Boccaccio's introduction about the plague in Florence can be read as a "strong, moral critique," not entirely merited, of doctors and their medical advice, which he saw as threatening to tear asunder the bonds

that kept society together, especially in terms of compassion and care of the sick. For Boccaccio, it seems, a "diseased society" was a far graver outcome than a diseased body or soul. Even Boccaccio's description of general human responses to plague reveal the strong influence of doctors' advice: one group isolated themselves, "consuming modest quantities of delicate foods and precious wines and avoiding all excesses"; another went to the opposite extreme and visited one tavern or private house after another, but only "the ones where the conversation was restricted to subjects that were pleasant and entertaining"; a third "steered a middle course" of going abroad but with the precaution of "holding in their hands a posy of flowers or fragrant herbs or one of a wide range of spices which they applied at frequent intervals to their nostrils"; and, of course, there were those who "callously" took the alternative of running away from the plague, "sparing no thought for anyone but themselves" and abandoning "their city, their homes, their relatives, their estates, and their belongings" to seek refuge in the countryside.

Indeed, the whole subsequent collection of a hundred stories, even though they studiously avoid any reference to plague, could be seen as fulfilling to the letter the advice of contemporary Italian doctors with regard to the sixth non-natural in a preservative regimen against plague, the accidents of the soul: Gentile da Foligno, for example, urges that "we be joyful and take delight in melodies, songs, stories (*historiis*), and similar delights," whereas Giovanni della Penna recommends that "people pursue and seek after anything delectable in order to distract the mind from fear of the plague." It is also clear that to Boccaccio, the flight response was in itself a sin capable of bringing down the wrath of God, for who could imagine that he could not "unleash this plague against men for their iniquities irrespective of where they happened to be"? The same point seems to be behind Michele da Piazza's story of Duke Giovanni of Sicily, who wandered through the "wild and uninhabited places" outside of Catania "like a fugitive," hoping in vain to escape the plague, dying at last in April 1348 at a church he built in Sant' Andrea. Interestingly enough, Boccaccio's views also find an echo in the Muslim community, particularly in two fatwas on the plague written by a fourteenth-century Islamic jurist, Ibn Lubb of Grenada, Spain, who likewise lived through the Black Death. Unlike Boccaccio or indeed any other Christian author, Lubb had the advantage of a centuries-old Prophetic tradition in Islam that proscribed anyone fleeing from a plague-stricken area. Yet even so, Lubb had to wrestle with apparent contradictions in the tradition that sometimes condoned flight based on an implicit recognition that the disease was contagious; the most convincing way he found to reconcile these contradictions was to emphasize Muslims' social and moral duty to stay and tend the sick. However, aside from maintaining religious consistency, Lubb, just as much as Boccaccio, was also motivated by a desire to preserve the body politic of his community, whose very fabric holding it together he saw as threatened should his fellow Muslims act upon an open admission of contagion.

Even if Boccaccio and others intend their descriptions of social responses to the plague as mainly morality tales, this does not mean that they may not also have been describing something real. Early Renaissance humanists such as Petrarch and Boccaccio seem to have perceived the need for a new kind of history from an individualistic perspective to chronicle an event on an unprecedented scale such as the Black Death. Boccaccio, after all, does say early on in his introduction:

> It is a remarkable story that I have to relate. And were it not for the fact that I am one of many people who saw it with their own eyes, I would scarcely dare to believe it, let alone commit it to paper, even though I had heard it from a person whose word I could trust.

We can believe him all the more if he really does intend his entire introduction as a social critique of those who were running away from the plague on the advice of their doctors. Complaints of moral failings among those who lived through the plague, whether they survived or did not, such as we find in the accounts of Matteo Villani of Florence, Gilles li Muisis of Tournai, Jean de Venette of Paris, and John of Reading in England, all seem rather stale in light of the fact that these same authors or others make the exact same observations before the plague. Yet this does not mean that contemporaries did not also see things their way, as attested by the moral legislation passed in the midst of plague in several towns, such as Florence or Tournai, that proscribed gambling, prostitution, work on Sundays, and other so-called sins that could potentially invoke God's vengeance.

It is also possible that Boccaccio and others were describing what they saw or were responding to current social issues raised by plague even when their accounts coincide with those by earlier authors. For instance, Boccaccio provides the following commentary at the end of his description of the various general social responses to plague:

> Of the people who held these various opinions, not all of them died. Nor, however, did they all survive. On the contrary, many of each different persuasion fell ill here, there, and everywhere, and having themselves, when they were fit and well, set an example to those who were as yet unaffected, they languished away with virtually no one to nurse them.

This drives home Boccaccio's point that those who abandoned their duties to society to preserve their own health would reap the terrible consequences, which we have seen was a contemporary response to what doctors at the time were prescribing to their patients. Yet it also is remarkably similar to what Paul the Deacon was saying about the plague in Italy in c. 565, except that in Paul's case, this punishment came upon those who *were* doing their duty by their family and friends. If Boccaccio was imitating Paul, he nonetheless tweaked the circumstances in a significant way to suit his own context or to make his moral point.

Despite this "strong moral critique" of those who fled the pestilence that comes from Boccaccio's pen with the very first outbreak of the Black Death, by the end of the Middle Ages, this question was decided very authoritatively and decisively in favor of the medical expediency of flight from the plague. Such a resolution is to be found in a little-known treatise residing in the Vatican Archives in Rome entitled *Quod liceat pestilentiam fugere* ("That it should be permitted to flee the pestilence"). As previously mentioned, this treatise was penned in the second half of the fifteenth century by the bishop of Brescia, Dominico Amanti, who wrote it at the request of James of Pavia, cardinal of St. Grisogono, apparently due to the fact that there was "some matter of doubt" or debate on the question among "learned and eminent men". Although Amanti claims that, by contrast, he is not going to "debate with the opinions of little old ladies and idiots" on the subject, perhaps he hoped that his ideas would trickle down to the common folk as well.

In typical scholastic fashion, Amanti starts out by stating the objections to his preferred position, which is that everyone, even priests, have the right to flee the plague. One possible objection is that flight "is contrary to [Christian] charity, prayers, and good works," an opinion we have already encountered from Boccaccio; another is that it attempts "to alter God's design" which had brought the plague in the first place. Somewhat unrelated to these objections are some positive arguments that Amanti makes for fleeing the pestilence. Animals such as kites and storks are known to flee before the "corrupt air" that brings pestilences, an observation that was a very common one in medical plague treatises and which Amanti seems to have gotten from Avicenna, since he quotes him as the "prince of physicians" who taught men "how to recognize pestilential air from its qualities" so that they could then "apply the most preferable remedy, namely flight." Anyone who would deny to men "what animals do by instinct" is thus "an enemy of nature". He is also apparently an enemy of medicine, for flight, Amanti asserts, is a remedy like any other medication, such as poultices or ointments, and "if you refuse anyone the right to flee, it is also necessary that you refuse to allow anyone to send for a physician or to seek medications, which is absurd." What is more, such an opinion would contradict scripture, although here Amanti quotes from one of the apocrypha (i.e., biblical works outside the canon), namely the Ecclesiasticus attributed to Jesus ben Sirach in c. 180 BCE. (also known as the Book of Sirach). Amanti references the "Honor the physician" passage (38:1-14) that assures the faithful that physicians and their medicines are sanctioned by God since he created them, which again was a popular quotation among medical plague treatises, beginning with the *Consultation* of the Paris medical faculty to the king of France in October 1348. When emphasizing Christians' duty to cherish their body as well as their soul, Amanti draws on not only the bible but also St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and even Cicero.

We have already seen how the second objection, which is quite close to the Muslim interpretation that one should not flee the plague since it comes from God's will, elicits from Amanti an attempt to portray God as not simply a vengeful deity out to reap sinners through the disease, but also a merciful one who provides a remedy in the form of flight. Here again Amanti tries to prove his point with a mixture of both biblical authority and reasoned argument. He draws on Ezekiel 14:21-23, where God promises to spare some of the Hebrews who will "lead forth their sons and daughters" from out of Jerusalem despite its apocalyptic destruction by the sword, famine, "evil beasts," and, of course, the pestilence. On a more philosophical level, Amanti is drawn into a discussion of predestination, so that those who object to flight as pointless since God has already decided one's fate at the hands of the plague are compared to fatalists who would deny any human role to salvation. To flee, on the other hand, is a privilege of one's God-given use of reason and free will, since any reasonable man can see "that corrupt air harms a man and that the disease of the pestilence is contagious". Rather than resign oneself to either damnation or death from the plague, one should avail oneself of any means of saving himself, "since the means by which he ought to do this is his choice, just as if these should be ordained by God." Those who believe that they are predestined for either salvation or damnation might ask themselves, "what is the point of me doing good works," or "what point is there that I should beware of sinning?" But in the same way that God, when he has predestined one for salvation, "has decided to save you in this way, namely by your doing good works," so does God, when "he has decided to deliver you from the pestilence … he has decided that you might be delivered

in this way, namely by fleeing". Although he does not explicitly say it, Amanti here seems to suggesting that his opponents are perilously close to expressing heretical opinions, and obviously he anticipates the Protestant Reformation debates that will emerge just half a century later. Amanti is also not above resorting to ridicule of his opponents as simpletons and fools: those who would stay and face the plague as part of God's design are compared to literalists who interpret the Lord's prayer, "give us this day our daily bread," as meaning they should not work but simply "sit unprepared at table [and wait] for the Lord to send down bread through his angels!"

Finally, the last third of Amanti's treatise is devoted to the charity objection to fleeing the plague. Amanti concedes that "sometimes in many places at this time, a father abandons his son, and brother abandons brother, and a servant abandons his fellow servant: there is no one who [is left] to console a poor soul." This is exactly what chroniclers of the Black Death like Boccaccio were saying more than a century earlier. And like Boccaccio, Amanti admits that this raises a moral issue for Christians: "I confess that charity among many has grown cold, because iniquity has abounded in accordance with the word of the Lord, and I reckon that on account of this pestilences perhaps rage more frequently than in former times." However, Amanti will not go as far as Boccaccio in declaring that fleeing the plague will lead to a breakdown of society, such that, "by us fleeing, hospitals are deserted, alms perish, men remain without doctors, without remedies, without beds, without ointments." If one were to say this, then by the same logic one would have to say that all men must become tillers of the land because we need bread for our food, or that everyone must be a builder because we need houses to live in. Indeed, one would even insist that "all of us clerics should get married, because marriage is necessary for the [propagation of the] human race, [and therefore] for us to make a profession of or to observe chastity, we are acting against charity" (once again shades of the coming Reformation debate here). Like St. Thomas Aquinas, Amanti seems to be implying that a duty incumbent upon the multitude does not imply the same duty upon each individual (*Summa Theologiae*, part two of the second part, question 152, article 2). But he also seems to be rejecting Boccaccio's notion that the needs of the community must trump those of the individual in the case of the plague.

Nonetheless, Amanti does allow for exceptions to his rule that everyone must be permitted to flee the plague: if by fleeing one provides a "pernicious example" to others, whereby they abandon sick neighbors who would otherwise perish or succumb to despair, then it is incumbent upon pastors especially to stay and care for their flock (here Amanti quotes from St. Cyprian's *Pastoral Letters*). But if one can find a substitute to do one's duties for him (as many priests and prelates did who were non-resident in their benefices), then this is not abandonment. In any case, Amanti asserts that "I have not yet seen any prelate taking himself away in this manner unless he is obliged [to do so] out of necessity, and who does not order that his domestic servants be attended to with all due care and diligence should they be infected by this disease." As for visiting the sick, Amanti again assures his fellow clerics that they need only do this under certain conditions, such as if the patient is forsaken by all others or whose case is incurable. Otherwise, Amanti is not about to make himself a martyr: as he says, "I will not search through the houses for anyone who labors under this disease." Amanti thus adopts it as a general rule that fleeing the pestilence is, in and of itself, licit and good; only where the end or circumstance is evil does the act become so. But deciding what these incidental conditions are that can change the essential goodness

of the act is up to the individual, for it "varies in terms of place, time, person, and many other circumstances." Toward the end of his treatise, Amanti turns the whole question of charity on its head, asserting "that it would be against charity to not flee [the plague], namely when there should be no necessity for staying," since prelates would be exposing themselves to mortal danger and "his death would do great damage to God's Church." By this reasoning, fleeing the plague would even be meritorious. The last word is left for St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*), which establishes an order to one's charity: significantly, one's own body takes precedence over one's neighbor's, so that Amanti concludes, "truly, I ought [to have a care] for myself and for my body more than for my neighbor's body."

Amanti's treatise is by far the fullest and most direct treatment on the subject of the moral implications of Christians' flight from the plague. It is remarkable and significant in a number of respects. One is struck, for example, at how tuned in Amanti is to medical plague treatises. While some might consider this a complete capitulation of religion to science, for Amanti it seems to have been simply a matter of compatibility: Christianity was not going to interfere in medicine's fight against the plague. Indeed, for Amanti, those who would oppose flight from the plague not only endanger their own lives and that of others, they potentially pose a sort of proto-Protestant threat to the Church. How far Amanti is from Boccaccio can be seen in his willingness to view flight as something not just to be condoned, but even admired. Whereas for Boccaccio preservation of communal bonds are paramount, for Amanti it is the individual perogative that takes precedence. On this question Christianity also diverges significantly from Islam, which by this time was developing a consensus that denied contagion from the plague, led by the influential plague treatise of the fifteenth-century Egyptian scholar, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī.

Amanti's treatise came at a crucial moment in the development of Europe's policies toward the plague. As already mentioned, it was not until the mid-fifteenth century that permanent health boards began to be set up in northern Italy (with the exception of Milan, which seemed to have one by 1424). While Amanti's treatise surely was not circulated as widely as Boccaccio's *Decameron*, it did have the stamp of authority: it was, after all, solicited by a papal cardinal and authored by an Italian bishop. This indicates that Church authorities were not about to stand in the way of plague controls as these were being implemented on a regular basis at the time Amanti was writing his treatise: measures that included quarantine, setting up of sanitary cordons, disinfection or outright destruction of infected houses and their belongings, isolation of the sick and those deemed contagious in their homes or in *lazarettos* and pesthouses, and so on. This was a very important development, for it meant that such controls could evolve essentially unfettered in Europe, until by the seventeenth century they began to encounter significant resistance, including from the Church itself, owing to their intrusiveness and rigor. This set the stage for a great clash between European colonial powers and their native subjects when the former attempted to impose similar controls during the Third Pandemic of plague that began in Hong Kong and India at the turn of the twentieth century.

In addition to abandonment of family members and flight from the plague, another observation that is a staple of chronicles of the Black Death is the way that funeral customs changed in the wake of the disease. This, too, has its antecedents in ancient sources, such as Thucydides's account of the Plague of Athens in c. 430 BCE and in those of Procopius of

Caesarea and John of Ephesus with regard to the First Pandemic of plague that began in c. 541 CE in the eastern Mediterranean. There is perhaps no more vivid image of the Black Death than Boccaccio's description of how bodies, after being piled up on the streets by neighbors who wanted to be rid of their rotting stench, were borne along on biers of "plain boards" carrying sometimes several members of a family at once and then buried in mass graves "in their hundreds, stowed tier upon tier like ships' cargo, each layer of corpses being covered over with a thin layer of soil till the trench was filled to the top." Equally famous and as often quoted is the account by his fellow Florentine, Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, of how pits dug in churchyards received the bodies of the poor thrown in during the night, whereupon the following morning,

> when a large number of bodies were found in the pit, they took some earth and shoveled it down on top of them; and later others were placed on top of them and then another layer of earth, just as one makes lasagne with layers of pasta and cheese.

These authors were obviously using contemporary images to communicate their shock and horror at how the dead were now being treated with such indifference in light of "the scale of the calamity." However, for sheer shock value, there is nothing to compare with the earlier account of John of Ephesus: after being dragged "like the corpses of dogs" or carried in so many litters that they bumped into each other, some made of sewn mattings as the bodies were so decayed, countless thousands of plague corpes were piled in great heaps at the harbor of Constantinople, where "putrefaction" flowed out their bodies and ran down "into the sea." They were then transported across the Golden Horn to be deposited "like dung" on the north shore of Galata and finally cast into deep pits, each one holding as many as 70,000 corpses, which were pressed into rows like "hay in a loft" or else trampled down by paid workmen "like spoiled grapes" in a winepress, their bodies sinking and immersing in the pus of 5- to 10-day-old corpses underneath. Conversely, there is perhaps comic relief to be found in one chronicle of the Black Death that describes how rows of dead bodies piled up along streets would provide cover for robbers to hide behind to jump out and waylay unsuspecting passers-by.

Even if medieval commentators on plague are indeed indebted to their predecessors, there is still the possibility that they are testifying to universal social responses to disease. Boccaccio's three paradigms of isolation, denial, and moderation that he noticed among Florentine citizens during the Black Death are remarkably similar to the sexual responses of many in the West when awareness of the AIDS crisis first broke in upon the public's consciousness sometime in the mid-1980s. As I recall, having lived through this event myself, some swore off all sex ("virginity vows" having made a comeback back then), others continued to have unprotected intercourse, and the vast majority used condoms or took an AIDS test.

Another universal observation made both then and now is that disease primarily affects the poor. Social stigmatization of plague as a poor man's disease is reflected in plague legislation and controls implemented by permanent health boards set up in many Italian towns beginning in the mid-fifteenth century, which enforced quarantine measures and isolation of the sick in plague hospitals. This was certainly not a new stigma, as the poor were already seen as being more susceptible to plague by chroniclers of the First Pandemic

such as John of Ephesus, and this observation was to be repeated during the Black Death by both doctors and other observers such as Matteo Villani of Florence; however, the stigma was to be considerably strengthened by evolving notions of contagion—that plague could be communicated naturally by the movements of certain groups of people such as prostitutes, beggars, "ruffians," foreigners, and other indigents instead of only through the air—and by the almost self-fulfilling process whereby the poor *were* more likely to be targeted by plague and other, truly communicable diseases such as typhus, smallpox, and influenza as the rich availed themselves of flight from city centers, and plague controls limited the poor's movements and isolated them with other contacts. Concern over unrest and uprisings among the lower orders, such as occurred in Florence during the Revolt of the Ciompi in 1378, also informed many of these plague controls. The continuation and even intensification of health boards' activities in the early modern period, and their revival during the Third Pandemic of plague in India and China at the turn of the twentieth century, when modern governments were now armed with an understanding of the microbial underpinnings of disease, meant that these same social issues raised during the late Middle Ages would also play a role in the modern experience with plague. Conversely, modern social comparisons to the Black Death that do not involve disease tend not to be so illuminating or helpful. For example, the American sociologist J.W. Thompson attempted to compare the psychological reaction of post-plague Europeans to that of his own "Lost Generation" in the aftermath of World War I, but the comparison fails largely because Europeans as a result of the Great War adopted some nihilistic attitudes toward God and religious mores that would be utterly alien to their medieval forebears. Likewise, the historian Norman Cantor imagined how the Black Death was like a modern neutron bomb, which kills large numbers of people but leaves the physical infrastructure intact, yet this analogy fails to convey the insidiousness with which plague, or indeed any disease, can worm its way into the social fabric of society instead of simply assaulting it from the outside.

Social responses to the plague are, of course, intimately tied up with the disease's economic impact. Some chronicle accounts do give us an economic snapshot of what happened in the immediate aftermath of the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1348–49; among the most detailed and revealing commentaries are those by William Dene of Rochester and Henry Knighton of Leicester in England, the latter even giving actual figures of prices and wages. From this, we get the impression that, with the rampant mortality of people, especially among the lower orders of society, wages of agricultural laborers skyrocketed in the wake of shortages of available help, whereas the prices of foodstuffs were depressed, at least initially, by a fall in demand with fewer mouths to feed. In addition to this, landlords were forced to renegotiate customary labor services demanded of their unfree serfs and lower rents for their tenants if they didn't want their properties to stand empty and their fields remain untilled and unharvested, as indeed the manorial records of several ecclesiastical and lay estates in England indicate for the year 1349.

All of these factors should have substantially raised the living standards of the peasantry and placed downward pressure on lords' incomes, leading to dramatic shifts in the social makeup of Europe's population. The historian A.R. Bridbury, for example, compared the economic windfall for Europe's peasantry in the aftermath of the Black Death to "a sort of Marshall aid on a stupendous scale," and Thorold Rogers and William Abel rechristened

the "golden age of the germ" as "the golden age of the laborer," or of the wage worker. And indeed, there is some evidence that, in the words of Ole Benedictow, "the proportion of the poor and destitute that were unable to pay taxes or rents was dramatically reduced in the wake of the Black Death." At Albi and Millau in southern France, this proportion declined from around 42 percent in 1343 to 28 percent in 1357, while those with fortunes of more than 100 livres doubled; in the Ribera region of northeastern Spain, those in poverty fell from 38 percent in 1330 to 23 percent in 1350. In England, some manors, such as Kibworth Harcourt in Leicestershire, show a surge in number of members in tithing lists recording those able to pay frankpledge dues, whereas on other manors such as in Essex, the true mortality of the Black Death may be masked owing to vacancies taken up by unacknowledged new members.

However, this is by no means to suggest that plague was generally welcomed simply as a means of social advancement! Setting aside the very real pain of losing loved ones and acquaintances, the transition from a feudal to a capitalistic economy was painful for some and was not going to be accepted lightly by the vested landholding class. Throughout Europe (with the notable exception of the Low Countries), labor laws passed in the immediate aftermath of the Black Death tried to turn back the economic clock to before the plague. In Italy, Spain, France, and England between 1348 and 1351, fixed wages were assigned for given amounts of work, and those able to work had to consent to be employed at the rates offered. This was being undertaken because of the widely-held perception expressed by the propertied classes in representative assemblies, such as the córtes of Castile in 1351, that lords

> cannot work their estates to produce bread and wine and other things that maintain men … because on the one hand many men and women wander about idle and do not want to work, and because on the other those who do work demand such great prices and salaries and wages, that those who have estates cannot comply, and for this reason, these estates have become deserted and lack laborers.

Complainants such as Henry Knighton or the commons of England in their Statute of Laborers issued in 1351 interpreted such behavior among their inferiors as motivated by the sin of greed, and similar sentiments were expressed by the chroniclers of Florence and even as far away as Egypt, especially with regard to household servants and grave-diggers. In fact, this could almost be considered a standard literary trope about social misbehavior in the aftermath of plague, as mentioned earlier: during the First Pandemic, for example, John of Ephesus retails a couple of stories designed to illustrate how the disease mercilessly punished money grabbing, as it swiftly mowed down all those who attempted to appropriate the possessions of the dead. At the same time, one has to remember that economic opportunism would not have been possible had not at least some landlords been desperate enough to compete with their peers for scarce labor by luring them with inducements in the new economy created by plague. Indeed, Knighton says that not only were workers arrested and imprisoned for taking higher wages in violation of the statute, but also "heavy fines" were assessed upon ecclesiastical lords and gentry who "were giving higher wages to the workers."

Historians have rightly cautioned that one must not generalize overmuch with regard to these laws. There were important regional differences, not only between countries but even within them. For instance, laws in Spain and France concentrated mainly on urban artisans and laborers, whereas those in England, Florence, and Siena focused equally, if not exclusively, on agricultural workers in the countryside. Compared to the conditions and penalties specified in English and French laws, those in Spain and Florence could be quite severe: forcing laborers to work from dawn to dusk without providing any food, or penalizing offenders with exorbitant fines or with corporal punishment and even execution as "rebels." Unlike Florence, Siena adopted from the very beginning an approach that employed the carrot and the stick, attempting to attract immigrants as potential workers by promising tax exemptions for a number of years in exchange. Whereas England and Castile kept reinstating their laws or even increasing their severity in the decades after the first outbreak of the Black Death, Aragon repealed its statutes in 1352, just two years after they were enacted, and Florence abruptly reversed course in 1364, adopting instead Siena's strategy of encouraging peasant migrants to return to the *contado* with an array of inducements including tax exemptions. One might think the city fathers of Florence were simply bowing to the ineluctable logic of market forces, but the motivations behind these labor laws actually were quite complex and not so easily categorized. For example, Florence's about-face in 1364 seems to have been taken primarily out of political rather than economic considerations, as a response to population drains in the mountainous regions of the *contado* bordering on its rivals to the north, which could have hurt both its tax base and military recruitment for the intercity peninsular wars that characterized the Italian scene throughout the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

How effective such labor laws were in re-instating a command economy is hard to determine, as their enforcement likewise seems to have been so variable and is capable of different possibilities of interpretation. In England, court rolls recording cases brought before specially appointed justices of laborers reveal that initially, during the 1350s, "hundreds of thousands" of men and women were tried each year for alleged violations of the statute—about 7,500 laborers were fined in Essex alone in 1352. This has been characterized by some historians, such as Bertha Putnam and E. B. Fryde, as exceptionally "thorough" or "zealous" efforts at enforcement of the Statute of Laborers of 1351. Yet an alternative interpretation is that so many fines were paid because laborers viewed them as a cost of doing business, as the profits to be made from higher than allowed wages was such that, in Chris Given-Wilson's phrase, "there was more to be gained from breaking the law and paying the penalty." Therefore what was regarded by Knighton as a "bloody-minded" disregard of the new laws could have been seen by others as simply good business practices.

The regular reissue of labor laws by the English parliament down to the 1440s traditionally has been interpreted as evidence of an overall failure of the legislation. However, as Given-Wilson has shown, subtle readjustments that were constantly being made had important implications, such as whether to impose national as opposed to local wage rates and prices, whether to fine both the givers and the receivers of higher wages (regardless of Knighton's categorical assertions on this matter), and how to employ the profits from fines as an inducement to local communities to participate in better enforcement of the government's statutes. By these standards, the laws were somewhat successful in being flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances as they arose. For instance, local officials in charge

of enforcing the statutes, such as justices of the peace, were sometimes given leeway to set wages in line with current cost-of-living rates, which included prices that grain and other victuals were fetching on the market. Employers were eventually exempted from being penalized to induce them to present offenders without fear of reprisal. Local communities were also encouraged to provide information about offenders by giving them a financial stake in the enterprise, as any fines collected were set against what those communities had to pay to the central government in the form of taxes. Thus, an entire variety of interest groups in the realm—lords, laborers, taxpayers—had a hand in just how well the labor laws were enforced.

Neither is it clear how other evidence can help us to elucidate the matter of labor law enforcement. The wage "stickiness," or flatness of wages relative to prices, that is recorded by manorial records in England until at least the late 1370s may argue for labor laws having at least some effect, if only to keep wages from rising faster than they did. For example, piece-rates paid to threshers, reapers, and mowers increased by anywhere from 7 to 27 percent during the three decades after the first outbreak of the Black Death, whereas prices jumped by 14 to 44 percent at the same time. Yet this pattern is closely paralleled in the Low Countries, where it persisted for even a decade or two longer, despite the fact that no labor laws were in force there. It should also be pointed out that most wage rates recorded by manorial accounts in England in the aftermath of the Black Death *were* substantially higher than those allowed by statute, indicating that both employers and their workers had no fear of disregarding the perhaps unrealistically low limits set by labor laws. Indeed, in the context of the high inflation during the three decades after 1348–49, the inflexibility of the mandated wage rates can seem quite cruel. When real wages did rise substantially in England and the Low Countries toward the end of the fourteenth century, they did so largely owing to deflationary pressures or declines in the cost of living; in fact, wage rates tended to be less "sticky" during times of price inflation, when it did not benefit workers as much. Thus, it could be argued that monetary policies affecting prices did more to improve the lot of laborers after the Black Death than did the shortage of labor created by disease mortality that supposedly put upward pressure on wages. The charge of idleness leveled against the new labor market in the wake of the Black Death was also just as likely to be a function of factors outside workers' control, such as seasonal availability of work and involuntary unemployment or paid time off: most laborers, in fact, seem to have worked a grueling 12-hour day in summer and 8 hours in the winter.

Nonetheless, the economic historian John Hatcher has pointed to literary evidence suggesting that laborers were compensated by their employers in other, hidden ways besides wages, such as more or better food and drink, gifts of clothing, and free banquets, despite the fact that these forms of compensation are recorded in manorial accounts less frequently after the Black Death than before. Such remuneration would have been even more highly valued at a time when the cost of living was going up. During the 1370s, for example, both William Langland and John Gower were complaining of peasants' higher expectations in the aftermath of the Black Death. In his poem *Piers Plowman*, Langland introduces his allegorical figure of "Waster" as a symbol of the typically lazy, hard-to-please peasant:

> Then would Waster not work, but would wander about,
> Nor beggar eat bread wherein beans had a part,

But flour of the finest, and wheat of the whitest;
Nor halfpenny-ale would in any wise drink,
But the best and the brownest the borough could sell.
Then laborers landless, that lived by their hands,
Would deign not to dine upon worts a day old;
No penny-ale pleased them, no piece of good bacon,
Only fresh flesh or fish, well fried or well baked,
Ever hot and still hotter, to heat well their maw.

John Gower, a member of the gentry class who owned manors in Kent, seems to speak from experience when he says:

> These are the people who behave basely within the house, as long as your food and drink last. Because such a man is hired as a member of your household, he scorns all ordinary food. He grumbles steadily that everything salted is harmful, and that he doesn't like cooked foods much, unless you give him some roast. Neither weak beer nor cider is of any use to him, and he will not return tomorrow unless you provide something better.

The recurring mortalities of the Black Death throughout the later Middle Ages undoubtedly meant that over the long term, the economic scales would continue to be heavily weighted in favor of workers as their labor remained scarce. The situation is ably summed up by a commons' petition of 1376 for more rigorous enforcement in England of the labor laws:

> … although various ordinances and statutes have been made in several parliaments to punish laborers, artificers and other servants, yet these have continued subtly and by great malice aforethought, to escape the penalty of the said ordinances and statutes. As soon as their masters accuse them of bad service, or wish to pay them for their labor according to the form of the statutes, they take flight and suddenly leave their employment and district, going from county to county, hundred to hundred, and vill to vill, in places strange and unknown to their masters … for they are taken into service immediately in new places, at such dear wages that example and encouragement is afforded to all servants to depart into fresh places, and go from master to master as soon as they are displeased about any matter. For fear of such flights, the commons now dare not challenge or offend their servants, but give them whatever they wish to ask, in spite of the statutes and ordinances to the contrary.

However, in many cases, higher expectations of the peasantry must also have been thwarted, as the ultimately unsuccessful struggle of some serfs at Wawne in Yorkshire to win their freedom from ownership by the monks of Meaux Abbey in 1358 demonstrates. We already have seen how labor laws were enforced to some degree by playing off one element of a community against the other to acquire information about offenders. The tensions thus created in medieval English society may have finally erupted in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, when thousands of rebels from Essex and Kent converged on London to demand

at Smithfield on June 15, in the words of their leader, Wat Tyler, "that there should be no more villeins in England, and no serfdom nor villeinage but that all men should be free and of one condition." At a stroke, this would have done away with the entire manorial system that had sustained the medieval social hierarchy for centuries. The mixed social makeup of the rebels may reflect the variety of men caught up in the tensions created by the effort to maintain this system in spite of the rapidly evolving circumstances effected by the Black Death. Conversely, some historians, such as Zvi Razi and Sam Cohn, argue that it was not so much economic motives as primarily a political program that was behind most of Europe's late medieval popular revolts, including the English Rising of 1381. Here it was a "lust for liberty" and desire for a greater voice in government that was said to be motivating an unfree peasantry and marginalized urban proletariat, whose social and political aspirations in the wake of the plague were being suppressed by a reactionary aristocracy. Once again, the Black Death is held to have sown the seeds of revolt, in this case by planting in the minds of those revolting peasants "a new self-confidence" and, in Cohn's words, a "belief in the efficacy of social action to change current affairs."

The economic winners and losers of the Black Death are, therefore, not so easy to discern, nor to disentangle from other factors. What "golden age" laborers enjoyed was not to be realized until some decades after the first onslaught of plague, and even if labor legislation was ultimately ineffective, it did give national governments and ruling elites sweeping powers that their subject citizenry were to rue later. Plague's economic impact could also vary considerably in town versus the country and from nation to nation. Whereas England may have been well on its way to becoming a fully capitalistic society by 1400, at which time peasant demands that had been temporarily thwarted in 1381 were finally being realized, one has to remember that the situation could be quite different elsewhere in Europe. In Catalonia in Spain, for example, old rights of *ius maletractandi* (literally, "the right of mistreatment") and high redemption prices enabled lords to successfully suppress peasant expectations of better conditions and more freedoms in the wake of the Black Death until civil war erupted in 1462–86. Thus, social tensions in Spain took much longer than in England to create a new equilibrium that was almost necessitated by the new economic realities created by plague. In Eastern Europe, however, lords seem to have been able to "enserf" peasants for the first time beginning in the fifteenth century, reversing the trend in England (where half of peasants were already free on the eve of the Black Death). In Italy, despite the immigration and taking up of vacant tenements that argue for social mobility among the *popolo minuto* in the immediate aftermath of the Black Death, studies of marriage alliances and guilds in Florence reveal a largely static society by the late fourteenth century, when ruling elites closed ranks to keep out upwardly mobile elements, such as the disenfranchised wool carders responsible for the Ciompi Revolt in 1378. Elsewhere, sumptuary legislation such as that passed in England in 1363 also tried to maintain the social order in the face of economic pressures by regulating the clothes that each rank could legally wear. Chroniclers' complaints of indecent clothing worn by survivors of the Black Death, such as Gilles li Muisis' comment that mens' fashion around Easter time in 1349 in Tournai were so short and tight that genitalia were on display for all to see, clearly linked this social indecency with fears of repeated occurrences of plague.

If there is mixed evidence as to the peasants being the clear economic winners of the Black Death, the same could be said of women who were alleged to have benefited

from the mortalities of plague. This "golden age" for women allegedly expressed itself in terms of their greater independence after the Black Death, taking advantage of greater economic opportunities created by the plague to put off marriage and migrate to the cities where they could easily find work. Wills proved at Bologna in Italy in 1348 indicate that daughters, sisters, and, to a lesser extent, wives, were more likely to be named as beneficiaries during a plague, whereas other evidence from London and York in England does seem to indicate that women remained single longer and operated as *femmes soles* or as equal partners of their husbands in the urban artisanal and trading economy. If this is the start of a "northwest" modern marriage pattern, where couples marry later and have fewer children, evidence from other regions of Europe, especially the Mediterranean, and even within the same country can easily be found to muddy the picture. For example, in Tuscany and southwestern France, tax surveys and testamentary records point to high marriage and fertility rates being the norm, especially in the immediate aftermath of mortality spikes from plague (which chroniclers attested was a deliberate response on the part of depleted populations). A marriage register that survives from the parish of Givry in eastern France records no fewer than 86 marriages for the year 1349, which was roughly five times the annual average before the plague between 1336 and 1341. In Douai in Flanders, marriage contracts reached their highest level ever recorded in the year after its first major plague in 1400. Even in England, some areas such as Halesowen in Worcestershire, Lewes in Sussex, and East Anglia during the fifteenth century seem to buck the northwest marriage pattern. This reminds us that traditional social roles of childbearing and -rearing were still expected of late medieval women, who continued to labor under the legal *coverture* of their husbands, to earn lower wages than their male counterparts (even if all were higher than before), and to be largely shut out from the guild system of medieval towns. Women could even be scapegoated as a result of the Black Death, as happened to prostitutes in several Italian towns such as Venice that tried to restrict their movements to *cordons sanitaires* on moral, medical, and social grounds as part of their plague controls in the mid-fifteenth century. There is also some evidence that, especially in later plagues in which differential virulence was less masked by high mortality among the general population, women and children were targeted by the disease, perhaps simply owing to the fact that they stayed at home in the environs of rats and fleas. This would only accentuate the importance of female fertility to society.

The silver lining of plague?

Within every class or social category and within every region of late medieval Europe, there were probably both winners and losers, economic or otherwise, of plague, and indeed the same could be said of almost any other disease or epidemic occurrence throughout human history. However, what seems beyond dispute nowadays is that the Black Death, by the very scale and persistence of its mortality, did have an outsized historical impact on Europe in the late Middle Ages. Equally noteworthy is the current view that plague, despite its overwhelming demographic effects, overall had a positive impact on late medieval society. That the Black Death held a "silver lining" for its sufferers has been popularized to the point that it is now, apparently, the stuff of supermarket tabloids.

However, this present consensus represents the confluence of two long-standing historiographical trends that go back to the nineteenth century. Beginning with the study by the German physician, Justin Hecker, who published *Der schwarze Tod im viersehnten Jahrhundert* (*The Black Death in the Fourteenth Century*) in 1832, one school of interpretation saw the Black Death as an overmighty actor on the stage of history, in which disease needed to be recognized alongside class struggle, war, or politics as a shaper of events. In Hecker's original "gothic" formulation, disease acted as a monstrous force of nature that swept away the old order of things and drove people to extremes of behavior, much like Mary Shelley's contemporary fictional creation, Frankenstein. Its power and influence were undeniable and simply had to be acknowledged by both medieval chroniclers and modern historians alike. This tradition was continued in rather more whimsical fashion by Hans Zinsser's account of how disease could arbitrarily change the course of historical personalities and events in his 1934 book, *Rats, Lice, and History*. More recently, it has been taken up in modified form by William McNeill in *Plagues and Peoples* (1976), which argues that, even in the modern age of the "wonder drug," disease will continue to play a decisive role in human history owing to an unending ecological war of attrition between men and microbes whereby humans act as "macroparasites" on their environment by continually upseting the balance of the disease pool, just as germs act as microparasites within a body. (The "weaponizing" of plague and emergence of drug-resistant forms in recent decades is a good example of this process.) This represents a sharp departure from previous authors who confidently predicted an "end to epidemics" in their time, such as one finds in the writings of Dr. Wu Liande, who helped write an influential manual on plague in 1936, or in C-E. A. Winslow's *The Conquest of Epidemic Disease* (1943) and L. Fabian Hirst's *The Conquest of Plague* (1953), both written at the dawn of the discovery and widespread use of antibiotics.

However, the nineteenth century also spawned the view, first espoused by fin-de-siècle English economic historians, that the Black Death was merely an arbitrary, short-term event swallowed up by long-term factors, such as a society's constitutional development, that were more important as engines of historical change. This received new life beginning in the 1930s with the work of the Cambridge historian Michael Postan, which sought to subsume the Black Death within a Malthusian cycle of population growth followed inevitably by decline. His long view of plague was eventually joined in the 1970s by Marxist historians such as Robert Brenner, Rodney Hilton, and Guy Bois, who, even as they sought to supplant the "Postan Thesis" with a Marxist one, also dismissed plague as a determinant of history, preferring instead to see spiraling class struggles as engendering a "crisis of feudalism" by the end of the Middle Ages. Around the same time or somewhat earlier, the *Annales* school of French historians, building on the writings of existentialist authors such as Albert Camus in *The Plague* (1948), saw more resiliency than disruption in the heroic responses and *mentalités* of ordinary men and women simply trying to cope with the everyday realities imposed by the Black Death. Therefore, it should be no surprise that in 1971, a collection of essays was published that implicitly questioned plague's pivotal role in late medieval society by including a question mark in its title, *The Black Death: A Turning Point in History?*

Nowadays, a new consensus that has emerged seems to want to reconcile or find a middle way between these two approaches—exogenous and endogenous, positivist and relativist—that have hitherto characterized historical approaches toward the Black Death.

This "silver lining" thesis, even if not entirely new, was championed in most cogent form by David Herlihy with the posthumous publication of his lectures in 1997 under the title, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, and his banner has been taken up to the present day by his student, Samuel Cohn. This new consensus would restore the Black Death to its former place as an awesome watershed in European history, quite simply the greatest ecological catastrophe that Europe has ever, or would ever, face and one that makes nonsense of any attempts to rationalize it through systems of *longue durée* such as the Malthusian or Marxist models. At the same time, however, medieval Europeans, through the rational and conscious choices they made in responding to the disease, were able to substantially mitigate, and even turn to good account, the impact of the plague and thus alter its subsequent course after the shock of its initial advent. (It should be noted that this same argument is *not* made with regard to the contemporary Middle East.) It was these constructive responses that helped Europeans make the transition, or transformation, from the late medieval to the early modern eras: inventing new labor-saving technologies such as the printing press; developing labor-saving agricultural techniques such as pasturage over direct farming; making conscious choices to forego or delay marriage and fertility to break the "Malthusian deadlock"; developing new medical approaches that favored practical measures such as better sanitation and quarantine to lower the virulence and prevent the recurrence of plague; and new artistic responses that helped advance the Renaissance agenda of emphasis upon the individual.

Much of this consensus, however, needs to be reexamined and reassessed. Invention of the printing press in Europe by the middle decades of the fifteenth century was driven more by a rising literacy and growing appetite for books than by any desire to save labor. As already indicated, marriage and fertility patterns in Europe after the Black Death could fluctuate over space and time. For example, tax census data that allow us to measure household size in Tuscany and Piedmont in Italy do show a decline from 4.3 persons in the average household before 1348 to 3.8 members immediately afterward but, by the 1360s, household size seems to have gone back to its pre-plague level.

Medicine, as we traced in detail earlier, remained essentially stagnant in response to plague throughout the later Middle Ages. In fact, it's hard to see how plague doctors could have done anything different without a truly alternative model for disease, which did not emerge until the nineteenth century with the awareness and acceptance of the germ theory. (Girolamo Fracastoro's "seeds of disease" espoused in his *On Contagion* published in 1546 owed an unacknowledged debt to Galen and, more recently, to Gentile da Foligno, even if Fracastoro did apply the theory in new ways.) Perhaps it is as Karl Sudhoff, the early twentieth-century editor of plague treatises, remarks, that medieval doctors were simply trapped in the dead end of their own learning, unable to get beyond the ideas of their time.

Even so, the historian Robert Gottfried argues that medicine had evolved into a modern form by the end of the Middle Ages owing to its greater acceptance of surgery, proliferation of how-to, self-help manuals, and new role played by hospitals and other public health and sanitation measures implemented by municipal health boards. This argument, however, creates a false dichotomy between university medicine and surgery and between measures first enacted in 1348 and those taken later. University-trained physicians such as Foligno did not disdain surgical techniques—which included bloodletting and treating plague boils—in their treatises; indeed, Louis Sanctus writes that physicians were hired in 1348 at Avignon

and "many Italian cities" to dissect corpses of victims to investigate the causes of plague. It was likely that Foligno, an old hand at dissection, was hired to do this at Perugia. However, even dissection would have been used simply to confirm the theoretical knowledge that plague originated in a humoral imbalance or decay in the region of certain organs such as the heart or in the presence of "poisonous matter" in the emunctories. Even those plague manuals that were written in the vernacular or were designed to be self-instructive, such as those by Jacme d'Agramont and John of Burgundy, were based on the same medical principles as treatises written for more academically-minded audiences. Practical sanitation and quarantine measures were already widely implemented—on the advice of university physicians—by several communities during the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1348; it was not until 100 years later that these same measures were implemented on a permanent basis by city health boards. Plague hospitals were mainly set up for the poor, with the ultimate aim of their isolation and control, not their cure. One thing that plague doctors and manuals did do that was probably new was stimulate demand for spices and other exotic ingredients that went into their plague remedies, which were among the luxuries that could be afforded by a greater proportion of urban populations that became newly wealthy in the aftermath of the Black Death. It was this very demand for luxury items that was part and parcel of the new dynamic economies created in Europe after the plague that stimulated the voyages of discovery toward the end of the Middle Ages.

Aside from the economic benefits that undoubtedly accrued to peasants in some parts of Europe in the wake of repeated plague strikes throughout the late medieval period, perhaps the most convincing element of the "silver lining" thesis is the cultural one: that plague engendered a new "cult of remembrance," to use Cohn's term, that anticipated the individualism and "fame and glory" ethos embodied in Renaissance portraiture. Ample testamentary evidence from central Italy, for example, seems to point to the 1360s and 1370s—in the aftermath of the second outbreak of the Black Death—as a turning point in demand for individual portraits and figures within larger compositions that were to be painted in the "very likeness" of the patron; but this can also be detected as early as 1348, such as when Libertus of Monte Feche, a hired mercenary "constable" from Liège who was fighting for Florence and who drew up his will on September 21 as he lay dying from his "illness" outside Arrezo, set aside 25 florins to commission a portrait to be hung up in the church of St. Anthony of Tragetto in the very city he was besieging. Likewise in the north of Europe, such as at Douai in Flanders, commission of portraits as revealed by wills show a marked increase in the wake of plague, although here it mainly took the form of tomb sculpture or brasses, and its high point was reached slightly later, after a major plague in 1400. This cult of remembrance is all the more persuasive if people were indeed being abandoned by even close family members as part of a common social experience shared by many communities during the plague. (It should be noted, however, that even as people evinced a greater desire of being remembered in their wills, it was family members who continued to be most often named as executors to carry out those wishes, as evidenced by testaments proved at Bologna in the midst of the plague there in 1348.) Like Boccaccio's criticisms of flight from cities, the cult of remembrance is a commentary, not so much on the plague, as on contemporary human responses to it. It also may help explain why the quality of artistic productions in Florence and Siena fell off in the wake of the Black Death of 1348, which has been widely noted and commented upon by art historians such

as Millard Meiss. Rather than representing an inability or refusal to replicate the innovative techniques of early Renaissance masters such as Giotto (1267–1337), this would then simply be a function of fewer surviving workshops struggling to keep up with a new-found demand for individualized paintings: a mass production of art necessitated by the greater numbers of patrons who were motivated both by the uncertainties of plague and by the wealth that was being spread around or redistributed by its ravages.

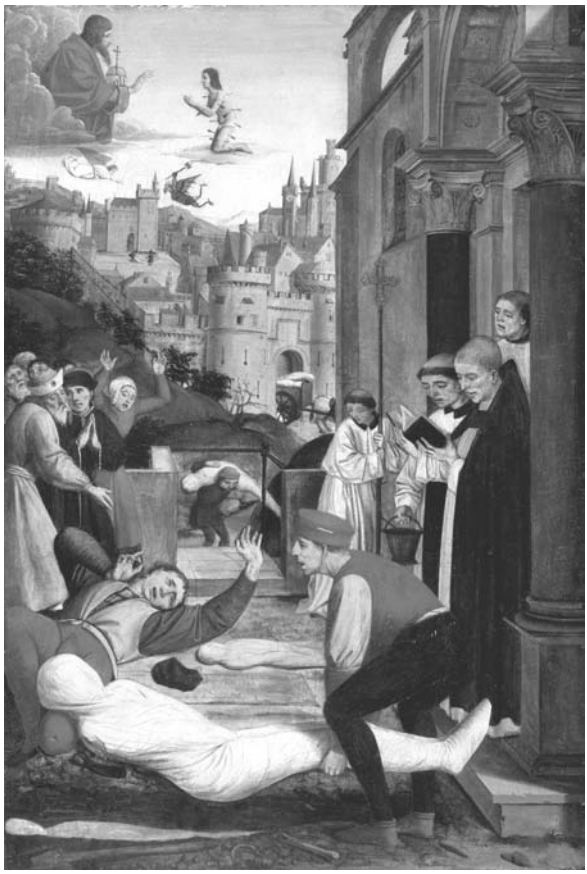
Plague and death

The same wills that demonstrate a new cult of remembrance after the Black Death also reveal new attitudes toward death among Europeans as a direct result of plague. This should not be surprising if, as Boccaccio avers, funeral customs broke down during a plague to the point that women gathered no longer to mourn but to laugh at the dead, and each corpse was taken away, not by a stately procession of one's neighbors, but by the *becchini* who swiftly hauled it in a coffin "not to the church specified by the dead man in his will, but usually to the nearest at hand." Fear of abandonment and of a nameless burial in a mass grave seem to be behind an increase in numbers of those specifying some kind of burial place in their wills. Whereas this increases only slightly from 74 to 77 percent in central Italy when comparing the decades of the fourteenth century before and after the arrival of the Black Death in 1348, in Douai in Flanders there is a more dramatic increase from 20 percent between 1301 and 1338 to 56 percent in 1400, the year of its first "serious plague." Also in Douai, the later wills become much more specific in terms of delineating the space where testators wished to be buried. In contrast to the experience of many who died of plague, the dead in these wills ensured that they would be surrounded by their network of family and kin: in Italy, this tended to be one's ancestors, as will makers typically specified burial in a private family vault or chapel, whereas in the north of Europe, it was usually the nuclear unit of spouses, children, and occasionally parents who were interred side by side within the parish church or in cemetery plots.

There were many other ways aside from the physical burial or tomb monument in which the dead could continue to intrude upon the consciousness of the living and refuse to be forgotten. Masses commemorating the testator, to be sung either on the anniversary of his or her death (known as "obits") or at other times, were willed in markedly increased numbers and with increasing complexity throughout the latter half of the fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth centuries in central Italy, Avignon, and Douai, often corresponding to known incidences of plague. Remembrance of the dead could also range the gamut from private, elaborately endowed chantry chapels (sometimes set up on behalf of a corporate entity, such as a guild) to General Mind celebrations where the names of all the benefactors and "good doers" who had ever donated anything of value to the parish—sometimes recorded on "bede-rolls" such as the one that survives at All Saints Church in Bristol, England—were read out and prayed for. These commemoration ceremonies not only benefited the dead in purgatory but also helped the living cope with their own future deaths by reminding them of the blurred boundaries between life and death and the immortality that could be conferred upon the dead, both in this life and in the hereafter. In addition, the promise of the resurrection and rebirth at the Apocalypse was held out to the faithful, when everyone could hope to triumph over death. Funeral arrangements, another

concern of wills that could be threatened by the mass death of plague, supposedly became more flamboyant or were performed with greater pomp in France beginning around 1330, although no evidence for such funerals has been found south of the Alps in Italy until the Counter-Reformation period of the sixteenth century. A small but persistent minority of primarily well-to-do citizens at Bury St. Edmunds in eastern England did leave instructions in their wills as to how they wished their funerals to be conducted, and these examples increase to at least a quarter of all testaments in the four decades leading up to the English Reformation. Fear of a sudden death before the requisite last rites could be performed by a priest, which was particularly associated with plague, was also addressed in *Ars Moriendi*, or "Art of Dying," manuals and illustrations that became highly popular, particularly in block print form, toward the end of the Middle Ages. This fear was attested by plague doctors such as Simon of Corvino, who noted in 1350 that the disease could snatch men away even as they were eating, drinking, or playing at pastimes, when the victim "suddenly perceives" a tumor on his groin accompanied by fever, from which "death follows immediately." For these reasons, medieval men and women also indulged in saint cults and fasts that would supposedly protect against sudden death and guarantee the presence of a priest at one's passing. To die alone, unshriven and unmourned, such as we have seen happened to many during the plague (and which happens all too often nowadays in nursing homes and emergency wards), was perhaps the worst punishment that could befall a medieval man, accustomed as he was to an elaborate preparation for death.

That a morbid obsession with death was omnipresent in late medieval Europe is a popular notion that perhaps can be traced to Johan Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, which first appeared in Dutch in 1919, in which he began his chapter entitled "The Vision of Death" with this famous pronouncement: "No other epoch has laid so much stress as the expiring Middle Ages on the thought of death. An everlasting call of *memento mori* [remembrance of death] resounds through life." When roughly half a century later the renowned French historian of death culture, Philippe Ariès, came to address the subject, he saw, instead of Huizinga's preoccupation with death in all the macabre images and references in the late Middle Ages, rather a "passionate love of life," indeed a profound attachment to and even *avaritia*, or greed for, his earthly possessions which he was not giving up without loud protest. Yet Ariès, like Huizinga and other, French historians of death culture, refused to see any connection between late medieval macabre *mentalités* and plague, preferring to subscribe to the *Annales* interpretation that minimized the impact of the Black Death. Instead, he saw the crucial shift in attitudes toward death as occurring earlier in the Middle Ages, though others located it later in the eighteenth century around the time of the French Revolution. However, as we have just seen, this ignores the evidence of wills that shows a clear correlation between plague and late medieval people's attempts to prepare for their own future deaths. Moreover, in the end, Ariès accepts Huizinga's thesis that the macabre or *memento mori* culture of the late Middle Ages embodies a "sense of failure" or "sense of disillusionment and discouragement" in society that led to its decline. However, more recent historians of the rituals of late medieval religion, such as Eamon Duffy, are instead inclined to see the macabre in a more positive light as evidence of people's willingness and determination to come to terms with death, a courageous—and ultimately life-affirming—enterprise that was all the more urgent in the wake of plague.



Josse Lieferinxe, *St. Sebastian Intercedes during the Plague in Pavia*, c. 1500. 1497–1499, oil on wood. (Photo © The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.)

That the plague inspired more individual portraiture or made more money available to patronize artists are not the only ways in which the Black Death may have had an impact upon art and literature. As already discussed, representations of plague saints, such as St. Sebastian and St. Roch, may have been part of a social response to plague that "manipulated the sacred" to gain greater control over or to defend against the disease. One such depiction, *St. Sebastian Intercedes during the Plague in Pavia*, dating to the very end of the fifteenth century, is one of the few paintings to survive from the Middle Ages that actually depicts a victim suffering from a plague boil. Originally part of a series of narrative panels commemorating the saint and commissioned by the Sebastian confraternity of Marseilles first to Bernardino Sismondi and then to Josse Lieferinxe, the painting features the mass burial of shrouded corpses in the foreground as one of the grave diggers drops dead with a bubo on his neck and the other is protected by a plague prayer in his cap that is just visible over the rim. As mourners react to the scene in different ways (reminiscent of the Three Living and Three

Dead frescos), on the right representatives of the Church calmly proceed with their funeral rites. Meanwhile, up in the heavens, an arrow-pierced St. Sebastian intercedes with God to end the plague as an angel commands a demon to strike down sinners. Obviously, many layers of meaning are to be found in this complex picture. Equally famous is the Limbourg brothers' miniature in the *Très Riches Heures* of the plague procession of Pope Gregory the Great in 590 in Rome, as recounted in *The Golden Legend*. Painted before the brothers and their patron, the Duke of Berry, themselves all died perhaps of plague in 1416, the miniature depicts members of the procession dropping dead of plague, as recounted in the legend, but it does not show any symptoms. Just like in the depiction of St. Sebastian, the promise of St. Gregory's intercession to end the plague is indicated by directing the viewer's gaze heavenward, as the pope lifts his hands in the direction of an angel sheathing his sword atop the Castel Sant' Angelo (formerly Hadrian's tomb). Other contemporary representations of plague to survive from the Middle Ages include a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century fresco from the chapel of St. Sebastian in Lanslevillard (on the French border with Switzerland) of a surgeon lancing a bubo on a woman's neck, and in manuscript illustrations of the chronicles of Gilles li Muisis and Giovanni Sercambi of the first outbreak of the Black Death (see illustrations on pages. 104 and 141). Muisis' manuscript shows the citizens of Tournai bringing corpses—enclosed in wooden coffins as prescribed by the city's ordinances—to a mass burial, whereas Sercambi's shows a mass of victims struck down by bat-winged demons wielding scythes or else shooting arrows and emptying vials of poisonous liquid into the air, reminiscent of Apocalypse 15–16. Unfortunately, such direct impressions by medieval artists of the plague are all too few.

The art historian Millard Meiss attempted to make a study of the impact of the Black Death upon Florentine and Sienese art by comparing individual productions in the decades before and after 1348, even if their subject matter had nothing to do with disease or death. However, his effort was severely hampered by problems both in dating and interpretation: The centerpiece of his thesis, the *Triumph of Death* fresco in the Camposanto of Pisa, which Meiss attributed to Francesco Traini, is now securely dated to well before the Black Death and is thought to reflect the resolving of the Beatific Vision controversy by Pope Benedict XII in 1336 (see illustration on p. 226). More fruitful, perhaps, is tracing the effects of plague on architecture, for building programs interrupted by the death of masons during the Black Death can clearly be seen in the case of several parish churches in England. However, I would argue that the best way to discover the artistic impact of the plague is to study the many depictions of rotting corpses and skeletons that are part of the macabre or *memento mori* genre that flourished in the later Middle Ages. Although this art form certainly predates the Black Death in terms of its origins, it is nonetheless most valuable for the way it reveals medieval attitudes toward death, which wills have proven was heavily influenced by plague. It is to this subject that we now turn in the next, and last, chapter.

DEATH

I was a pauper born, then to Primate raised
Now I am cut down and ready to be food for worms
Behold my grave.
Whoever you may be who passes by, I ask you to remember
You will be like me after you die
All horrible, dust, worms, vile flesh.

Epitaph from the tomb of Henry Chichele, d. 1443

To see the fifteenth-century tomb of Archbishop Henry Chichele in Canterbury Cathedral is to gaze upon the very image of death. On the upper level of the tomb, on a great stone slab, lies the archbishop decked out in all the robes and regalia of his state. However, just below it, in what seems an ornate coffin with open, traceried, Gothic windows, appears the archbishop again in quite a different aspect. Except for the pudding haircut, which was the fashion of the times, the discreetly naked cadaver lying on its shroud could be our contemporary: pale, still, emaciated, the bony flesh drawn tightly over the shrunken form, the eyes hollow, the cheeks sunken, the mouth open from the shock of being dead. From an age not known for its realistic portraiture of the living, it seems that the medieval sculptor of this tomb is giving us a privileged glimpse into the grave. Such a portrait of death is duplicated on nearly 200 other tombs throughout northern Europe from the end of the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. (It was never adopted in Mediterranean countries, perhaps because there the real corpse was already on display during funerary ceremonies.) Why did our forebears portray themselves so graphically in death and display the result to posterity for all time?

Needless to say, they had a different attitude toward death than we do today. For the vast majority of us in the modern Western world, it would be utterly inconceivable to pay for the privilege of having ourselves carved on our memorials (should we choose to have one) as a desiccated, rotting corpse. Why bury the dead, only to have the tomb throw up our remains in all their hideous, gruesome deformity for all to see? Even in the Middle Ages, the thirteenth-century theologian St. Thomas Aquinas asserted that burial is "for the sake of the living, lest their eyes be revolted by the disfigurement of the corpse." However, unlike medieval men and women, we in the modern West studiously avoid *all* unpleasant reminders of death. The French historian Philippe Ariès has characterized our present

The Fourth Horseman, Death. (reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

attitude as the "death denied," the "dirty death," or the "invisible death." By this, he means that nowadays the dying no longer determine their own deaths—indeed, feel compelled to perpetuate the lie that they are not dying at all—and with the advent of new medical technologies, we have lost the choice to die a natural death.

Our recent repugnance for death perhaps was already evident by the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was during the Victorian era that authorities at the church of Dalton Holme in Yorkshire ordered that the life-size carved skeleton lying underneath the reclining effigy of Sir John Hotham be removed (not to be replaced until the 1960s) because it "frightened the children" of parishioners. Hotham's tomb, erected at his death in 1689, was the last monument in England to depict a cadaverous or skeletal figure, known as the "transi," a term derived from the Latin verb *transire*, meaning to pass away. Clearly, to the Victorians of Dalton, Hotham's skeleton had infringed upon the comfortable remoteness they now enjoyed from death.

Nevertheless, the transi tomb is evidence of a genre of apocalyptic and macabre art and literature that enjoyed great popularity throughout Europe during the later Middle Ages and for centuries beyond. From illuminations and other depictions of the fourth horseman of the Apocalypse to portrayals of interactions between death and man to the enshrinement of cadavers in the transi tombs, these expressions of mortality are all closely dependent on each other. One can trace a natural progression as, at each stage, death assumes an ever more personal aspect, giving us a revealing window onto the mentality of late medieval man, yet all the while holding forth the promise of communal judgment at the Apocalypse.

The tomb of Sir John Hotham (d. 1689), the last monument in England to depict the transi figure below, a gruesome skeleton. (Reproduced by permission of English Heritage. © Crown copyright. NMR.)

The fourth rider of the apocalypse

Go to almost any great Romanesque cathedral in France and the first sight that greets you as you approach the immense portals is a vision of the Apocalypse. Just above the main doorway will loom most likely a reenactment in stone of the Last Judgment at the end of the world. Christ resides in the middle of the heavenly spheres, often surrounded by the four evangelists, the 12 apostles, and a host of saints, preparing to separate the saved from the damned. In the words of St. John:

> And I saw a great white throne and the one who sat upon it; from his face the earth and heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and scrolls were opened. And another scroll was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the scrolls, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hell gave up the dead that were in them; and they were judged each one, according to their works (Apocalypse 20:11-13).

This scene is essentially the same, whether carved in the tympanums at Moissac, Vèzelay, St. Denis, or Chartres. At Beaulieu and Bourges, the dead rise at the sound of the angels' trumpets by actually lifting up the lids of their tombs. At Autun and St. Foy-de-Conques, devils and angels vie to tip the scales that weigh men's souls. Yet in all these examples, the message is clear: entrance to the church is the entrance to a better world.

The Doom, or Last Judgment, over the chancel arch at Lutterworth Church in Leicestershire. Note how some of the dead rise as skeletons, some as naked cadavers, while the rest rise clothed in their shrouds or earthly garments. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Photograph A.F. Kersting.)

As it was outside the church, so it was inside. The Doom, or Last Judgment of Christ, was painted on the walls of many a parish church in England during the fourteenth century. Traces of the subject, if not the entire scene itself, survive in no fewer than 24 examples, usually painted over the chancel arch, just above the entrance to the sanctuary containing the high altar. Most of these show the dead rising from their graves and either the weighing of souls or the separation of the saved from the damned. Again, the message is clear: participation in the sacrament of the mass is the gateway to paradise.

Our focus, however, is not on the climax of John's Revelation but on the beginning: the opening of the seven seals that will unleash God's destructive forces upon the land and that eventually will lead to the Second Coming. In particular, we are concerned with the Fourth Rider of the Apocalypse—Death—heralded by the opening of the fourth seal. How should Death be portrayed? Medieval artists' attempts to grapple with that question led to the earliest depictions of the cadaver in art: the Triumph of Death theme became one of the most awe-inspiring subjects in Western painting.

Around the middle of the thirteenth century, a remarkable group of manuscript illuminators emerged in England. From about 1240 to 1280, these artists produced a series of beautifully illuminated editions of the Apocalypse of St. John. Commissioned largely by the court of Henry III and later by that of the young Prince Edward and his wife, Eleanor of Castile, the manuscripts, thought to have been produced mainly in London, typically contain a half-page illustration above a text in Latin or French. Why did the Apocalypse emerge at this time to be the subject of such sumptuous illumination?

The Fourth Rider of the Apocalypse, Death. From a manuscript dating to the 1290s in the British Library. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

The answer, in part, goes back to the twelfth-century writings of one of the most apocalyptic authors of the Middle Ages, Joachim of Fiore. According to Joachim's periodic view of history, the third and final Age of the Holy Spirit would see the coming of the Antichrist and the final reckoning of mankind. By his numerical calculations, the visionary predicted that this apocalyptic age would begin in the year 1260. Joachim's ideas probably first began filtering back to England after September 1190, when Richard the Lionheart landed at Messina, Sicily, on his way to the Third Crusade. It was at Messina, according to the chroniclers, that the English king was granted an audience with the mystical abbot. There Joachim expounded his prophecies regarding the approaching Apocalypse and the Antichrist, whom he believed to be allied with the man who would become Richard's greatest enemy: Saladin, sultan of Egypt and Syria. In the succeeding decades, English authors such as Ralph of Coggeshall were to demonstrate a thorough familiarity with "Joachism." By the 1240s, when the English Apocalypse manuscripts were being produced, the countdown to 1260 was fast approaching.

With its emphasis on a confrontation between good and evil, the Apocalypse may also be seen as a heroic adventure story full of angelic knights fighting ferocious dragons and many-headed beasts. In this respect, the Apocalypse has many affinities with the romances of King Arthur, whose cult was to be particularly favored by King Edward I. The reign of his father, Henry III, was, with the exception of Richard's exploits on the Third Crusade, the most intense period of England's contributions to the crusading movement. In 1240, Richard, earl of Cornwall, Henry's brother, and Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester, left for the Holy Land with 800 knights. In 1250, Henry himself took the cross (for a second

The Fourth Rider of the Apocalypse, Death. From an Italian manuscript in the Laurentian Library, Florence. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

time) and, between 1270 and 1272, his son campaigned in the East with a small contingent of fellow crusaders. The men who commissioned the Apocalypses may very well have seen themselves as the embodiment of resistance to overwhelming evil.

The artists who executed the English Apocalypses did not make them in isolation but were undoubtedly in contact with Continental artists, particularly in France. This is not to say that the English style was not distinctive, but communication across the Channel was common, and English models influenced French work and vice versa. In some cases, a single manuscript may have been produced jointly by workshops in both countries. Politically speaking, relations between England and France after 1254 were strong. In that year, Henry III visited the French capital at the invitation of Louis IX, and in 1259 the Treaty of Paris was concluded between them. Ten years later, Prince Edward, the son of Louis's sister, also came to Paris to prepare for the Eighth Crusade. Such political contacts could not but help facilitate artistic ones as well.

The vast majority of the Apocalypse manuscripts produced in England and France during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries depict the Fourth Rider, Death, as a man. Usually he is bearded, wearing a turban, pointed cap, or hooded cloak, and he is riding a pale horse, carrying either a sword or a brazier of fire in his hand and issuing from,

or dragging along by a harness, the mouth of hell in the form of a great beast's head. Often the hell mouth contains burning souls, among whom can be recognized kings, bishops, and the tonsured heads of monks. However, within this group, a handful of illuminations depict Death in quite a different aspect: as a decaying, skeletal cadaver.

The oldest such illustration can be found in the so-called Burckhardt-Wildt Apocalypse (named after its eighteenth-century owner, Daniel Burckhardt-Wildt, who compiled an album of the illustrations only after these had been cut out of the original manuscript). The manuscript was made around 1280 by a workshop located within the county of Lincoln or York in England. The Fourth Horseman is shown with the hollow eyes, fleshless nose, and sunken jaw of a skull (see the illustration that opens this chapter). He carries a silver sword with a golden handle in his right hand, while in his left he holds the reins of a pale horse. Except for his extremities, on which his flesh is decaying, the corpse is clothed in a hooded mantle, perhaps meant to represent a shroud. Death issues from a double-headed mouth of hell, from which peer the faces of burning souls presided over by a demon. An almost exact copy of this image, down to the repeating diamond background, survives in another Apocalypse manuscript thought to have been painted by the same artist a decade later in the 1290s. Finally, a very similar example, with a cadaver emerging from a hell mouth, carrying a sword and wearing a mantle but with no hood and riding what appears to be a leaping rather than striding horse, appears in an Italian Apocalypse whose text is thought to have been composed in the early decades of the fourteenth century. The illuminations, however, are ascribed to an English artist working between 1280 and 1290. All three manuscripts, in fact, are attributed to the same illuminator, an identification greatly strengthened by their common use of the cadaver to represent Death.

Why did this illuminator, or small group of them, in late-thirteenth-century England suddenly decide to draw Death as a corpse rather than as most contemporary illuminations would have him—in the form of a living man? Showing the Fourth Rider as a cadaver or skeleton aligns the figure more closely with his role as the harbinger of death and better suits the narrative context of the Apocalypse story, where Death makes a dramatic entrance as a corpse, setting himself apart from the other three riders. And in the Apocalypse, this is indeed Death's role: he is more powerful than the other horsemen, for he can kill with all their weapons—plague, war, and famine—combined. Death has a license from God to kill with every disaster that may be commanded. He thus can wreak upon humanity havoc that is far more sweeping and terrifying than that of any of the riders alone.

The use of the cadaver in the Apocalypse story by this English illuminator represents an artistic leap that was to have lasting effects. It now is thought that the original Burckhardt-Wildt series inspired a famous tapestry of the Apocalypse made for Louis, duke of Anjou, between 1377 and 1380. Originally comprising 84 *tableaus*, or scenes, on six *pièces*, each measuring approximately 20 by 75 feet, the Apocalypse Tapestry of Angers (restored twice during the nineteenth century) still dazzles with its vivid colors and monumental figures. It was woven in the workshop of Nicholas Bataille of Paris, based on cartoon drawings by Jean Bondol, painter to the French royal court. In 1380, it was recorded that the king, Charles V, had lent to the duke an illuminated manuscript of the Apocalypse, now known to have been painted in England around 1250. Nonetheless, art historians long have been dissatisfied with this manuscript as a model for the tapestry because the two display quite different artistic styles. Indeed, the manuscript King Charles lent shows the fourth rider as a bearded

This elaborate rendition of Death is from the Angers Apocalypse Tapestry, c. 1377–80. Compare this image to that at the beginning of this chapter from the Burckhardt-Wildt Apocalypse. (Reproduced with permission of Centre des Monuments Nationaux, Paris. Caroline Rose © CMN, Paris.)

man carrying a brazier of fire, whereas the Apocalypse Tapestry at Angers features Death riding out as a skeleton wielding a sword. The image, down to the position of the sword on Death's shoulder, is instead very similar to the Burckhardt-Wildt series and may have been transmitted through English contacts with France.

The fifteenth century saw a second artistic leap in the representation of the Fourth Horseman. In 1413, Jean, duke of Berry in France, commissioned a trio of Dutch illuminators known as the Limbourg brothers to make a book of hours that would surpass all others in his collection. Left unfinished at the deaths of the duke and his artists in 1416, the *Très Riches Heures* was not to be completed until 1485 under a new patron, Charles, duke of Savoy. To finish the manuscript, he hired an illuminator from Bourges named Jean Colombe, who already had done similar service for the duke on an illustrated text of the Apocalypse.

On folio 90v. of the *Très Riches Heures*, Colombe portrays the horseman of Death. The rider himself has been returned to human form as an elegant nobleman mounted on a white steed and brandishing a sword. However, he is preceded by an army of skeletal corpses dressed in winding sheets worn in the style of Roman togas. Before them flees in terror another, human army, whose armor avails them little as they retreat from the scene of battle, a graveyard, back toward the town beyond. Cadavers appear in Colombe's Apocalypse no doubt because by that time a long tradition had established that this should be so. However, where Colombe departs from tradition is in his multiplication of the corpse, to the point that it overawes the viewer with the power of Death.

Artistically and psychologically, this effect was to achieve its most sublime expression in the next century with Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *Triumph of Death* masterpiece of

The Fourth Rider and his army of skeletons, as depicted by Jean Colombe in the *Très Riches Heures*, fifteenth century. (Musee Conde, Chantilly, France / Giraudon / The Bridgeman Art Library.)

circa 1562. Cavorting across an apocalyptic landscape in an orgy of activity, the skeletal Death invades every imaginable space of the painting. We see him, for example, in the lower left-hand corner riding a tired old nag leading a cart full of skulls, reminiscent of illustrations of Petrarch's poem, *Triumphus Mortis* (Triumph of Death). Directly above, a chorus of cadavers don winding sheets as togas as they baptize stone-weighted bodies in a river, while in the lower right-hand corner a handful of knights vainly draw their swords against their skeletal adversaries, both evoking Colombe's illumination. At the thematic and spatial center of the painting, Death on his horse herds the living into a giant coffin, whose trapdoor swings open like a mousetrap, as the only avenue of escape is blocked by a horde of skeletons armed with sepulchral shields. With the mortality of all mankind here on display, never has the overwhelming power (and terror) of Death been so convincingly portrayed.

In all of these images, from the Fourth Rider of the Burckhardt-Wildt Apocalypse to the triumphal skeletons of Brueghel's painting, Death is an impersonal force. He mows down all regardless of rank. His work leaves little room for compassion or contestation. There is no appeal beyond Death. As the late medieval English poet John Lydgate describes him:

The Triumph of Death, by Pieter Brueghel the Elder, c. 1562, a masterpiece of apocalyptic imagery. (Prado, Madrid, Spain / The Bridgeman Art Library.)

In the Apocalips of Seyn John
The chapitlys whoo so can devyde
The Apoostyl thoughte that he sawn oon
Upon a paale hors did ryde,
That poweer hadde on every syde.
His name was Deth thorugh cruelte,
His strook whoo so that durste abyde.

In the Apocalypse of St. John
In one of the chapters into which it is divided
The Apostle thought that he saw one
Upon a pale horse did ride
Who had power on every side
His name was Death, because of his cruelty
Whose stroke no one dared abide.

It was a terrifying message: Death was uncomfortably godlike in his all-encompassing might. Yet Death's terror was mitigated by the close relationship between the Fourth Rider and the Last Judgment that was to come at the end of the Apocalypse story. The opening of the fourth seal meant that eventually Christ was to come again to separate the saved from the damned. Justice would reign at last. In preachers' sermons, the pale horse of Death

symbolized the arrival of incorruptible and unbiased justice. This was an attractive theme, particularly to late-medieval Englishmen, who lived at a time when the bribery of judges, the depredations of sheriffs, and the flouting of the law were all too common. Indeed, the outlaw ballads popular in England during the later Middle Ages, such as the legend of Robin Hood, can be considered apocalyptic. The hero overturns the old, corrupt order and a new, more equal justice reigns. To the modern reader, such apocalyptic visions may seem threatening but, to the medieval mind, there was comfort to be found in the aftermath of the Apocalypse, wherein good finally triumphs over evil and everyone meets with the fate that he or she deserves.

The three living and the three dead

Another way in which medieval men and women softened the impact of Death was by engaging with him directly, drawing him into conversation in which the personality of both Death and the dying assumed greater importance. An emerging personal rapport with Death was related in the medieval mind to the Apocalypse, particularly to the Fourth Rider and the Last Judgment. By conversing with Death, man took some of the terror out of his coming and could better prepare for the finality of his end. This engagement with Death ultimately took shape in the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead. According to the legend, three men are walking in the woods one day and stumble upon three rotting cadavers. Confronted with this gruesome sight, each of the three men speaks his mind. However, what is even more remarkable, the dead talk back. For the first time in the medieval West, Death speaks to man.

This story has a long and rather unusual pedigree. Strange though it may seem, it probably originated in the life of Buddha in India during the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. The story of Siddharta Gautama, the pampered son of an Indian bigwig who left his father's palace to confront the miseries of the world and eventually lead a life of asceticism, was Christianized into the legend of Sts. Barlaam and Josaphat. The similarities between the lives of Buddha and Josaphat illustrate the influence of the East on early Christianity, particularly on the Desert Fathers, whose careers as hermits closely paralleled those of the heroes of these stories.

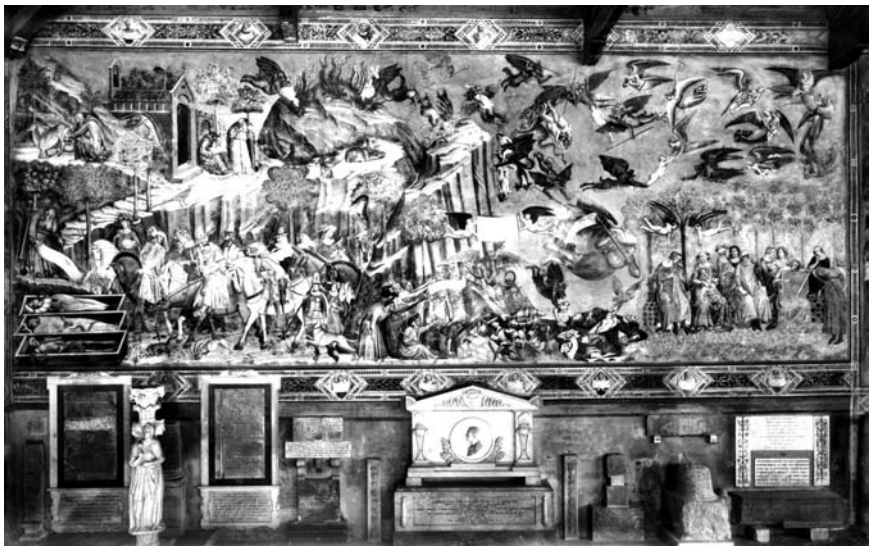
The inspiration that the Barlaam and Josaphat legend may have provided to that of the Three Living and the Three Dead is thought to come at the point where the hermit Barlaam converts the young prince Josaphat to Christianity. Following the example of Christ, Barlaam tells Josaphat a series of parables. Among them is the story of the good king who made four caskets, two of them covered with gold but filled with the stinking bones of the dead, the other two covered with tar but filled with precious stones and pearls. The caskets are used to instruct the king's entourage that those of rich appearance secretly are filled with vice, whereas the poor emanate the sweetness of virtue. Another parable tells of a man with three friends. The first two, symbolizing riches and family, whom the man loved the most, abandon him in time of need, at the hour of death. However, the last friend, symbolizing good works and whom the man loved least, comes to his aid. Traditionally, the story of Barlaam and Josaphat is ascribed to John of Damascus, a Syrian theologian writing around 730 CE. It is thought to have passed to the West through a Latin translation of a Greek manuscript made at Constantinople during the middle of the eleventh century. The story

then made its way to southern Italy through that region's close connections with Byzantium at this time, before ending up in Jacob of Voragine's *Golden Legend* by the thirteenth century.

In one version of the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead, the living come upon the dead lying in their caskets or tombs. There is no dialogue between the two realms; rather, the living draw the appropriate moral lessons from the hideous specimens before them. The dead act as a mirror for the living, reminding them of the transitory nature of the world and the inevitability of death, which spares no one, rich or poor, young or old. This version of the legend is thought to have come down to us in the Latin poem, *Cum Apertam Sepulturam* (*When the Tomb is Opened*). Three kings or men gaze upon a rotting cadaver lying in a mass grave. Each of the living draws his own lesson from the macabre spectacle. The first laments the passing glory of the world and reminds his companions that they will end up like the corpse, just as it was once like them. He urges repentance and preparation for the afterlife, for no one can escape death. The second king, repulsed by the sight and smell of death, dwells on all the material things that the dead have lost. Rotting bones inspire the third man to deliver a sermon on the futility of pride and human desires, echoing the moral tone of the first king.

Among early Italian frescoes of the Three Living and the Three Dead theme are some that show the living, usually mounted on their horses, before the dead in their coffins in varying stages of decomposition. Such images were painted in a fresco at the cemetery chapel of Poggio Mirteto in the Monti Sabini region toward the end of the thirteenth century, in a triptych painting attributed to Jacopo del Casentino of Florence at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and at the monastery of Sacro Speco in Subiaco during the 1360s. However, the masterpiece, indeed the finest painting of them all, is the fresco attributed to either Francesco Traini or Buonamico Buffalmacco in the Camposanto in Pisa, thought to date to the 1330s (see illustration on the next page). The Pisan *Triumph of Death* shares many elements with other Italian paintings of the subject: the dog sniffing out the corpses, also present in Casentino's painting, and the hermit pointing out the moral of the dead, undoubtedly a reference to the Barlaam and Josaphat story, also present in frescoes at Vezzolano, Atri, and Montefiascone, all of which predate this example. Yet the artistic genius of the *Triumph of Death* is evident in the masterly way the painter depicts the psychological reactions of the assemblage of male and female riders to the three corpses, ranging from disgust and fear to curiosity and moral posturing.

For our purposes, the real genius of the *Triumph of Death* is the way it brings together the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead with other Christian themes, particularly the Fourth Horseman and the Last Judgment of the Apocalypse. Originally, the fresco adorned the southern wall of the cloister along which people had to pass to go from the cathedral to the cemetery, and it is useful to look at the painting as if passing by it in procession. If one follows the painting from left to right, one sees first the moral of the Three Living and the Three Dead, as a troop of finely-mounted noblemen come upon three coffined cadavers in varying stages of decay. Then one sees the act of death itself, in the form of an aged figure armed with a scythe who, while ignoring the sick and lame begging for death, is about to invade an unsuspecting party of pleasure seekers in a garden. Finally, just above Death, the artist shows what happens afterward, as angels and devils play a tug-of-war with souls at the Last Judgment. The art historian Christine Boeckl argues that the fresco was heavily influenced by Pope Benedict XII's ruling in 1336 on the judgment of individuals in



The Triumph of Death, attributed to either Francesco Traini or Buonamico Buffalmacco, in the Camposanto, Pisa, c. 1330s. (Courtesy Archivi Alinari/Art Resource, New York.)

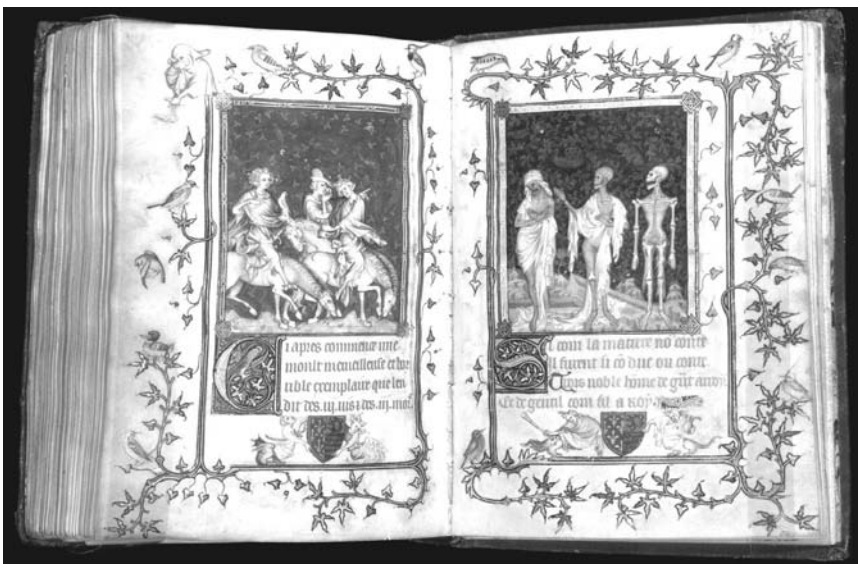
relation to the universal judgment at the Apocalypse: Although Benedict confirmed that each Christian would receive an immediate judgment of the soul upon his or her death, he also asserted that supreme blessedness would not be complete until the body was rejoined with the soul at the Last Judgment. Thus, the spectacle of cadavers confronting the living points to a higher, more epochal event: to a time when all men and women must confront their own deaths and the fate of their souls (and their bodies) forever after.

It is quite clear in the *Triumph of Death* and other paintings like it that the dead lie mute in their tombs. However, already by the end of the thirteenth century, the dead were beginning to find their voice. In one of the earliest paintings of the Three Living and the Three Dead, a fresco in the church of Santa Margherita de Melfi in Italy, perhaps dating to the early thirteenth century, the living encounter the dead as upright skeletons. A similar scene occurs at the cathedral of Atri in the Abruzzi region from the second half of the thirteenth century and at the church of San Flaviano in Montefiascone, also in Italy, from the early fourteenth century.

In literature, the dead begin talking and walking in French poems of the legend. The first and perhaps most accomplished of these poems was written by Baudouin de Condé, minstrel to Marguerite d'Anjou, countess of Flanders. Condé lived during the second half of the thirteenth century, and his poem, *Li Troi Mort et li Troi Vif* (*The Three Dead and the Three Living*), probably influenced later versions composed in France, England, Germany, and Italy. In the poem, three young noblemen come face-to-face with three decomposing cadavers crawling with worms. Predictably, each of the three living men reacts differently. The first is almost driven mad with fear; the second wishes to profit from this "mirror" sent by God; and the third enumerates in gruesome detail the various parts of the body missing from the dead. Such a range of responses already has been encountered in the Latin poem,

Cum Apertam Sepulturam. However, if the dead now begin to speak, what do they say? They, too, have their roles. The first dead introduces himself and his companions. They were once noblemen like their living counterparts, he informs them, and God sent them to the living to mend their ways. Somber is the second dead. Death is cruel when he bites; he spares no one, high or low; the pains of death are the evil result of Adam's original sin. Finally, the third dead ends the poem on what one might say is a happier note. He addresses the living as "brothers and friends." He warns them to turn to good works rather than remain in sin for one hour, for this is nothing compared to the endless pain of death. He requests their prayers and wishes them well. The appearance of this poem was shortly followed by illuminations of the legend in English, French, and Flemish books of hours, where it became a popular motif. The first of these were produced in a French miniature of around 1300 and in the psalter of Robert de Lisle, made perhaps in a London workshop c. 1310, which were closely followed by an illumination for the psalter of Bonne de Luxembourg, duchess of Normandy, painted by the workshop of Jean Pucelle or Jean le Noir sometime between 1332 and the patron's demise during the Black Death in 1349. The last is heavily indebted to *The Triumph of Death* fresco, even though the dead are standing upright. Many other examples of the theme were produced in a variety of mediums and countries down to the early sixteenth century.

The Three Living and the Three Dead can be considered a medieval ghost story, part of a literary genre that dates back to at least 1000 CE and speaks to a universal urge to trespass the bounds of death and communicate with the other world. In most medieval ghost tales, the dead are there to hector the living into a better remembrance, usually through prayers



Three Living and Three Dead: Manuscript illumination in the psalter of Bonne de Luxembourg, c. 1332–49. Note that the three living are modeled on *The Triumph of Death* fresco in Pisa, but that the three dead are now upright. (Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1969 (69.86) Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

and other rituals designed to shorten the dead's time in purgatory. Yet the three dead are more than just ghosts of former individuals wishing to return to their earthly haunts. They speak on behalf of Death and all the dead, and therefore their message is of a far greater scope and import than that of ordinary ghosts. These dead are here to terrify us and console us. They remind us that we, too, will die but tell us how to triumph at the end. They show us the agony of death and point us to the ecstasy of the eternal. Ironically, it is the dead who must teach us how to live.

In the only English-language version of the legend, "gostis ful grym" appear to three kings out of the mist. The poem, *The Three Dead Kings*, from a fifteenth-century manuscript attributed to John Audelay, portrays these ghosts as not unfamiliar to the living:

> *"Nay, are we no fyndus," qoth furst, "that ye before you fynden. We wer your faders of fold that fayre youe have fonden."*
>
> "Nay, we are no fiends," said the first [dead], "that you before you find. We were your fathers of old that once you deemed so fair."

As this passage indicates, *The Three Dead Kings* is highly alliterative, and it employs an extremely elaborate rhyme scheme. In this respect, it is similar to the French poems of a century earlier, although similarities also have been noted with German versions of the legend. Among the latter is the setting of the poem wherein the three living meet the three dead in the course of a hunt in the woods, a feature that is typical of English wall paintings of the subject. After the usual exchanges, the poem ends with the living kings making a minster, or church, to avoid the fate of their fathers and to profit from their advice.

Wall paintings of the Three Living and the Three Dead became quite common in England. Nearly 40 such frescoes are known to have existed, of which hardly more than half can still be seen in varying states of preservation. The majority were executed during the fourteenth century. The earliest of them, at Widford, Oxfordshire, and Charlwood, Surrey, are dated to the early part of the century, before the plague. Nonetheless, the theme seems to have picked up only after the arrival of the Black Death in 1349.

Artistically speaking, these paintings do not compare with the *Triumph of Death* masterpiece at Pisa. In particular, the figures of the dead, usually skeletons, tend to be stiff and awkwardly drawn. However, clearly the sheer number of the frescoes in England attests to the popularity of the subject, and it seems that each painting played a large and important part in the decoration of the local church. One of the most complete and best-preserved examples is the painting in the church of St. Andrew at Wickhampton, Norfolk. One enters the church and immediately sees on the opposing north wall a monumental Three Living and the Three Dead. It fills the entire field of vision: three skeletal cadavers on the left, three hunting kings on the right, and underneath a huntsman with his hounds chasing a hare in the woods. The Wickhampton Three Living and the Three Dead dates to about 1380 and was thus made within living memory of the Black Death, which is known to have carried off the rector of the church in 1349. Why, in the middle of the flat, bleak Norfolk Broads, was such a large and prominent painting commissioned?

The answer, I believe, at Wickhampton as elsewhere, lies in the atmosphere of death created by the plague, which kept recurring throughout the later Middle Ages. The Three

Living and the Three Dead, already well established in European art and literature, imparted a message that may have helped people cope with death. Even though the dead provide a mirror of mortality, they also remind the living that the body, riddled with disease and decay, will be resurrected in its pristine form at the Last Judgment. One of the most important lessons the three dead teach the three living is to prepare for this event. The *Triumph of Death* fresco at Pisa made a clear connection for its viewers between the legend and the Apocalypse. The message also was driven home in the English parish church. The huntsman and hounds pursuing the hare in the lower border of the painting at Wickhampton, for instance, are thought to symbolize the single-minded pursuit man should have of the spiritual world. At Lutterworth church in Leicestershire, over the chancel arch, the dead rise from their tombs at the call of Christ's trumpet, while on the south wall the three kings of the legend are still visible from a painting made in the mid-fourteenth century. At the church of St. Andrew in Pickworth, Lincolnshire, a depiction of the Doom, or Last Judgment, again dominates the chancel arch whereas on the north wall to the west fragments of the Three Living and the Three Dead survive next to an equally damaged painting of the Weighing of Souls. The last dead in Audelay's poem of *The Three Dead Kings* advises his audience to "Do so ye dred not the dome"—in other words, see to it that you approach the end of the world with a clear conscience. The appearance of the dead and the coming of the Last Judgment, when man would triumph over death, were inextricably linked.

Medieval man wanted to talk to Death and have Death talk back. Undoubtedly, this easy familiarity with Death made the Fourth Rider of the Apocalypse less arbitrary and awe inspiring. It gave Death a human face, a personality. The Three Living and the Three Dead provided one of the first and simplest means to humanize Death, not only in art but in dramatic settings. Perhaps the clearest evidence that the legend was reenacted for popular audiences comes from a fifteenth-century German poem from Strasbourg: its lines are illustrated with drawings of the dead standing on top of tombs with their arms and forefingers extended in dramatic gestures. Could not paintings of the theme inside churches inspire reenactments without? By rehearsing death, medieval man may have been far less terrified when it came time to play the real thing.

Dance of death

Of all the cadaverous art and literature produced during the later Middle Ages, that of Death dancing with a series of partners culled from the whole range of the medieval social hierarchy was perhaps the most popular. Texts and images of the Dance of Death, or *Danse Macabre*, penetrated nearly all countries of Europe and inspired some of its most famous authors. In fifteenth-century Paris, a painting of the Dance in the cloisters of the cemetery of Les Innocents led François Villon to contemplate life's fleeting pleasures in his *Testament*. About a century and a half later, it appeared in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. The motif has continued to appeal in modern times. Camille Saint-Saëns composed a musical tone poem called *The Danse Macabre*, Hermann Hesse describes it in his novel, *Narcissus and Goldmund*, and Ingmar Bergman brought it to life in the finale to his film, *The Seventh Seal*.

The Dance seems ready-made for the stage, for both entertainment and didactic purposes. The first reference to a performance of the Dance of Death comes from Caudebec in

Normandy, where it was acted out in the parish church in 1393. Johann Bischoff, writing in 1400, hints at a Dance of Death performed among 20 different kinds of dances in Vienna at Easter. In 1449, a Dance of Death was acted out before the duke of Bourgogne at Bruges in Flanders and, in 1453, the Franciscans of Besançon, France, staged a Dance of Death in the church of St. Jean. The Catalan *Dansa de la Mort* from Spain is still sung and danced to this day.

One of the reasons why the Dance of Death has endured is that it seems to have tapped into the mixed and complex responses to widespread mortality, becoming especially a pictorial and poetic summation of the plague. In origin, the Dance may have been forged in the crucible of pestilence. One theory holds that the Dance was first written down by a Dominican friar from Wurzburg, Germany, shortly after the Black Death, in 1360. Other scholars date the earliest mention of the Dance to 1376, when a French poet, Jean le Févre, composed *Le Respit de Mort* (*A Reprieve from Death*) in which he boasts, "Je fis de Macabre la danse, " or "I made the Danse Macabre." It is quite likely that Le Févre means here that he himself "danced with Death" after contracting a severe illness on October 9 of that year, when the plague was making the rounds of Europe, rather than that he wrote a poem entitled *La Danse Macabre*. Contemporary chroniclers likewise relate some kind of dance to plague. According to the *Grandes Chroniques* (*Great Chronicle*) compiled by the monks of St. Denis in Paris, during the Black Death of 1348, the men and women of a certain town danced to the accompaniment of drum and bagpipe to ward off the pestilence. Two monks from the abbey who witnessed this spectacle in the course of their travels asked the townspeople the reason for it, to which they replied,

> We have seen our neighbors die and are seeing them die day after day, but since the mortality has in no way entered our town, we are not without hope that our festive mood will not allow it to come here, and this is the reason for why we are dancing.

A German chronicler relates that in 1374, groups of dancers, sometimes 500 strong, would dance for half a day in towns along the Rhine and then fall to the ground and allow people to trample on their bodies, in the belief that this would cure them of the disease. There may, in fact, have been a physiological explanation for the dancing. Bubonic plague eventually attacks the nervous system, perhaps resulting in chorea, sometimes known as St. Vitus's Dance, which produces involuntary contractions of the muscles in the face and limbs that may be characterized or masked by a dance. In this respect, it may be akin to ergotism, or St. Anthony's fire, that was possibly contracted by people eating moldy grain during the Great Famine.

Another reason for the Dance of Death's popularity is its suitability for dramatic presentation. Before the Dance acquired a secular audience, it may have been used by preachers to dramatically illustrate their sermons on death. Such is indicated in a fifteenth-century English translation of a French poem, in which Death comes to the Cordelier, or Franciscan Friar, with the words:

Sir cordeler, to yow myn hand is rawght
To this daunce, yow to conveie and lede
Whiche in youre preching, have ful ofte tawght,
How that I am moste gastful for to drede.

Sir Cordelier, to you my hand is extended
To convey and lead you to this dance
Which in your preaching, you have often taught
That I am most fearfully to be dreaded.

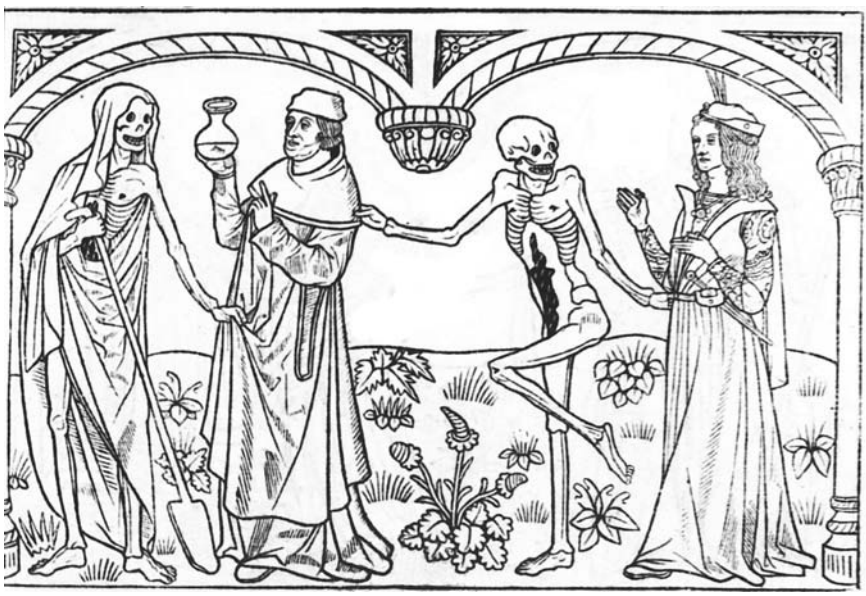
In 1429 in Paris, a Friar Richard preached apocalyptic sermons to thousands for five or six hours with one of the most famous frescoes of the Dance as a backdrop.

Last, we must not discount the appeal of the social message of the Dance of Death. Death here is the Great Leveler, the democratic spoiler who comes for one and all regardless of wealth, rank, or power; no one is exempt, a point that must have been forcibly driven home during time of plague. Of course, this theme was not new: We already have seen it in representations of Death as the Fourth Rider of the Apocalypse and in the poems of the Three Living and the Three Dead. The close connections between these three forms is demonstrated by the frequent proximity of their images. In Paris in 1408, the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead was sculpted on the doorway of the church of Les Innocents on the orders of the duke of Berry, shortly before the Dance was to adorn the southern wall of the cloister that enclosed the adjoining cemetery. At Clusone in Bergamo, Italy, a fresco dated 1485 depicts King Death and two skeletal attendants shooting down the high and mighty, including three men on horseback interpreted as the three living, while below is an elaborate round of the Dance of Death. A sumptuously illuminated manuscript from France, also dating to the late fifteenth century, combines in its first 23 folios images of the Dance of Death, the Three Living and the Three Dead and the Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse.

Yet the Dance of Death clearly represents an advance on the simple personification of the Grim Reaper. The dialogue with Death now is greatly extended, to 30 or more figures, and Death tailors his message to each of the living. Consequently, the Dance, through the mouthpiece of Death, reveals some uniquely medieval Western views of the world. For example, in a version of the poem printed by Guyot Marchant in 1485, the Patriarch is informed by Death that he never will become pope, a clear slap at the Greek Orthodox Church. The Usurer is likewise chastised, by both Death and a Poor Man, because he coldheartedly extracts profit from the interest on his loans, a practice condemned by canon law and usually associated with the Jews. In the Dance, Death also plays a more sinister role than in the Three Living and the Three Dead. He does not just speak to his dance partners, he carries them away, albeit with more courtesy than in paintings of the Apocalypse. Though the living resign themselves to the Dance, the rich meekly resist, and the poor stoutly submit, a formula ripe with social meaning. The Archbishop throws his head back in fear at Death's approach, and the King's Sergeant threatens rebellion. The Laborer, on the other hand, welcomes a rest from his toil, and the Hermit dies secure in the riches of God's grace, an expression that prompts Death's only reply, commending his attitude.

The earliest image of the Dance, accompanied by a poem, was arguably the most influential: the fresco that once adorned the southern cloister of the cemetery of Les Innocents in Paris. Painted in 1424–25 during the English occupation of the city in the course of the Hundred Years War, the elaborate mural at Les Innocents was destroyed in 1669 when King Louis XIV ordered that the neighboring boulevard of La Féronnerie be

Death takes the Monk and the Abbot, Guyot Marchant woodcut from 1485. The figure of death in the middle seems to be taking a bow, which indicates that this is meant to be a theatrical performance. From the *Danse Macabre*, published Paris, 1485. (Private collection / The Bridgeman Art Library.)



Death dances with the Clerk and the Hermit, Guyot Marchant woodcut from 1485. The figure of death in the middle seems to be taking a bow, which indicates that this is meant to be a theatrical performance. (Private Collection/ The Bridgeman Art Library.)

expanded. The inscriptions that accompanied the painting survive in two manuscripts from the abbey of St. Victor in Paris, and in 1485 the printer Guyot Marchant issued the first of many editions of the same poem, containing woodcut illustrations thought to be updated versions of the original mural. This was one of many block-book editions of the Dance of Death that were printed in various cities in France and Germany in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: the most famous was that published at Lyons in 1538 by Hans Holbein the Younger, perhaps inspired by the cycle painted at Basel, Switzerland.

The poem from Les Innocents, which through cross-Channel contacts was to be so influential in England, tells of 30 partners who dance a reel with Death: Pope, Emperor, Cardinal, King, Patriarch, Constable, Archbishop, Baron, Bishop, Squire, Abbot, Bailiff, Astronomer, Bourgeois, Canon, Merchant, Carthusian Monk, Sergeant, Monk, Usurer (accompanied by a Poor Man), Physician, Lover, Advocate, Minstrel, Priest, Laborer, Franciscan Friar, Infant, Clerk, and Hermit. Though the poem has a heavy moralistic tone that was perhaps inspired by the homiletic or didactic works of the Paris theologian Jean Gerson (d. 1429) and his school, the illustrations, such as they are reproduced by Marchant, are thought to owe much to comic theater or farce (*théâtre profane*). The animated figures of the skeletal corpses contrast with the stately and dignified poses of their partners, to the point that, in the words of David Fein, "the dead are more alive than the living." However, even though the poem and the paintings of the Dance may have had their respective origins in two quite different traditions, the mocking tone suggested by the poses of the dancing dead actually reinforce the poem's social message quite well.

The plague may very well have inspired the artists of Les Innocents to document this macabre procession. Between 1414 and 1439, the pestilence visited Paris no fewer than eight times and, in England, national epidemics raged for several years during the 1420s and 1430s. Despite the apparent good government of the English duke of Bedford in the city, the other horsemen, namely war and his close attendant, famine, also may have played a role. According to the anonymous *Journal of a Bourgeois*, which records the painting of the mural, Paris suffered in 1421 from high taxes, a long winter, famine, and the depredations of wolves, most of which the author attributes to the Hundred Years War. Perhaps it is a war weariness that makes the Constable lament:

My whole intention has been
To assail castles and fortresses
And to bring them to my subjection
To acquire honors, riches;
But I see that all prowess
Death lays low, which is a great vexation.

Nor should we discount the possibility of the very surroundings of the cemetery inspiring the Dance, just as they inspired Villon, who observed the bones of all the dead mingled so equitably in the charnel houses just above the cloisters.

The painting at Les Innocents would inspire other renditions. It perhaps influenced similar murals painted around 1460 at the chapel of Kermaria-an-Isquit in Plouha in Brittany, at the abbey of Chaise-Dieu in the Auvergne, and at the Marienkirche in Lübeck,

Germany. The first two still survive to convey some idea of the original glory of their model. In 1426, a Benedictine monk from Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, John Lydgate, was in Paris, then still occupied by the English, where he could observe at first hand the freshly painted Dance at Les Innocents. According to the opening and concluding stanzas of his version of the poem, Lydgate freely translated the Dance from the French at Les Innocents with the help of some native clerks to transport it back to England. This would have been done at least by 1436, the year the English were forced to evacuate Paris. By 1440, the pictures and words of the Dance, as transposed by Lydgate, seem to have been recreated on painted boards in the north cloister of the Pardon Churchyard at St. Paul's Cathedral, London, under the patronage of Jankin Carpenter, town clerk, who paid for them "with great expenses." To the original 30 dancers with Death, Lydgate added six others: the Empress, the Lady of Great Estate (or noblewoman), the Abbess, the Amorous Gentlewoman, the Juror, and the "Tregetour," identified as John Rikill, formerly personal jester to Henry V, who apparently died at the time Lydgate made his translation. In a later, inferior revision of the poem, known as the B text, 10 new characters were added, including the Mayor, the Canon Regular, the Judge, the Doctor of both Canon and Civil Law, the Nun, the Artificer (or craftsman), and the Servant or Officer, though the Lady of Great Estate, the Bailiff, the Bourgeois, the Monk, the Usurer (and Poor Man), the Squire, the Tregetour, the Priest, and the Clerk were left out.

There are several characteristics of Lydgate's poem that are distinctly different from the original in Paris. For one thing, the connections with plague are much stronger. This is made clear immediately, in the first stanza of the Translator's Introduction, wherein Lydgate informs his audience what lessons they should learn from the Dance:

O yee folkes, harde herted as a stone
Which to the world, have al your advertence
Liche as it sholde, laste evere in oone
Where is your witte, wher is your prudence
To se a-forne, the sodeyne violence
Of cruel dethe, that be so wyse and sage
Whiche sleeth allas, by stroke of pestilence
Bothe yonge and olde, of lowe and hie parage.

O you people, hard-hearted as a stone
Who devote all your attention to the world
Which you think should last forever and anon
Where is your reason, where is your wisdom
To see in advance the sudden violence
Of cruel Death, who is so wise and knowing
Who slays all of us, by the stroke of pestilence
Both young and old, of low and high degree.

We already have seen in the previous chapter how in stanza 54 of the poem, the Physician bewails his impotence in the face of plague. Such explicit reference to pestilence is missing in the original French version of the Dance; the closest *le Médecin* comes to uttering the

word is *maladie* (malady). England may well have had the pestilence more on its mind. In addition to the plagues of the 1420s, the 1430s were a time of cold weather and disease: National epidemics and famines broke out between 1433 and 1435 and between 1437 and 1440. This apparently was the very time when Lydgate returned to England from Paris and when the Dance at St. Paul's in London was being made.

In addition, there is a heavy judicial overtone to the English Dance. The A and B versions together introduce four new representatives of the legal profession—Judge, Doctor of Laws, Juror, and Officer—to the Bailiff and Advocate of the original French procession. The Judge is ashamed of having obstructed justice; the Doctor of Laws is admonished by Death of any guile in his disputations; the Juror admits that he would "hang the trewe and the theeff acquyte"; and the Officer gives the parting advice, "in office lat no man doon outrage." Essentially, their message is: the men of law are corrupt, but they will get their just sentence before the one, true Judge. This righteous tone can be found in the French poems as well, but it waxes in the English verses. Death warns the Bailiff that he will be judged at a "new assise" for the "extorcions and wronges to redresse," crimes of which he is not accused at Les Innocents. The Advocate, or Man of Law, is threatened with the "dome," or the Last Judgment, a punishment he does not face from the French Death. Lydgate's Dance of Death thus shares with the Fourth Rider an apocalyptic sense of ultimate justice that proved so attractive to late medieval Englishmen.

What is remarkable is that, despite the auspicious early influence from France, the Dance of Death adorns so few of English churches, far fewer than the Three Living and the Three Dead. Traces of the Dance survive at Hexham in Northumberland, Newark-on-Trent in Nottinghamshire, and Sparham in Norfolk, at all of which it was painted on rood screens during the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. Aside from the example at St. Paul's, frescoes of the Dance that once existed but since disappeared include examples at Stratford-on-Avon; Wortley Hall, Gloucestershire; the archbishop of Canterbury's palace at Croydon, Surrey; Henry VIII's castle at Whitehall, London; and perhaps the Hungerford Chapel in Salisbury Cathedral. A minor series of the Dance was carved in the misericords (ledges for support attached to the underside of seats in choir stalls) of Windsor Castle and of Coventry Cathedral. The latter's images, however, were already defaced before being destroyed in bombing during the Second World War, whereas those in the retro-choir rib vault of Rosslyn Chapel, Scotland, also have suffered much from time. In the church of St. Andrew, Norwich, a stained-glass panel, one of an original set of 44 from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, displays a cadaverous Death draped in his shroud checkmating a bishop on a chessboard. In Lydgate's poem, Death checkmates the Empress and the Amorous Gentlewoman (rather than the Bishop), whereas the theme of man playing a chess game with Death returns as the central conceit of Bergman's film, *The Seventh Seal* (1957).

It may well be that England has a paucity of these images of the Dance of Death because they are more elaborate and, therefore, more expensive to execute. There also may have been cheaper, and correspondingly less enduring, versions of the Dance made so that they were more prevalent in parish churches than we know about today. For example, one parish church in Bristol, All Saints, just happens to have its churchwardens' accounts survive, an unusual occurrence before the Reformation. This records that one William Wytteney "let ordain and let make at his own cost a memorial that every man should remember his own death, that is to say the Dance of Pauls, the which cost £18." Undoubtedly this was a Dance

Death as a Chessman: checkmating a bishop at St. Andrew's Church, Norwich, late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, and in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957). (The first image is reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR. © Crown copyright. NMR. The second image is reproduced with permission of Svensk Filmindustri.)

of Death in imitation of the one at St. Paul's Pardon Churchyard, which seems to have been painted soon after its model, in the mid-fifteenth century. It also seems to have been painted on cloth or boards to be hung up in the manner of a tapestry or banner, rather than as a permanent fresco on the church wall: the churchwardens' accounts state that it was put up and taken down again twice a year, around the feast of St. James in late July, when pilgrims going to and from Santiago de Compostela in Spain would have thronged the port of Bristol, and on All Saints on November 1, when a skeletal procession would have been especially appropriate for a time of year when it was believed the boundaries between the realms of the living and the dead were easily trespassed. A similarly transient representation of the Dance modeled on the one at St. Paul's was hung up in three "long cloths" before the rood-loft at the church of Long Melford in Suffolk.

Nevertheless, I do not think we should discount the possibility that the message of the Dance may have been socially unpalatable to many an English country parson. In the wake of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and Lollard activity in the decades thereafter, English authorities were particularly sensitive to the leveling themes that the rebels and heretics propounded. In both the French and English poems of the Dance, nearly the entire Church hierarchy is accused of being worldly. Aside from the Cardinal, Archbishop, and Bishop, all rich, proud men, the Abbot is fat from high living, the Canon clutches at his many benefices, the Monk wallows in vice. Not even the Parson, a sympathetic character in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, is above cherishing his tithes. Nor might the local gentry be overly receptive to the Dance, given that they tended to put their status and wealth on display during funerals, judging from the arrangements made in their wills when anticipating their own deaths. Conversely, the Dance does, in a macabre way, preserve a rigid hierarchy. Yet even this may have been offensive, particularly to the later reformers who saw a pope and a cardinal precede their king. In the A version of Lydgate's poem, the Pope is given "soverente over the churche and states temporal," whereas in the B version, his authority is limited to the Church. Although Henry VIII apparently had a tapestry and fresco of the Dance commissioned (but exactly when in his reign is uncertain), in 1549, after his death, the lord protector, Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset, pulled down the cloister containing the Dance at St. Paul's and used the rubble to build his new house along the Strand.

The last intriguing question concerning the Dance is what relationship exists between Death and the dancers. Are the cadavers simply replicated images of almighty Death? Or is each cadaver a mirror image of its living counterpart, as he or she will appear at death? There is nothing in the Dance poems themselves to suggest that the living are addressing their dead selves. Sometimes, in both the French and English versions, Death is addressed by male dancers using the feminine article or pronoun. Moreover, the images do not tally: in the case of the obstreperous Sergeant, for example, two dead escort him to his grave, while the Infant is carried away by an adult corpse. Nor do the Three Living and the Three Dead juxtapose two stages of the same body. In the Latin poem, *Cum Apertam Sepulturam*, three kings address a single corpse and, in the Pisan *Triumph of Death*, 10 riders gaze upon three decomposing dead. Not until cadavers are carved on tombs do we see living individuals masquerade as Death.

Vado mori and *ars moriendi*

Vado mori, je vois morir, *I wende to dede*—such is the refrain of the *Vado Mori* poems appearing in several languages, the earliest of which date to the thirteenth century. Like the Three Living and the Three Dead and the Dance of Death, the message of *Vado Mori* is clear: there is no escape from death. To prove its point, members of all classes of society, from Pope to Poor Man, repeat its mantra: "I go to die." Each dying man has barely enough time to tell how he dies in a manner suited to his station. The Knight, for example, who had conquered in life, is conquered by Death. The Logician is out-argued by Death; the Cantor cannot sing his notes through his tears; the Sailor is shipwrecked by Death; the Butler is poisoned. In one version of the poem, probably dating to the fourteenth century, there is a dialogue of sorts between the dying and an anonymous speaker, either a moralizing hermit or Death itself. In response to each man's lament of "I go to die," his companion answers, "Live in God," meaning, amend your life so that you may have a "future life, a celestial future" after death. Like the Dance of Death, the *Vado Mori* poems parade a variety of participants whose deaths are tailored to their occupational or social classes. The poems are unusual, however, for their favorable view of the Lawyer: he is called the "defender of the poor."

Although Death plays little part in the poems, the English illustrations of *Vado Mori*, or variations of it, usually depict Death as a skeleton or cadaver coming to claim the speaker. One such illustration, from an English manuscript of the fifteenth century, shows Death with a dart in each hand stinging a king, a bishop, and a knight, all of whom recite: "I wende to dede." Later in the same manuscript, a harp player is about to be shot at by Death, who draws back his bow. The harpist laments:

Allas ful warly for wo may I synge
For into sorow turned is my harpe
And my organ into voyce of wepynge
When i rememyr the deth that is scharpe.

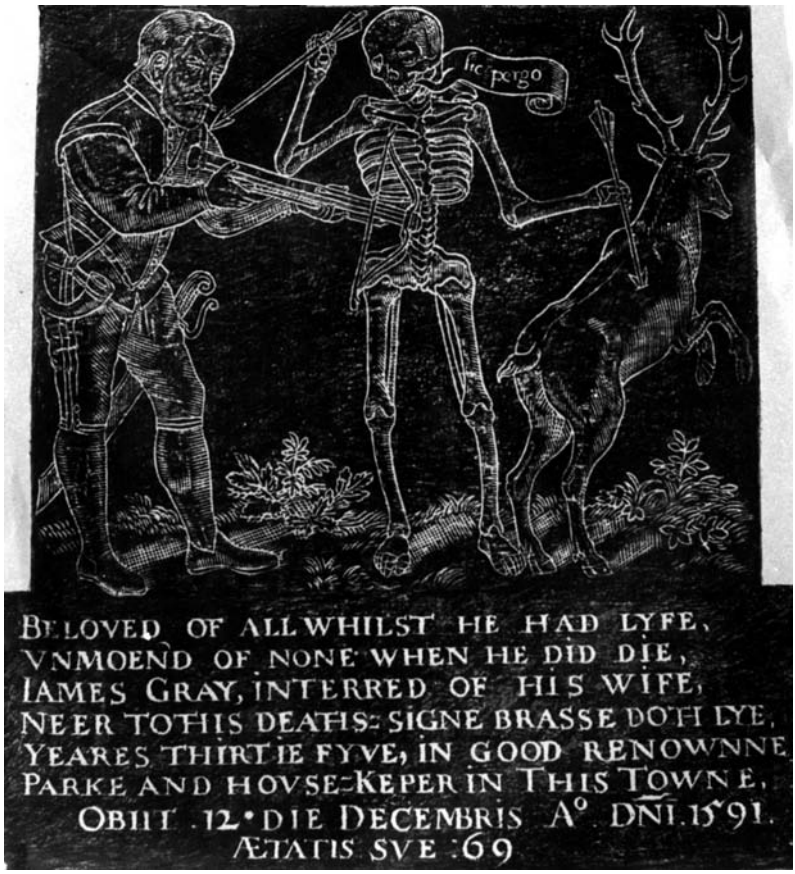
Alas, full warily in woe may I sing
For to sorrow is devoted my harp
And my voice [is turned] into one of weeping
When I remember death that is sharp.

Arming Death with a bow and arrow is a particularly English touch. It also appears in a window at the parish church of Stanford-on-Avon, Northamptonshire, whose vicar, Henry Williams, dying in 1501, had himself commemorated next to an image of Death with his longbow rising out of a tomb "shoting at me." Englishmen conceived of Death claiming them with the same weapon with which they dealt so much death to their enemies in war. Finally, in a memorial brass to James Gray, park-keeper at Hudson, Hertfordshire, who died in 1591, Death hunts the hunter with his dart, reminiscent of the earlier *Vado Mori* poems, in which men die as they lived.

The *Vado Mori* poems anticipate the *Ars Moriendi* manuals that became so popular throughout Europe during the fifteenth century. Also called the *Art of Living Well and of*

Vado Mori: Death taking aim with a favorite English weapon, the longbow, at a harp-player. From a fifteenth-century English manuscript. (Reproduced with permission of the British Library. © The British Library Board.)

Dying Well (for the two, in the medieval mind, naturally go together), the *Ars Moriendi* (Art of Dying) survives in more than 200 illustrated block-book editions. As with the use of the pronoun "I" in the *Vado Mori* poems, the *Ars Moriendi* shifts the focus to the individual. Man is no longer concerned with death in general but with one particular death: his own. He is especially concerned about what will happen to him after death, where he can end up in one of three places—heaven, hell, or purgatory. Consequently, it is not the act of dying that is most important but rather how the bedridden man behaves up to the very moment of death. Of the 11 scenes typical of the printed editions of the genre, five show the temptations before death—unbelief, despair, impatience, pride, and avarice—followed by five angelic inspirations to counteract the temptations and, at the very end, the good death, wherein the soul ascends to paradise. Such a sustained examination of death illustrates a more introspective exercise than any of the previous macabre genres.



Vado Mori: Memorial brass for James Gray (d. 1591), park-keeper, at Hudson, Hertfordshire. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

Yet despite the new-found emphasis on the individual, the *Ars Moriendi* proved not incompatible with the message of the Apocalypse, especially when, like the Three Living and the Three Dead and the Dance of Death, it was adapted for the stage. An allegorical reenactment of the deathbed scene became popular in fifteenth-century England as the play, *Everyman*. In the play, Everyman, symbolizing any man about to die, is abandoned in short order by his friends, symbolized by Fellowship; his family, symbolized by Kindred and Cousin; and by his material possessions, symbolized by Goods. Not even his natural qualities—Knowledge, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, Five-wits (or senses)—can accompany him on this "pilgrimage." His only steadfast companion, even unto the grave, is Good Deeds, symbolizing Everyman's charitable works, which he had hitherto neglected. A key part also is played by Confession, symbolizing the necessity to do penance that sets Everyman on the path to salvation.

What is striking about the play is the prominence given at the beginning of the drama to Death, who has a much greater role here than in any other *Ars Moriendi* form. (Interestingly, Death does not appear at the end, when Everyman dies.) Indeed, he speaks more in *Everyman* than he ever has before. Death is commissioned by God to take Everyman unawares, when he has his end "least in mind." Then ensues a long conversation between Death and Everyman, consisting of no fewer than 99 lines, the essence of which is that Everyman desperately pleads with Death to grant a stay of execution. First he offers Death £1000, but Death cannot be bribed. Next, Everyman begs for a moratorium of 12 years in which to settle his spiritual accounts, but Death is impatient. Finally, Everyman requests a single day to amend his life, but Death denies even this. What is remarkable, though, is that in the end, Death does grant a delay, however fleeting:

And now out of thy sight I will me hie:
See thou make thee ready shortly,
For thou mayst say this is the day
That no man living may 'scape away.

For the first time, Death stays his hand, if only briefly; the personal face of Death is nowhere more evident, and much drama remains. How long this *mortus interruptus* lasts—several minutes, hours?—we do not know, but without it, the play cannot go on.

At one point, Everyman asks Death if he will ever return from the pilgrimage he is about to undertake. Death answers:

No, Everyman. And thou be once there,
Thou mayst never more come here,
Trust me verily.

Death does not tell the whole truth, however. A little later on in the play, Fellowship asks the same question as Everyman asked Death: Will they ever come back from their journey to the other world? Everyman answers, "Nay, never again, 'till the day of doom." So, in actual fact, man *will* return from death: at the Last Judgment of the Apocalypse, when his body will be reunited with his soul. This point is reemphasized by the Doctor, who comes on the stage at the very end of the play to explain its meaning:

And he that hath his account whole and sound,
High in heaven he shall be crowned,
Unto which place God bring us all thither,
That we may live body and soul togither.

The ancient belief in the resurrection of the body at the end of the world can be traced in the Judeo-Christian tradition back to the Old Testament, especially to the Book of Job, where Job says, "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (19:25–27). In the New Testament, we have, above all, the example of the resurrection of Christ himself. In addition, the Apostle Paul explains the resurrection to the Corinthians using the beautiful image of a seed sown in

the ground that sprouts forth "in incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:35–44). Then, of course, there is the famous vision of St. John in the Revelation, where he see the dead rise up from their graves at the coming of Christ in judgment (Apocalypse 20:11–13). However, what *Everyman* demonstrates is that, at the popular level, people came to the same conclusion as did schoolmen in the university: Even with an immediate judgment of the soul upon death, the Apocalypse still holds an important place for its power to redeem the body. At the Last Judgment, medieval men and women believed, the physical forms we had enjoyed in our youth, despite any ravages from famine, war, plague, and death, will be restored to us to rejoin our souls. Even in the midst of the crises of the Apocalypse, there is hope that a full recovery is imminent. *Everyman* attests to the enduring necessity of the resurrection to the medieval psyche.

The dying man of the Middle Ages therefore believed that he could have it both ways, that he could take his body, hale and whole, with him after death. (In what condition the body would be resurrected is a question we will explore later.) However, to do this, he had to first humiliate his body, humiliate his pride, so that he might be deemed worthy by God to enter paradise. For it was no good resurrecting the body if it was to end up in hell suffering real, physical torments for all eternity. Even though Dante denies "Suicides" their bodies in canto 13 of the *Inferno* in his great poem, *The Divine Comedy*, the Church made it quite clear that the resurrection of the bodies of the damned will be no different from that of the blessed. Therefore, it became fashionable to express contempt for the body, as the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century French poets Eustache Deschamps and Pierre de Nesson do so well. Sometimes borrowing from the Book of Job, they describe the body as the repository of dung, filth, spittle, urine, excrement, menstrual blood, and other assorted and repulsive bodily fluids. Yet, this was simply a means to an end. Man could have his soul, and his body too, and enjoy them both in a future paradise, provided that he played his cards right.

Body and soul

It became fashionable in the later Middle Ages to express a twofold concern for the body and the soul in the form of a "dialogue" between them. The Latin poem, *Dialogus inter Corpus et Animam* (*Dialogue between the Body and the Soul*), was very popular in England during the thirteenth century and served as the basis for a more poetic English language version. By the middle of the fifteenth century, a prose version appeared in a northern English dialect under the title, *A Dysputacion betwyx the Saule and the Body when it is Past Oute of the Body*. The verses are accompanied by illustrations of a soul in human form conversing with a decomposing corpse lying in a shroud. Proof that the disputation became part of the macabre genre is Guyot Marchant's publication of a *Debate of the Body and the Soul* in his 1486 edition of the *Danse Macabre*. Likewise, the French poet of death, François Villon, wrote a *Debate of the Heart and of the Body* loosely based on that between the body and soul.

The soul begins the *Dysputacion*, as it does in the earlier poems of the debate, by abusing the body and accusing it of leading the soul into corruption. The body is "horribille and fowle stynkyng wormes mete," whose misgovernance led the soul to "gret disese and hevynes." However, in the next lines, as is true of other debate poems, the body holds its own against the soul's opening salvo. In fact, the body is quite a skillful debater, parrying the

soul's bitter attacks by quoting from Ezekiel and Aristotle and turning the soul's arguments against it. Whether the metaphor be a smoky fire, a smelly candle, or a narrow sack, the body reverses the reference to itself by pointing out that it is but the outward form of the "actyfe" flame, wick, or enclosed contents within. Ironically, the body argues against the soul by diminishing its own importance and exalting the powers of its other half: it was but the faithful subject of its sovereign who "suld hafe drawne me to the [thee] with thi goode governance aftyr Gods lawe." Other bodies that were better ruled have lain in the ground miraculously "alle hole withouten corrupcion in thair grave or sepulkyr [sepulcher]."

The *Dysputacion* is finally ended by an angel, who in the last illustration of the verse looks down upon the antagonists, pleading:

> *Pes and stynt of your pleyng, for it is not your avaylyng betwyx yow twoo to stryfe on swylk maner of wyse be swylk wordes and to be mefed. For ye ar predestinate to salvacion and hereafter sal be ioyned again togeder.*
>
> Be peaceful and stop your arguing, for it is unavailing for you two to debate in such manner using such words and to be so moved. For you are predestined to salvation and hereafter will be joined again together.

Feuding between these two cantankerous spouses is thus put to rest by the promise of the resurrection, when they will be wedded in a perfect union, a solution already hinted at by the body in its first response to the soul: "Thu sal in bones cum to thi jugement at the general resurreccion of me and of al other that ar ded." Such a reconciliation is not found in earlier poems of the debate, where both the body and soul are doomed to eternal torment as a result of their mutual failings. By means of an apocalyptic denouement at the Last Judgment, body and soul in the *Dysputacion* are counseled back together.

A singular variation on the debate theme occurs in the same manuscript in *A Disputacioun betwyx the Body andWormes*. Here the body debates not with the soul but with worms that are about to devour her flesh. The poem begins like other debate poems with a dream vision by the poet. Yet, in this case, the dream vision is unique in two important respects. In the first lines of the poem, the poet immediately relates his vision to a time of plague:

> *In the ceson of juge mortalite*
> *Of sondre disseses with the pestilence*
> *Hevely reynand whilom in cuntre*
> *To go pylgramege mefed by my conscience.*
>
> In a season of huge mortality
> Of various diseases including the pestilence
> Which once upon a time ruled strongly over the land
> To go on pilgrimage was I moved by my conscience.

The poet dreams his disputation partly because he enters a church to pray for relief against the apocalyptic horseman of plague. It would be fair to assume, then, that this poem

A Disputacioun betwyx the Body and Wormes, 15th-century. In the poet's dream, a lady's corpse lying underneath her elaborate tomb (opposite) engages in a debate with the worms crawling through her rotting flesh. (Reproduced with permission of the British Library. © The British Library Board.)

was inspired by the sickness and death caused by such a disease and that it was meant to provide some comfort in the face of rampant mortality.

The second important aspect of the prologue to the poem is its use of a "towmbe or sepulture" inside the church for inspiration. The tomb effigy is of a great lady, "ful freschly forgyd, depycte, and depynte." The poet then falls asleep beside the tomb and dreams that the woman it depicts engages in a dialogue with worms that devour her dead body. The first manuscript page of the poem is illustrated by a colored drawing of a woman's tomb, the effigy decked out in elaborate headdress and robes, while underneath is a skeletal corpse in a shroud riddled with what look like worms, toads, and newts. This central illustration is followed by others in the margins of the poem showing the woman's naked corpse, standing up and still in her headdress, addressing an assemblage of wriggling worms.

Unlike the dialogue between the body and the soul, the body and worms do not engage in a true debate between two evenly-matched antagonists; the worms win here hands down. The woman pleads with the worms to stop gnawing her body and calls upon the knights and squires who so admired her in life to come defend her from these inconsiderate vermin. However, the worms will not be denied. They have conquered far more powerful adversaries in the past, men like Judas Maccabaeus, Julius Caesar, Godfrey of Bouillon (first crusader king of Jerusalem), Alexander the Great, David, Hector, King Arthur, and Charlemagne, among others. The worms send their advance guard of lice and fleas to pick at her while she is alive and are swiftly followed by a rearguard of the cockatrice, basilisk, dragon, lizard, tortoise, snake, toad, mole, scorpion, viper, adder, ant, caterpillar, spider, maggots, newt, water leech, and others not far "behynde."

Nevertheless, the *Disputacioun* ends in a way similar to that between the body and soul: with the promise of the resurrection. In this way, the body is reconciled with the worms because it knows it will be made whole again. As the body says to the worms:

This that I hafe complened and sayd
In no displesyng take it yow unto

Lat us be frendes at this sodayn brayde
Neghbours and luf as before we gan do
Let us kys and dwell to gedyr evermore
To that God wil that I sal agayn upryse
At the day of dome before the hye justyse
With the body glorified to be
And of that nownbyr that I may be one
To cum to that blis of heven in fee
Thorow the mene and the mediacione
Of our blissed lord our verry patrone
Thar in abilite to be for his hye plesaunce
Amen, Amen pour charite at this instaunce.

At what I have bemoaned and said
Do not you take offense
Let us be friends after this sudden uproar
[Let us be] neighbors and love each other as we did before
Let us kiss and dwell together forevermore
Because God wills that I will rise again
At the day of Doom before the High Judge
When my body will be glorified
And of that number may I be one
Who enters by right into the bliss of heaven
By means of the intervention and mediation
Of our blessed Lord [Christ] our savior
There at his almighty pleasure will I be with my [bodily] faculties
Amen, amen, may He be charitable in this instance.

If the debate poems argue for the resurrection of the body, the question remains: Exactly what kind of body will be resurrected? This sort of problem has been addressed throughout the centuries of medieval Christianity. There are three main authorities on the subject: St. Augustine of the fourth and fifth centuries CE, Peter Lombard of the twelfth century, and St. Thomas Aquinas of the thirteenth century. Some of these authors' specific concerns (which also were those of many Christians) were, quite frankly, bizarre. How will our bodies be resurrected if they happen to be eaten and digested by cannibals? (The flesh will simply be given back, as if on loan.) Will aborted fetuses be resurrected? (Yes, even though they cannot be "born again" because they were never born in the first place.) Will all the hair and nails we have shaved or pared off be restored? (No, only what does not result in ugliness.) Will all the food we have eaten form a part of our bodies? (No, only what is permanent will rise.) Will we be married in heaven? (No, nor will we have any intercourse despite the presence of our genitals.) Will we all be the same gender and height? (No, we will be resurrected with our individual proportions.) At what age will we be resurrected? (At around 30, the age of Christ, even for those who died young.) Will the resurrection occur during the day or the night? (At night, when Christ was resurrected.)

Despite such learned explanations, there remained some confusion at the more popular level about what the resurrection would look like. Even though William Durand, a thirteenth-century liturgist, declared that we would be fully clothed at the "day of judgment" and Aquinas asserted that man would be "remade perfect in all his members," John Lydgate imagined the dead at the day of Doom standing on their tombs showing "a dredful foul figure…with boonys blak and donne." Paintings and sculptures of the Last Judgment often have the dead rising naked out of their graves at the sound of the angels' trumpets, yet Christ in his majesty is shown surrounded by the saved in all the accoutrements of their former lives. A considerable amount of variation and imagination thus accompanied artists' rendering of the climax of the Apocalypse.

What concerns us here, and what probably interested Europeans who lived through the crises of the later Middle Ages, is how the resurrected body will overcome mutilations and deformities of various sorts brought on by famine, war, and plague. Peter Lombard, the twelfth-century theologian, makes it clear that the body will be resurrected perfectly whole. Basing himself on Augustine, he writes in the fourth book of his *Sentences*: "Therefore the bodies of the saints will rise without any blemish, without any deformity, as it were without any corruption, affliction, difficulty." However, it was left up to Aquinas to explain exactly how this will occur. Drawing from Aristotle, Aquinas states in his *Summa Theologiae*:

> The soul stands in relation to the body not only as its form and end, but also as efficient cause. For the soul is compared to the body as art to the thing made by art … and whatever is shown forth explicitly in the product of art is all contained implicitly and originally in the art. In like manner whatever appears in the parts of the body is all contained originally and, in a way, implicitly in the soul. Thus just as the work of an art would not be perfect if its product lacked any of the things contained in the art, so neither could man be perfect, unless the whole that is contained enfolded in the soul be outwardly unfolded in the body … Since then at the resurrection man's body must correspond entirely to the soul … it follows that man also must rise again perfect, seeing that he is thereby repaired in order that he may obtain his ultimate perfection.

This elegant statement solves the problem of dismemberment and disease that may have afflicted the temporal body. The soul is conceived by Aquinas as a kind of blueprint for the resurrection of matter, which becomes a perfect expression of man's inner beauty. His interpretation was endorsed in 1336 by Pope Benedict XII, who declared in his bull, *Benedictus Deus*, that the soul, instead of simply being enclosed by the body, is "but a self of which the body is the expression." By borrowing Aristotle's analogy of art, Aquinas also calls to mind the importance of physical elaboration and expression of these ideas, especially for the vast majority of the illiterate. The two-tiered transi tombs of England are one, perhaps the greatest, such artistic expression of Aquinas's theory of the resurrection.

The transi tombs

Tomb effigies of the deceased lying in recumbent position, commonly known as "gisants," may date to as early as the tenth century in Europe and became common from the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. These images appear to be of the deceased as

they may have looked in life (the so-called *representacion au vif*). Yet the presence of angels at the head of Edward II (d. 1327), for instance, suggest that the effigy may also have been intended as an idealized figure depicted at the resurrection. Certainly the contents of some tombs indicate a preparation for such an event: the exhumed grave of a twelfth-century bishop of Paris, for example, revealed that he was buried with a note on his chest proclaiming his assurance that he would rise again. A number of fourteenth-century English tombs portray angels presenting the naked souls of their patrons to Christ or the Holy Trinity. In addition, some portrayals of the Last Judgment show bodies being resurrected in full regalia. Giovanni Pisano's tomb of Margaret of Brabant (d. 1311) in Genoa, Italy, actually has two angels on either side of the deceased lifting her up in her earthly garments to her heavenly fate.

What the transi tomb did, of course, was contrast or replace altogether the idealized effigy with its opposite: a decomposing or desiccated cadaver (the *representacion de la mort*, or representation of death). Among the first to be so represented were the physician Guillaume de Harcigny (d. 1393) at Laon, France, and another member of the professional class, the lay judge, François de la Sarra (d. 1363 but tomb erected in the 1390s) at La Sarraz, Switzerland. On the latter tomb, worms crawl in or out of La Sarra's arms and legs, while frogs or toads gnaw or rest on his eyes, lips, and genitalia. Worms are also mentioned in the epitaphs on the tombs of Archbishop Henry Chichele, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and of Bishop Richard Fleming. Worms were naturally associated with plague-ridden or decomposing bodies. Shortly before describing how the Black Death invaded the

The two-tiered transi tomb balanced the *representacion au vif,* in life, as in this armored figure of John Fitzalan, earl of Arundel, with the *representacion de la mort,* in death, the cadaverous figure below. (Reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR. © Crown copyright.)

whole world and left hardly a third of the human race standing—regardless of age, status, or gender—the physician-poet Simon of Corvino has this to say: "The precious nobility of man becomes a vile cadaver,/Food for worms, a stinking plague, a thing more vile than any other."

During the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1348, the Catalan physician, Jacme d'Agramont, and his Italian colleagues, Gentile da Foligno and Giovanni della Penna, all prescribed medicines for worms because they believed that they accompanied the illness and could cause the death of the patient. Also during the fourteenth century, Master Franciscus Dinanilus of Bologna believed that the "poisonous matter" of plague could give rise to "pernicious worms" in the body that "cruelly bite the anus and damage important places and cause the victory of death," for which he prescribed a special medicine. His Jewish colleague, Abraham Kashlari, also noticed as one of the symptoms of pestilential fever that patients "discharged worms" in their vomit or stool. Association of plague with worms continued in the fifteenth century with an anonymous doctor in Lübeck, Germany, who in 1411 listed worms, including the intestinal kind, as one of the signs heralding the plague in young boys. Meanwhile, Michel Boeti, a Montpellier physician who also wrote a plague treatise in the early part of the century, included an entire section devoted to plague apostemes generated by various kinds of worms. An anonymous German treatise of 1481 likewise claimed that "the worst sort of worms" were generated by "a putrefaction of the humors" during a plague, which would bite "the opening of the stomach" and cause so much pain that the patient would swoon and die; in addition, these worms gave rise to "poisonous fumes" that could "corrupt and suffocate the vital spirits," which is why they needed to be drawn out of the body and killed with the "appropriate medicines."

An important point to remember here is that medieval people believed worms were spontaneously generated from *inside* the body, even during the process of decomposition when the corpse was laid in the ground. This belief can be traced all the way back to Pliny the Younger (61–113 CE), who recorded a popular folklore that the human spinal marrow was transformed into a snake upon death. This would imply that the worms on La Sarra's tomb are in fact crawling *out* of his body, not into it, as most modern people would normally expect. Instead of a gruesome image of corruption and decay, La Sarra's worm-ridden body then becomes a hopeful symbol of what will happen at the resurrection, when the body will be restored to its pristine form. This interpretation is strengthened by the passage from the Book of Job relating to the resurrection already quoted and by the original presence of two scallop shells on La Sarra's pillow, one on either side of his head (only one now survives, on the viewer's right). The scallop shell was an ancient symbol of rebirth, going back to the Greek myth of the birth of Aphrodite. (Although the scallop shell also symbolized pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James at Santiago de Compostela, La Sarra never made a journey to this site.) As for the frogs, they too could be issuing out of the body, just as they issue out of the mouth of the dragon, beast, and false prophet in Revelation 16:13. An alternative interpretation would associate the frogs and worms with sin and evil, as they are in early fourteenth-century German depictions of Frau Welt, or the Lady of the World, whose vain, beautiful body is secretly eaten from behind by these creatures. Although this would not be very flattering to La Sarra, perhaps, it would demonstrate an almost requisite humility before God: St. Thomas Aquinas declared in the thirteenth

century that one must interpret the gnawing of worms in a figurative sense as symbolizing "the pangs of conscience."

The next significant transi tomb was made in c. 1402, upon the death of Cardinal Jean de Lagrange at Avignon. Lagrange's tomb (which was disassembled during the French Revolution) was an especially elaborate monument consisting of 10 stages, including an effigy of the deceased just above his transi. This may have served as a model for the first "double-decker tomb," that of Archbishop Henry Chichele in Canterbury, England, in which the life-like effigy of the patron above contrasts with a naked cadaver image below. This became the signature transi tomb of England, although it was certainly not unique to that country.

Philippe Ariès regards the transi as "the most important minor character in the macabre iconography of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries," yet he judged the double-decker tombs as too few to "express a main current of the sensibility of the age." Nonetheless, the handful of individual examples of double-decker tombs that will be the focus of the pages that follow serve as a kind of grand summation of the themes we have been pursuing in this chapter. Though the macabre was an important element of these tombs, their main purpose, I believe, was as preparation for the Apocalypse, not as moralizing message or appeal for prayers. Humiliation of the body in the service of God, which may well have been a part of these tombs' iconography, was not new: one can find it already well established in the medieval mystical literature. What was new about the two-tiered transi tombs was their perfectly balanced union of two sensibilities, mortification and glorification, fear and hope, that made up the process of death and resurrection. This did no more than reflect medieval man's mixed emotions at the coming of the Apocalypse.

Like the debate poems, there is a dialogue going on here in the double-decker tombs, but a harmonious rather than adversarial one between two bodies, one of death and the other of resurrected life. Reflecting their patrons' high status, these tombs are among the most sumptuous and beautifully carved in England during the fifteenth century. Their transis are gruesome, and their inscriptions certainly call attention to this fact. However, the strong presence of angels on the tombs points to a triumph over sickness, mutilation, and death. For some, whose lives were directly touched by one of the horsemen of the Apocalypse, this must have been a great comfort.

Archbishop Henry Chichele

On August 31, 1422, Henry V, king of England and heir to the kingdom of France, died at Vincennes, near Paris. The king had taken ill at the siege of Meaux, just 30 miles from Paris, and he probably died of dysentery caused by some intestinal infection or disease. He was undoubtedly a wasted man in his last days: hollow eyes, sunken cheeks, skeletal frame, the very image of death on the transi tombs.

When Henry's body arrived in England in late October or early November, it was met at Dover by the archbishop of Canterbury, Henry Chichele. Chichele, who owed his primacy to his sovereign's patronage, had been a key figure in the royal administration. From at least 1406, he had acted as diplomat to France on behalf of the then prince of Wales, and he continued to serve in this capacity under the new king. In 1414, he was translated to Canterbury from the relatively minor Welsh see of St. David's, at a time when schism in

the papacy made the king's wishes in ecclesiastical preferments law. On November 17, 1415, Chichele received the victor of Agincourt at Canterbury, and from 1418, he himself took part in Henry's French campaigns leading up to the Treaty of Troyes of 1420. The archbishop obviously was a member of the war party: Shakespeare put into his mouth the arguments for going to war with France just before the French ambassadors arrive at court. When it came time to prepare for his own death, Chichele willed that his chantry colleges at Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire (where he had been born), and at All Souls College, Oxford, pray for the soul of his friend, "the illustrious Prince Henry, late king of England."

Undoubtedly, Chichele's tomb, the first to employ the double-decker style, was inspired by the premature death of his royal namesake. Henry V died at 35, a monarch who seemed on the verge of conquering France for the first time since the days of the Angevin Empire in the twelfth century. For English patriots, his demise was a cruel blow, leaving behind a baby son to carry on the cause. We know that the tomb was completed by early 1425, less than three years after the king's death, as in that year a goldsmith by the name of Bernard took refuge behind the iron railings of the "new monument" to escape a mob seeking his arrest. In artistic terms, Chichele may have been inspired by Lagrange's tomb at Avignon, where he probably visited as ambassador. Conversely, it is equally possible that the two-tiered tomb was in imitation of the double image of effigy and coffin paraded at state funerals. This processional technique was first performed in 1327 at the funeral of Edward II and subsequently was used at those of Henry V and Chichele himself.

Chichele's full epitaph, carved in Latin in an abbreviated Gothic script, runs along the top and bottom verges of the tomb, but it is unlikely that it was read by many. (Not even the pilgrim in *A Disputacioun betwyx the Body and Wormes* read the inscription on the tomb that inspired his dream: "The Epytaf to loke was I not faynte," or "I was not inclined to look

The tomb of Henry Chichele, archbishop of Canterbury, at Canterbury Cathedral. The tomb was completed by 1425 but the archbishop did not occupy it until his death in 1443. (Reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR. © Crown copyright.)

at the epitaph.") The lower epitaph around Chichele's transi emphasizes mortality, but the upper one around his effigy proudly describes his worldly career up to and including his appointment as archbishop. His tomb, especially the surrounding canopy with its statutes of the apostles that had been destroyed during the seventeenth century, has been heavily restored. Yet, it well illustrates how medieval monuments originally were richly decorated. Every 50 years, the fellows of All Souls College in Oxford must repaint the tomb in accordance with Chichele's foundation charter, a tradition that continues to this day.

The most interesting fact about Chichele's tomb is that, for at least 18 years until his death in 1443, he could have looked down at his transi and seen himself portrayed in death. In this "portrait as prediction," Chichele could gaze into the future at his approaching end. Whereas other macabre art depicts Death as a separate entity discrete from the viewer, here one is presented with a far more intimate mirror: the spectacle of one's own mortality. For the first time in England, a patron masquerades as Death, imagining how he would decompose in the grave. Why would Chichele ever have wanted to have such an image carved and displayed?

The answer, I believe, is that the tomb proclaims a hope in the resurrection of the body at the Apocalypse, not just a morbid meditation on the theme of corruption and decay. In this dialogue between two bodies, one of the deceased as a living, resplendent effigy, and the other as a rotting, naked corpse, one is tempted to "read" only downward, from the effigy to the cadaver, and see the end of man as nothing but "dust, worms, vile flesh." However, for medieval patrons such as Chichele, death was not the end. Rather, it was the beginning, the gateway to a better world. Death, who triumphs as the Fourth Rider of the Apocalypse, now at the Last Judgment bows down in defeat before the triumph of the resurrected body. We must also read upward in the two-tiered tombs, not to a *representacion du vif* (representation of life) but to a *representacion de l'après-vif* (representation of the afterlife). The upper effigy is a pristine body resurrected out of the mere skin and bones lying underneath. Thus, as Chichele read down his tomb, he viewed his humility before God: the corruption and decay that would come upon all earthly status and goods. However, when he read back up, he saw his reward: his restored body, around 30 years of age, dressed in his pontifical vestments, rising up like a phoenix out of his ashes below. Two angel supporters on either side of his head and angels bearing heraldic shields in the canopy escort him upward to the heavenly host, to rejoin his beloved king.

Bishop Richard Fleming

Richard Fleming, bishop of Lincoln, died in 1431 and left his two-tiered transi tomb to posterity in Lincoln Cathedral. Fleming probably was inspired by the example of his colleague at Canterbury in the making of his monument. The two have several similarities. Fleming's tomb, like Chichele's, was designed as part of a chantry chapel and still forms part of the original structure in the north aisle of the choir. Also following Chichele, Fleming attached an inscription, likewise in Latin rhyming couplets, to his tomb. Fleming's epitaph, originally inscribed on a tablet that is no longer extant, is much longer than Chichele's (no fewer than 26 lines) but has much the same theme. Once again, there is the reminder of voracious worms, the transitoriness of life. "Of what use is the height of a Doctorate?" Fleming asks, a question that still may be on the lips of many a graduate student. And yet,

once again, there is a biographical element behind which one can detect, despite the self-flagellation, a hint of pride. Fleming was an Oxford man, he tells us, then a master of canon law, chamberlain to Pope Martin V, bishop of Lincoln (1420–31), and finally archbishop of York for a brief time (1424–25). He was retranslated back to Lincoln at his own insistence, perhaps a practical application of the humility shown in his transi (now much defaced). The inscription ends, as does the lower one of Chichele, with an appeal for prayers, but this function was far better fulfilled by the chantry foundation.

In his youth, Fleming had been a Lollard sympathizer, but his days as bishop were to see him a hunter of heretics. In this regard, he may have had some contact with Chichele, who was especially active in the suppression of Lollardy in 1428. In 1430, shortly before his death, Fleming founded a college at Oxford, just as his primate was to do 7 years later. The express purpose of Lincoln College was to combat the Lollard heretics "who profane with swinish snouts its [the Bible's] most holy pearls." It is doubtful whether a man who was as much an enemy of heresy as Fleming would have built a tomb that was itself heretical. (Quite the opposite is suggested by the dragon crushed under the upper effigy's feet.) Yet, that is the impression one gets from scholars who focus on the castigation of the body that these tombs seem to portray. If such was the sole intention of the bishop, his tomb would have flirted dangerously with the extreme self-abasement of those very Lollards he had spent his life trying to root out.

I believe that Fleming, like Chichele, used the presence of angels to signify the resurrection of his body on the upper level of his tomb rising up from his cadaver below. Two angels on bended knee with overlarge hands and feet cradle Fleming's curly locks in a more

Transi tomb of Richard Fleming (d. 1431), bishop of Lincoln, at Lincoln Cathedral. The tomb forms part of the chantry chapel of the Fleming family. (Reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR. © Crown copyright.)

Details from the Fleming chantry, at Lincoln Cathedral. (Reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR. © Crown copyright.)

intimate gesture than on Chichele's monument. In addition, there are two angels pendent from the arches above Fleming's piously gesturing body. The left angel, faring better than its neighbor from mutilation, can still be seen clasping its hands in prayer and directing its gaze heavenward in an appeal for the resurrected bishop's reception to paradise.

Earl John Fitzalan

On November 16, 1857, the Reverend Canon Tierney, chaplain to the duke of Norfolk, excavated the tomb of John Fitzalan, seventh earl of Arundel. Fitzalan had died in France during the Hundred Years War, and everyone assumed that he had been buried there. However, Tierney came across the will of Fulke Eyton, Arundel's squire, in which he mentions "the bones of my Lord John … that I broughte oute of France" in exchange for a reward of more than £1000. This led Tierney to believe that Arundel actually had been buried in the family chapel and, sure enough, directly beneath the tomb, in a vaulted chamber, lay the skeletal remains of what had once been a large man, more than six feet tall, missing one of its legs.

Fitzalan had died in 1435, a hero (for the English side) of the later period of the Hundred Years War. So great was his reputation for capturing towns and castles in northern France that he was styled the "English Achilles." He was honored with the title of duke of Touraine and entrusted with the captaincy of Rouen Castle. However, in May 1434, Fitzalan's military career came to an abrupt end. He was shot in the leg by a culverin, a primitive gun, while besieging the castle of Gerberoy in Normandy. Taken prisoner by the French, Fitzalan

Tomb of John Fitzalan (d. 1435), seventh earl of Arundel at collegiate chapel of Trinity College, Arundel, in Sussex. A hero of the Hundred Years War, the earl appears in his full armor, with his amputated leg restored in this depiction. The earl's body was discovered underneath the tomb in the nineteenth century. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

was conveyed to the nearest big town, Beauvais, where his leg was amputated. It was not until a year later, on June 12, 1435, that he finally died of his wound, a long, slow, probably agonizing death. He was alleged to have been buried in the Franciscan church at Beauvais, but even if he had, his squire, Fulke Eyton, apparently exhumed his body and arranged to have the remains brought back to the family's resting place at Arundel. This would have been in accordance with the earl's wishes expressed in his own will of 1430, in which he desired to be buried in the chapel for the canons of Trinity College, Arundel, that had been founded by Richard, the fourth earl, 50 years before.

Nevertheless, a section of the wall on the north side of the chapel had to be removed to make room for Fitzalan's double-decker tomb. Originally, the tomb and chapel were part of the church of St. Nicholas, considered a safer venue than the castle because the latter was a potential target of marauding Frenchmen during the Hundred Years War. Under the dissolution of religious houses in the sixteenth century, Henry VIII sold the collegiate chapel to the duke of Norfolk, under whose protection it remains to this day a Catholic place of worship (and serves as the private mausoleum of the Norfolk/Arundel family). The western half of the building then became the Anglican parish church of the town. One now can stand behind its high altar and look through the original fourteenth-century iron grill that had separated the chancel from the nave into what once had been the high altar of the entire Catholic structure. Since that great divide of the sixteenth century, there have been only six occasions when the grille was opened and one could pass from one religion to the other.

What remains unclear is whether Fitzalan himself commissioned the transi of his tomb or whether his executors saw it as the modish style of the day. Undoubtedly, the restorative power of the resurrection would have held some appeal to the fractured body of the earl, and it was not unknown for the English nobility to think in such religious terms. In

1354, seven years before his death, Henry of Grosmont, duke of Lancaster, close friend to King Edward III, and one of the most militarily successful and chivalrous figures of his day, composed a devotional work in French, *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines* (*The Book of Holy Medicines*). In it, Lancaster uses many analogies to battle scars and field hospital remedies, such as Fitzalan himself received, to describe the state of his soul. He compares his sins to seven wounds on his body, and one of the bandages that will help him rise from his sickbed is the Virgin Mary's joy at her Son's resurrection.

Whether Fitzalan intended it or not, his tomb shares elements of angelic resurrection that also appear at Canterbury and Lincoln. Two angels, their heads decapitated probably by Cromwell's soldiers quartered in the chapel during the English Civil War, hold Fitzalan's pillow in a pose very similar to those at the head of Chichele. Angels also hold shields on corbels attached to the wall at either end of the tomb. (see illustration on p. 248).. Meanwhile, Fitzalan's elegantly armored body (originally painted) rises up above his emaciated cadaver on its shroud. In both instances, the earl's missing leg, so cruelly blasted by the new technology of war, is once again made whole.

Bishop Thomas Beckington

More than any other patron noted heretofore, Thomas Beckington, bishop of Bath and Wells, left behind documentation concerning the disposal of his corpse. In his will drawn up in 1464, the year before he died, Beckington bequeathed his body to Wells Cathedral to be buried under his double-decker tomb in the chantry chapel, "which I have already fully and perfectly disposed and prepared for that purpose." In line, perhaps, with the humility demonstrated by his transi, Beckington also willed that his funeral be a modest affair, more "in the recreation and relief of the poor than in the solace of the rich and powerful." On January 15, 1452, on "about the fifth hour in the morning," according to his episcopal register, Beckington consecrated his tomb before an audience that included the "dean and some canons of the cathedral and many other men and women." Finally, among his official correspondence is a letter to Beckington from Master Thomas Chandler, dated October 1449, that praises the bishop for his tomb and its "perpetual memory of death." Thus, like Chichele, Beckington could have seen himself portrayed as dead for as long as 16 years before he actually died.

Unfortunately, there is little explanation of why Beckington built the monument that he did. In his early career, he was official to Archbishop Chichele, and surely he knew about the Canterbury tomb. After he became bishop, Beckington served as secretary and emissary to France for King Henry VI during the 1430s, when England began suffering defeat after defeat in war. Whatever his motivation may have been, Beckington followed the pattern of his mentor, Chichele, but not in every respect.

This time there are no angels holding vigil by the head of the bishop, whose effigy and transi, once painted, have suffered damage to face, hands, and feet. However, this does not mean that angels heralding the resurrection play no role in the tomb; they very much do. At the top of each of the six columns supporting the effigy's bier is a cross-crowned angel, his elaborate feathered wings wrapping themselves up and around the pendulated arch to almost touch the wings of his neighbor. And in the canopy that originally surmounted the whole tomb, two angels with similar cruciform crowns and elongated wings hang down

Details from the tomb of Bishop Thomas Beckington (d. 1465). (The first image is reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London. The second image is reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR. © Crown copyright.)

The wasted image of the transi tomb of Thomas Beckington, bishop of Bath and Wells, depicts the hollow eyes, sunken cheeks, and skeletal frame of death. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

in the style of Fleming's tomb. Each angel holds in his hands a shield bearing a wounded heart, the symbol of Christ's passion. This most beautiful and intricately carved canopy, its inner surface decorated with stars, seems to depict the very heavens toward which the resurrected body, gazing up, looks forward at its day of doom.

Duchess Alice de la Pole

The two-tiered tomb of Alice de la Pole, duchess of Suffolk, at the church of the Virgin Mary in Ewelme, Oxfordshire, is the only one of its kind to portray a female transi in fifteenth-century England. It also is one of the most richly carved and thematically significant of the tombs. In its layout and use of angelic imagery, Alice's monument provides the strongest affirmation yet of the resurrection of the body.

Alice de la Pole was born Alice Chaucer, granddaughter of the poet. At least two of her husbands (she had three) succumbed to the violence of the age. Thomas Montagu, earl of Salisbury, her second husband, was shot to death at Orléans in 1428, shortly before Joan of Arc was to arrive to raise the English siege. His place, both as commander of English forces at Orléans and at Alice's side, was taken by William de la Pole, fourth earl of Suffolk. For the next two decades, Pole was to assume a leading role in English politics. In 1437, he was made high steward of the duchy of Lancaster, north of the River Trent, in effect commanding the king's lands in the north. That same year, he and Alice co-founded an almshouse for 12 poor men at Ewelme. The chapel of St. John the Baptist was added to the church as part of

The tomb of Alice de la Pole (d. 1475), duchess of Suffolk, at Ewelme, Oxfordshire. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

the foundation and was to play an important part in Alice's tomb iconography. In 1448, Pole was created duke, but two years later he was exiled by the Yorkist faction and murdered at sea en route to France. His death, largely the result of his unpopular matchmaking between King Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou and of his efforts to make peace with France, was a harbinger of what was to come in the War of the Roses. He was buried apart from his wife in the Carthusian monastery of Kingston-on-Hull. Alice, a very wealthy widow, never remarried and survived her husband by 25 years until her death in 1475.

Alice's cadaver image, although beautifully carved and quite dramatic, is barely visible, hidden as it is by two arcades of eight small Gothic arches. Her transi shows a wizened and wrinkled duchess: her face shrunken and drawn, her breasts pendulant and withered. Its ugliness almost seems an act of penance, like the almshouse, due to God. By contrast, the upper effigy depicts a handsome and dignified woman, a coronet on her head, widow's weeds around her face and neck, her wedding ring on the fourth finger of her right hand, and the symbol of the Order of the Garter on her left forearm. (Alice was one of just three women in England to be so honored.) Traces of red, blue, and gold paint still survive on this magnificently opulent tomb, yet the inscription simply asks the reader to pray for the soul of "the most serene princess, Alice, duchess of Suffolk, patroness of this church and foundress of this almshouse."

The most impressive aspect of the tomb, however, is the overwhelming presence of angels of two kinds—gowned and feathered. Four feathered angels, two on each side, hold the duchess's pillow, while underneath the elaborate canopy sheltering her head two gowned angels hold heraldic shields. Sixteen angelic weepers, both gowned and feathered, array themselves directly above each of the openings giving in to Alice's transi. Twenty angelic busts in an attitude of prayer range along the canopy of the entire tomb, surmounted

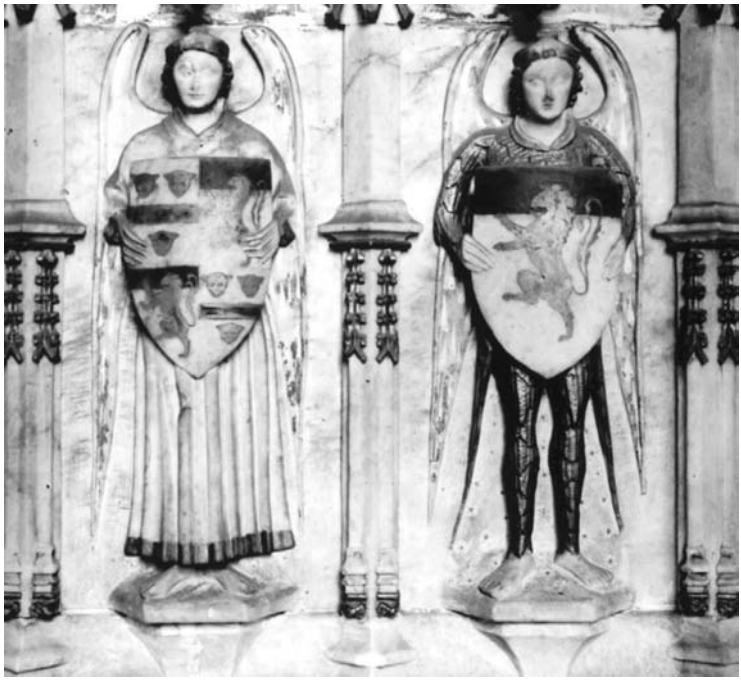
by eight wooden carvings of full-figured gowned and feathered angels, their arms raised to heaven, on crenellated mounts (see illustration p. 270). The wooden ceiling of the chapel of St. John the Baptist, just to the south of Alice's monument, is alive with more half-figured angels holding scrolls and shields. Finally, directly above the transi, painted on the underside of the sarcophagus, are two images. The first, over the cadaver's head, is a painting of the angel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary; the second, over the feet, is a depiction of Mary Magdalene and John the Baptist. The entire effect is of a multitude of the heavenly host bearing and welcoming Alice's resurrected body up to paradise, leaving behind the corruption and decay of a turbulent life.

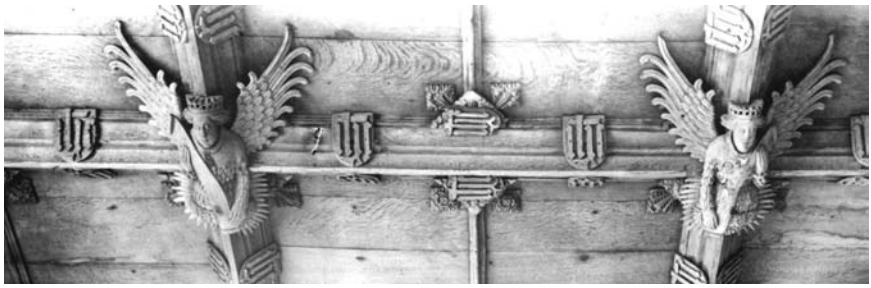
Single transis and shroud brasses

Most of the "macabre" tombs carved in England during the late medieval (and continuing into the early modern) period consist of a single image—the cadaver. The double-decker monument seems to have been a luxury afforded only by the very rich, usually the prelates or the nobility. A single transi, conversely, was a more economical alternative favored by the gentry and merchant classes or the minor clergy. There were, of course, exceptions to this rule. John Barton, a wool merchant who became wealthy from the trade with Calais, the only French town to remain in English hands after the Hundred Years War, built a double-decker tomb at the end of the fifteenth century in the church of Holm-by-Newark, Nottinghamshire, consisting of the effigies of Barton and his wife above and the cadaver of Barton alone in the alcove below. Richard Fox and Stephen Gardiner, both bishops of Winchester during the sixteenth century, opted for single transis in their chantry chapels, despite the fact that they were bishops of the richest diocese in England.

In at least some instances, what appears to be a single transi was originally intended to be a double tomb. The cadaver of Thomas Heywood, dean of Lichfield, who died in 1492 and was buried in the cathedral, looks to be a single monument of the much weathered transi of the dean lying on his shroud. However, we know from drawings done of the tomb before the destruction of the Civil War that Heywood was originally portrayed a second time in an upper painted effigy of the dean in a red-and-white hooded gown. John Wakeman, last abbot of Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire, who died in 1549, was cheated out of his intended funeral by Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. Before Tewkesbury was dissolved in 1539, Wakeman built his chantry and tomb in the abbey, but he was not to be buried there. Moreover, the cenotaph, which has a single transi on its upper level, houses an alcove below that looks as if it originally was meant to receive Wakeman's cadaver image, while his effigy, never carved, would have replaced it beneath the elaborate, filigreed canopy.

Assuming, however, that in most cases the single transi tombs were designed that way, this still does not obviate the importance of the resurrection and the Apocalypse to their making. The most famous single transi, that of John Baret, a rich cloth maker who died in 1467 and was buried in the church of St. Mary in Bury St. Edmund's, Suffolk, may have the founder castigate himself on his tomb as a "ful rewli wretche" ("a very despicable creature"). However, this profession of humility, as indicated above, was perhaps a clever ruse to ensure one's place in heaven once the body was reunited with the soul at the sound of the angels' trumpets. Angels still make their appearance on single transis, as they do so prominently on the double-decker tombs. One such example comes from Ireland, the





Angels depicted on the tomb of Alice de la Pole and on the ceiling of the chapel of St. John the Baptist at Ewelme. (The upper image is reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR. © Crown copyright. The other images are reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

sixteenth-century tomb of Sir Edmond Goldyng and his wife, Elizabeth, in the churchyard of St. Peter's, Drogheda. Eight angel weepers bear the arms of Goldyng, Elizabeth, and his two other wives, Blanche and Joanna, on tablets that originally supported the transis. Goldyng's tomb is the only one from the British Isles that shows both husband and wife in the dual matrimonial pose of decomposing corpses.

Shroud brasses were an even more inexpensive route to the macabre that was employed especially by the urban middle class. The best known of these brasses is that of Ralph Hamsterley, rector of Oddington in Oxfordshire, whose shrouded skeleton is crawling with worms. Yet even among these "bargain" brass tombs, the double-decker image and the resurrection can be found. The brass of Bernard Brocas, Esq., from 1488 at Sherborne St. John in Hampshire, depicts the kneeling effigy of the squire above his shrouded skeleton. Richard Willoughby of Wollaton, Nottinghamshire, who died in 1471, combined for his tomb an upper brass effigy of himself and his wife, inset with seven brass shells symbolizing the resurrection, and a carved stone transi below. Thomas Spryng of Lavenham, Suffolk, was commemorated at his death in 1486 by a brass showing himself, his wife, and his three children all rising up from a communal tomb at the Last Judgment. Sir Ralph Wodford, who died in 1498, is depicted on an incised slab at Ashby Folville, Leicestershire, standing in his shroud as just above his head a scroll proclaims the passage from Job relating to the resurrection. Both William Feteplace and his wife cast off the covers of their tombs as they rise up at the end of the world on their brass installed in 1516 at Childrey, Berkshire. All these examples foreshadow by at least a century the resurrection monuments that were to become so popular in England.

Renaissance and resurrection tombs

The Renaissance may conjure up a time of emerging modern sensibilities in art and politics, but the tombs of three pairs of French kings and queens who are said to typify the age are carved in the medieval English style of the double-decker monument. Kathleen Cohen, an art historian who has comprehensively surveyed the transi tombs, characterizes the sixteenth-century French examples as expressing a "new spirit" of the "triumph of worldly glory" as opposed to the old spirit of "anxiety and humility" that supposedly marked the fifteenth-century English types. However, that division, I believe, is an artificial one. Medieval English tombs have more than their fair share of bodily resurrection, whereas the French ones, despite some classically Renaissance features, still try to approach the resurrection through a show of humility. The two were closely linked. England's two-tiered plan served as a model for France, whose modified designs then traveled back across the Channel during the seventeenth century to influence the double-decker tombs of Robert Cecil and John Hotham.

Between 1515, marking the death of King Louis XII of France, and 1589, the year of the demise of Catherine de Medici, widowed queen of King Henry II, three magnificent tombs were added to that royal mausoleum known as the abbey of St. Denis in Paris. Spanning three-quarters of a century, these tombs, built by Renaissance princes and princesses, have a medieval quality. On the upper level are their effigies as they seem to have been in life and perhaps as they would like to be when resurrected. On the lower level are their transis, naked in the rigor mortis of death. The message is essentially the same as in the medieval

double-decker tombs: Humility is the path to eternal glory. Nevertheless, there are some important differences. The French upper effigies are shown kneeling, usually before a prie-dieu, in an attitude of prayer and humility before God. Classical elements have been added in the form of columns on rectangular porticos, and on two of the tombs, those of Louis XII and Anne of Brittany and of Henry II and Catherine de Medici, the four virtues of Force, Temperance, Prudence, and Justice appear on the corners in the guise of ancient goddesses.

However, it is the cadavers lying on their burial urns in the alcoves below that are most remarkable. They are carved in the Renaissance style—anatomically correct and fine in the attention paid to every detail of the body—yet this newfound realism is allied to a most grisly depiction of death. The transis of Louis XII (d. 1515) and Anne of Brittany (d. 1514) show embalming stitches used to repair the body after its being eviscerated just after death, a procedure undertaken to preserve the royal corpse for the funeral, which for the sixteenth-century Valois kings could be elaborate rituals, sometimes lasting as long as 11 days. Yet despite this new fascination with the human body, even a dead one, it was the resurrected version that was more important. The corpses of Francis I (d. 1547) and his wife Claude (d. 1524) are, like those of Louis and Anne, superbly rendered images of mortality. Their lifeless gaze, however, is directed literally toward the resurrection: On the

The details of the transis of King Louis XII of France (d. 1515) and Anne of Brittany (d. 1514) are realistically rendered, down to the depiction of embalming stitches. (From *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, by Kathleen Cohen © 1973 Regents of the University of California. Published by the University of California Press. Reproduced with kind permission of University of California Press.)

The transis of Francis I (d. 1547) and Claude (d. 1524) look forward, literally, to the resurrection, depicted on the underside of their burial vault in the form of Christ rising from his tomb. (Pascal Lemaître © Centre des Monuments Nationaux, Paris.)

underside of the vault that houses the transis is a carved relief of Christ rising triumphant from his tomb. Clearly, Francis and Claude were looking to share a similar fate.

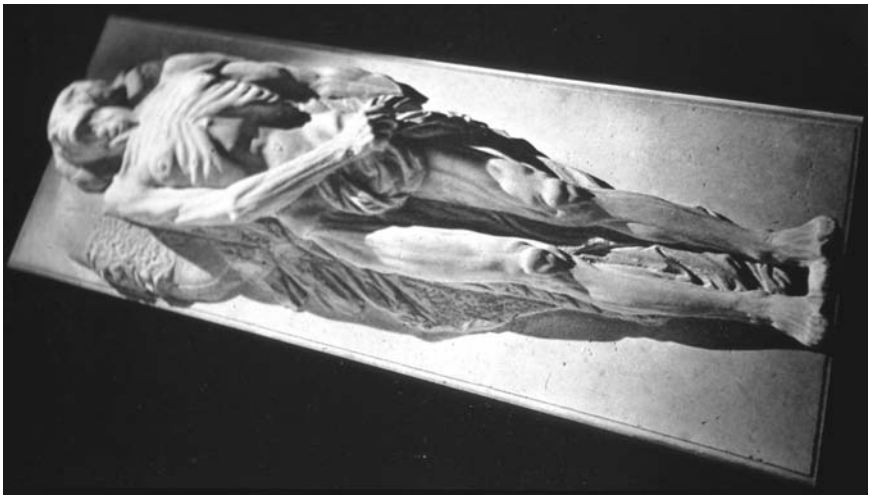
The only exception to the realism of the French royal cadavers is the transi of Catherine de Medici. Though her husband, Henry II, who died in 1559 in a jousting accident, is portrayed in the previous tradition of rigid rigor mortis, Catherine is given a beautified pose similar to the one in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. Nonetheless, the original transi of Catherine designed for the tomb is quite different. In 1565, Girolamo della Robbia, one of the Italian artists frequently commissioned by the French Renaissance kings, was ordered to sculpt the queen "as she would look a few days after death." Catherine, who was to outlive her husband by 30 years, was at the time 45 years old. Robbia's sculpture, now in the Louvre Museum, shows the queen in the more typical pose of death: stiff limbs, shrunken belly, prominent ribs, and flaccid breasts. Apparently, Catherine became offended by Robbia's transi and substituted the current one by Germain Pilon. Of these royals, she

Renaissance transi tomb of Henry II (d. 1559) and Catherine de Medici (d. 1589). The idealized effigy of Catherine by Germain Pilon, modeled after Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, was substituted for the original and more realistic sculpture by Girolamo della Robbia of 1565, now in the Louvre Museum. (Courtesy Centre des Monuments Nationaux, Paris.)

is the only one to have insisted on two idealized figures for her tomb, defying the humility thought due to God.

The format of the French royal tombs was to return to England on the monuments of Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury (d. 1612) and Sir John Hotham (d. 1689). Their tombs, respectively at St. Etheldreda's Church in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, and at Dalton Holme in Yorkshire, both display the classicized virtues of Force, Temperance, Prudence, and Justice bearing on their shoulders the upper effigies, now recumbent in the traditional English manner (see illustration on p. 216). However, these tombs also borrowed from Renaissance monuments in the Low Countries, which had a long history of trade with England and, in Hotham's case, had also recently contributed a king, in the form of William III, prince of Orange. For instance, the kneeling position of the virtues as they support the effigy is thought to have been derived from Tommaso Vincidor's monument to Engelbrecht II of Nassau at Breda, Holland, constructed sometime during the 1520s. The skeletal transi probably was influenced by that on the double tomb of Reynout III (d. 1556) at Vianen, also in the Netherlands. Whatever the medium of its transmission, the persistence into the seventeenth century of the two-tiered tomb structure testifies to the enduring power of the meaning behind this type of monument.

The seventeenth century in England is more famously known for its resurrection monuments, more than 30 of which were carved and erected in parish churches throughout



The unused transi of Catherine de Medici, by Girolamo della Robbia, 1565. (Courtesy Centre des Monuments Nationaux, Paris.)

the country. Typically, they show a standing figure in its shroud rising up out of its burial urn, the standard being set by the monument to the poet John Donne (d. 1631) at St. Paul's in London. The overall imagery may be quite different, but there continue to be connections between these tombs and the earlier double-decker style. Sir John Denham, a judge who died in 1638, is commemorated at Egham, Surrey, in a remarkable monument in which he rises half-naked in his shroud at the sound of the angels' trumpets above a charnel house or ossuary full of shrouded skeletons, among which can be discerned the fleshly features of Denham and his second wife, Eleanor. The juxtaposition of resurrection and decay recalls the medieval tombs, although Denham's memorial seems more directly inspired by a passage from Ezekiel referring to the reassemblage of dry bones in a valley (37:1–14). Angels, who play such an important role in medieval double-decker tombs, haul Henry Howard out of his grave in his wall monument installed at Ewelme after his death in 1647. The familial resurrection featured in shroud brasses over a century earlier reappears in the tomb of Sir John Astley (d. 1639) and his wife and parents, all shown standing in their shrouds at All Saints Church in Maidstone, Kent, or in the wonderfully intimate monument to Edward Noel, Viscount Campden, and his wife, Juliana, erected in 1664 at St. James Church in Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire.

Though there are strong links down the centuries within the English memorial arts, the seventeenth-century images favored the resurrected body, whereas the fifteenth-century examples emphasized the macabre cadaver, especially on the single transi tombs. Perhaps this can be explained by what one might call the arrogance of the new religion. To the medieval mind, the humility of the decaying corpse helped one on the path through purgatory preparatory to the Apocalypse; the cadaver was, therefore, representative of the program of piety, penitence, and good works that went along with faith to achieve salvation. After the Reformation, and particularly after the Puritan version of Protestantism took

Resurrection tomb of Sir John Denham (d. 1638) at Egham, Surrey. Among the bony figures below Denham's resurrection can be distinguished the faces of Sir John and his wife, Eleanor. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Photograph A.F. Kersting.)

hold, this humility was eliminated. What was required now was membership of the elect (to which one was chosen by God, regardless of merit), which the patrons of these effigies, rising so confidently from their tombs, seemed to believe they had attained.

The last word

There have been numerous attempts over the years to explain the transi tomb. Some of these have opted for an esoteric approach, perhaps because the tombs seem so frankly bizarre. Pamela King sees the English double-decker versions as reflecting rival Lancastrian and Yorkist allegiances during the War of the Roses. Paul Binski claims that the transi is "a sophisticated anti-tomb" in which the new style almost rebels against the old by "unmasking" and "disclosing" a revolting corpse that previously had been discreetly hidden from view.

The intimate resurrection tomb of Viscount Edward Noel and his wife, Juliana, erected in 1664 at Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire. (Reproduced with kind permission of Conway Library, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

Perhaps the most widely accepted interpretation to date is that of Kathleen Cohen, who views the transi tombs as the product of "a strong sense of anxiety about the fate of the soul [combined] with an intense preoccupation with death," to which crises such as plague and war were undoubtedly major contributing factors. For Cohen, the function of the transi tomb is to reconcile "the conflict between the growing worldly interests of the period and the traditional religious demand for humility."The pull of these conflicting impulses is said to be embodied by tomb inscriptions that impart either a moralizing message against pride and vanity along the lines of "I was what you are, I am what you will be" or that take the form of a humble appeal for prayers from the onlooker to speed the patron's soul through purgatory.

This is an interpretation that owes much to other historians of late medieval culture. For instance, it was the Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga, who first argued in *The Waning of the Middle Ages* that this was a time of an unhealthy preoccupation with death, when the macabre

arts assumed a sterile rigidity of expression. According to Huizinga, in the morbid gloom that descended on Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, all of man's most tender and subtlest feelings became swallowed up in "the too much accentuated and too vivid representation of Death hideous and threatening." The great fear and anxiety that these patrons supposedly felt and expressed through their tombs also ties in remarkably well with Jean Delumeau's thesis that a guilt culture—in which people were overly concerned with their fate in the afterlife—pervaded Europe during the late Middle Ages.

As you can probably guess, I couldn't disagree more with this rather dreary interpretation of the transi tombs. For me, none of the explanations offered earlier satisfactorily answers the question I raised at the beginning of this chapter and which gets to the heart of the matter with regard to these tombs: namely, why should their patrons have spent so much to have such unflattering representations of themselves erected for all eternity? Though there may be some truth to the self-serving fear and anxiety hypothesis, I can't help feeling that it is far from being the whole story. Indeed, I believe that it is an overly dark view of the *memento mori*, or "remembrance of death," theme in art and literature that ultimately can be traced back to Huizinga's misguided assumption of a "waning" to the late Middle Ages, which by the very fact that it is described as "late" already implies a decline.

Rather, it is we who may be gloomy and over-preoccupied with death, for by imposing such an interpretation, we may be ignoring an underlying message of hope and recovery from misfortune that was juxtaposed *alongside* a reminder of man's mortality. Some inscriptions on medieval tombs do suggest an anxiety for the deceased's soul, but surely there was also a confidence that this would be answered with prayers that would go a long way to assuaging the patron's feelings of sin and guilt? In any case, the inscriptions were almost always written in Latin and probably were not intended for public consumption. Judging from the complacency and tranquil self-assurance evinced by Englishmen whose wills survive from the late medieval period, such an anxiety does not seem to have been widespread. Rather than a morbid obsession with death, these tombs provided a redemptive power that was apocalyptic in character. They are a grand summation of not just the macabre art of the corpse but of the entire medieval psyche that endured the four horsemen of the Apocalypse: famine, war, plague, and death. Only by exploring the uplifting message behind all the gruesome imagery of "skeletons and worms" can we understand how late medieval men and women coped with rampant death and engendered a rebirth of culture during the Renaissance.

The cadaver is but a transitional figure to the time when that individual will re-inhabit his complete, young body at the resurrection: such would have been the consolation proffered during the Middle Ages for the decay that so disfigured an earthly form. It was certainly a consolation for Europeans who faced the crises of the Apocalypse during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. At the end of the world during the Last Judgment, bellies distended by famine would be reduced to their proper proportions, limbs hacked and scarred by war would be restored, and skin ruptured and swollen from the plague would resume its true complexion. In all this, we should not discount an element of humor, even if it be a morbid one, in the ability of medieval man to picture himself in death. Death became familiar and, therefore, less frightening. Perhaps tomb patrons like Chichele smiled a little at their dead selves and in that amusement banished some of the terror of their impending death.

Illustration of angels from tomb of Alice de la Pole. (Reproduced by permission of English Heritage. NMR. © Crown copyright.)

Though one is unlikely today to depict oneself carved as a cadaver on a tomb and only suicidal cultists would insist that we welcome death by looking forward to the Apocalypse, we can perhaps transcend our mortal prison through an appreciation of the art of our ancestors, especially tombs, through which the dead survive. Sadly, destruction of church monuments, including tombs, was particularly severe in England during the reign of Edward VI in the sixteenth century and during the Civil War in the seventeenth. Like Milton's fallen angels, the iconoclasts attacked what they could not understand, defacing what had been created in a time and place now wholly alien to them.

EPITAPH

> The heavens are calling you and wheel about you, displaying to you their eternal glories, and still your eyes are on the ground.
>
> —Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Purgatorio*, Canto XIV, c. 1321

"Who here believes in the afterlife?" This is a question I always ask my students at the beginning of every course I teach on the Black Death or on the Middle Ages. Typically, quite a bit fewer than half the class will answer in the affirmative; most will say that they are not sure of what lies on the other side or that after we die there is simply nothing. By contrast, there would have been no need to ask this question in the Middle Ages, or rather, it just would not have occurred to anyone to ask it. The existence of an afterlife would have been automatically assumed, just as there is a sky above and the earth below. I raise this question to illustrate the great gulf that exists between our modern assumptions and the medieval.

Yet, it is crucial that we bridge this gulf if we are ever to understand how late medieval Europeans pulled back from the brink of the Apocalypse. For too many of my readers, the very term *medieval* may still conjure up images of a backward and primitive society, compared to our own, but how many of us would dare face what our ancestors faced in the late Middle Ages? Would our modern world fare as well? I do not believe that it would because, despite all our advantages in terms of technological and scientific "progress," I am convinced that we would be at a severe disadvantage compared to our medieval forebears. Their secret weapon is none other than their belief in the afterlife. In essence, this psychologically "inoculated" them against the terrors of whatever apocalyptic crises—famine, war, plague, and death—unfolded in their times. It is why I believe, as I argued in the last chapter, that medieval viewers could contemplate so serenely, even hopefully, the macabre images of death that were so prevalent in the late Middle Ages, for simple logic should tell us that anyone who could gaze upon so prolific a face of death must have had some comfort level with the spectacle. However, it is for this very reason that my students are so skeptical of my optimistic take on all the skeletons and worms: they no longer believe in the assurances of an afterlife, that death is but a beginning, not an end.

We can never recover this lost faith in an afterlife, and I am not arguing that we should. However, it is still essential that we understand it. For it is this, above all, that made late medieval European culture uniquely equipped to endure the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. At no other time, and no other place, was there such a concrete and almost tangible visualization of the afterlife as existed in the Europe of the late Middle Ages. One

has to think only of Dante's early-fourteenth-century masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*, to realize how profound a visualization this was. From the nine circles of *Inferno* to the nine terraces of the mount of *Purgatorio* and on up through the nine planetary and stellar spheres before reaching the highest, empyrean realm of *Paradisio*, Dante maps out a supremely detailed topography of the afterlife. This was accompanied by all sorts of paintings and illuminations and other descriptions of life after death, although purgatory, a nebulous, intermediate state or place half in heaven and half in hell, to which the Church gave "birth" sometime in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, seems to have fared less well than the other two, opposing realms that can be traced back to Hebraic and Greco-Roman traditions.

Yet, it was purgatory that was to prove essential to Europe's recovery and renewal from the crises of the Apocalypse, not only because it was reputed to be the most populated of the supernatural realms, but also because it afforded Europeans a hope and a promise that connected the living with the dead. The ways in which the dead continued to be commemorated by the living, who were expected to help speed the journey through purgatory, became ever more important after the advent of the Black Death, which played havoc with so many of the social ties, customs, and norms that people had formerly relied upon here in life. All this is well illustrated by my favorite medieval ghost story, which comes from a source that eludes me now but which goes something like this: one day a priest, taking a path he uses every day through a cemetery on his way to church, steps over a grave, out from which there suddenly stretches a skeletal hand that grabs the ankle of the priest! In vain does he try to free himself from the skeletal grasp, until finally he harkens to a disembodied voice that issues from out of the grave, which chides him for stepping over his resting place every day without saying one prayer for his poor soul. Once the priest promises to do so from now on, the skeletal hand releases its grip, and the priest is allowed to go on his way. The dead refused to be forgotten in the late Middle Ages and, in turn, the living were reminded of the immortality that could be theirs in the afterlife. Not coincidentally, those of my family, friends, and acquaintances who claim to have seen ghosts, and some of my students can be counted among them, are the ones who today most fervently believe in an afterlife.

If we are to believe the late-medieval English mystic, Julian of Norwich, not even the damned and the "heathen," or non-Christians, are to be denied the redemptive power of purgatory:

> And I wondered greatly at this revelation, and considered our faith, wondering as follows: our faith is grounded in God's word, and it is part of our faith that we should believe that God's word will be kept in all things; and one point of our faith is that many shall be damned—like the angels who fell out of heaven from pride, who are now fiends, and men on earth who die outside the faith of Holy Church, that is, those who are heathens, and also any man who has received Christianity and lives an unchristian life and so dies excluded from the love of God. Holy Church teaches me to believe that all these shall be condemned everlastingly to hell. And given all this, I thought it impossible that all manner of things should be well, as our Lord revealed at this time. And I received no other answer in showing from our Lord God but this:

> "What is impossible to you is not impossible to me. I shall keep my word in all things and I shall make all things well."

This is a remarkably generous impulse that one would be hard-pressed to find, I dare say, even among modern Christians. As with her theology that negates God's anger at human sin, Julian forebears to delve further into this mystery, simply leaving it up to God's power and word that He "shall make all well that is not well." She even refuses to see the Jews as implicated in Christ's passion, which most of her fellow Christians accepted without question and which contributed to some of the most shameful chapters in medieval European history, the unprovoked persecution and pogroms of Jews, particularly during the Black Death.

Earlier in the aforequoted chapter, Julian seems to address the doubt and anguish that could arise among her fellow Christians as a result of their being battered by one apocalyptic crisis after another:

> But another thing understood is this: deeds are done which appear so evil to us and people suffer such terrible evils that it does not seem as though any good will ever come of them; and we consider this, sorrowing and grieving over it so that we cannot find peace in the blessed contemplation of God as we should do.

Her answer to this is that our life is meant to be one of penance and suffering, whose end we cannot yet see but which is God's medicine and remedy for our sin, by means of which our guilt will be turned to glory, our sorrow into joy, our despair into hope, and our humility into triumph. Toward the end of the long text of her *Revelations* or *Showings*, Julian lists four types of fear: fear of attack, which leads to suffering; fear of punishment, which leads to contrition; doubtful fear, which leads to despair; and finally reverent fear, which Julian claims is "the only fear we can have which thoroughly pleases God," because it leads us to "flee from all that is not good and fall upon our Lord's breast like a child upon its mother's bosom." Although the three other kinds of fear may do some good, Julian warns that they are not holy, for true, reverent fear is none other than the love of God.

This is Julian's resounding answer to the claim of some scholars, such as Jean Delumeau, that the late Middle Ages were unrelievedly paralyzed by sin and fear and held hostage to its own guilt. This, I believe, is a gross mischaracterization of late medieval culture and does little justice to its achievement in overcoming a wrenching series of crises. Maybe it holds some validity by the early modern period, when the escape valve of purgatory and prayers for the dead were done away with in some countries in favor of the "horrible doctrine" of predestination and the hunt for witches and belief in a vast, demonic conspiracy was in full swing. However, I believe that it is even truer of our own times. The toxic power of fear has never been better demonstrated than in the United States since 9/11, when Americans were led to subvert and sacrifice almost every democratic principle they believe in, including the rule of law, the right to privacy, and the dignity of the individual. We could learn something from the men and women of the late Middle Ages, who faced up to their fears rather than giving in to them and wrested hope from despair in the midst of the rampaging riders of the Apocalypse. Without their courage and conviction that "alle shalle

be wele," we would not have had the Renaissance, nor even the Reformation, or indeed any of the other subsequent "gifts" of modernity.

I know of no textbook on the Middle Ages on the market today that any longer subscribes to Johan Huizinga's outdated thesis of a decline, or "waning," of European culture and of a society that was in a terminal "crisis" mode during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. All affirm instead that there was a great deal of "continuity," yet also that there was a "transition" or "transformation," however gradual, from the late medieval to the early modern eras. They would all agree with what I have said so far in this Epitaph, that the men and women of the late Middle Ages did not succumb to a "death wish" or "lose their nerve" in the face of their Apocalypse but rather laid the foundations for what came afterward. Indeed, in all fairness to Huizinga, he himself pointed to this moderating view at the very end of his classic work, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*:

> Profound pessimism spread a general gloom over life. The gothic principle prevailed in art. But all these forms and modes were on the wane. A high and strong culture is declining, but at the same time and in the same sphere new things are being born. The tide is turning, the tone of life is about to change.

However, even though this new consensus on a transition rather than decline is quite reasonable and I subscribed to it in the first edition of this book, I am still not satisfied with it. For I have to ask, a transition to what? Is "Early Modern" any more coherent of a historical period than "Middle Ages?" If there was so much continuity, why a transition at all? Why not simply adopt Dietrich Gerhard's periodization of "Old Europe," extending from about 1000 to 1800? Is there any point in teaching a course on the Middle Ages or Early Modern Europe, other than that it is convenient?

Yet, there were some significant changes taking place, although I would argue that these were by no means preordained or of *longue durée*. Instead, they arose rather unexpectedly and within a relatively compressed period of time, within a century or two. Some agents of these changes, such as plague or famine, arose from entirely exogenous factors, such as the weather or introduction of new disease microbes. Others, such as the rise of new military technologies, tactics, and logistics, were intrinsic to society, yet completely unprecedented. Nevertheless, late medieval society was rather fortunate at this stage, when it was under stress from some quite enormous challenges, to be facing no real threat of outside invasion or of being supplanted by a foreign culture. By contrast, this could fairly be said to have happened with the "decline and fall" of the Roman Empire, when at some point there does seem to have been a transition from "Late Antiquity" to "Middle Ages," when in fact people began calling themselves "moderns" (*moderni*). Indeed, it was Europe that, by the end of the fifteenth century, was doing the expanding and invading at the expense of other cultures, such as the Aztec and Inca Empires of Central and South America. Still, changes in late medieval Europe there did occur, whether these be new artistic outlooks during the Renaissance, new ways of fighting war, a shift from a feudal to a capitalistic economy or, somewhat later, religious change during the Reformation. However, at the same time, some fundamentals of society, such as its political institutions, social structures or hierarchies, and moral and metaphysical underpinnings, remained essentially the same or became even stronger. What is more, many of the actors in these changes, such as the

Renaissance artists and religious reformers, claimed to be doing no more than establishing continuity with a remote but revered past and not trying to break from it, as could be said of later revolutionaries. I, therefore, use *transcendence* rather than *transition* or *transformation* to describe this time wherein Europeans had to make some adjustments to triumph over, or "transcend," the crises of the Apocalypse but whose culture and values were not fundamentally altered by them. I use it to refer to this complex process of change, and yet not-change, or stasis.

I also use *transcendence* to draw attention to the intricate interactions between the religious and the secular in bringing about what changes occurred in late medieval Europe. By this, I do not mean "transcendentalism," which is used to refer to mainly Eastern religions that focus fixedly on the hereafter, at the expense of the here and now. Quite the opposite, when I raised the issue of medieval Europeans' belief in the afterlife at the beginning of this Epitaph, I meant that their firm conviction in a life after death gave them the courage and confidence to master their fears, face up to their daunting challenges, and, above all, take advantage of new opportunities, economic or otherwise, that opened up in the midst or aftermath of plagues, famines, and wars. Here again is another intriguing paradox of late medieval society: spiritual certainties make material gains possible.

This was not a time of transition to something completely different, still less a decline or waning of a culture that had enabled Europeans to come to the very brink of the Apocalypse and then step back. This was transcendence.

TABLES

Table 1 Clerical mortality during the great famine, 1307–26

	*DEATHS**		
Year	*Diocese of Hereford*	*Diocese of Winchester*	*Diocese of Exeter*
1307	19	24	1
1308	30	14	22
1309	13	29	61
1310	25	16	48
1311	13	13	32
1312	24	16	35
1313	24	29	36
1314	19	24	31
1315	13	22	18
1316	33	22	20
1317	incomplete	22	25
1318	13	29	33
1319	1	incomplete	17
1320	26	incomplete	17
1321	14	18	29
1322	13	19	27
1323	5	incomplete	19
1324	9		23
1325	7		12
1326	10		incomplete

*Figures adjusted in order to account for the probable death dates of incumbents, usually one month prior to the institution of his successor.

Sources: *Registrum Ricardi de Swinfield, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1283–1317*, ed. W.W. Capes (Canterbury and York Society, 6, 1909), 539–46; *Registrum Ade de Orleton, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1317–1327*, ed. A.T. Bannister (Canterbury and York Society, 5, 1908), 385; *Registrum Henrici Woodlock Diocesis Wintoniensis, A.D. 1305–1316*, trans, and ed. A.W. Goodman, 2 vols. (Canterbury and York Society, 43–44, 1940–11), 2:722–47; *The Registers of John de Sandale and Rigaud de Asserio, Bishops of Winchester, A.D. 1316–1323*, ed. F. J. Baigent (Hampshire Record Society, 1897), 119–58, 428–528; *The Register of Walter de Stapledon, Bishop of Exeter*, A.D. 1307–1326, ed. F. C. Hingeston-Randolph (London and Exeter, 1892), 184–271.

Table 2 Clerical propaganda during the Hundred Years War, 1337–77

Year	*Dioceses*	*Occasion*	*Response*
1337	Ely, Bath and Wells	Peace negotiations between England and France; king's expedition to Scotland	Prayers, processions, masses, publication of "schedule" (in English) concerning peace negotiations
1338	Carlisle	King's expedition to Scotland	Prayers, processions
1339	Worcester, Bath and Wells	King's expedition to France	Masses, processions, fasts, vigils, almsgivings
1340	Winchester, Durham, Ely, Worcester, Hereford, Carlisle	Peace; victory at Sluys; further success of king's expedition to Flanders	Prayers, processions, masses, litanies, psalms, bell-ringing
1342	Lincoln, Winchester, Durham, Worcester, Exeter, Bath and Wells, Salisbury	King's expedition to France and another to Scotland	Prayers, processions, masses, and sermons
1345	Worcester, Bath and Wells	King's expedition to France	Prayers, masses
1346	Ely, Worcester, Winchester, Hereford, Carlisle, Bath and Wells	King's expedition to France and its safe return; King's landing at St. Vaast de la Hogue in Normandy and continued success; capture of Caen	Prayers, processions, masses, litanies, psalms, publication of "schedule" detailing the king's exploits from the landing at St. Vaast de la Hogue to the capture of Caen
1348	Bath and Wells, Hereford	King's expedition to France	Prayers
1350	London, Bath and Wells, Hereford	The king at Calais and plague; peace and well-being of king; king's expedition against Spanish pirates	Prayers, processions, psalms, litanies
1352	Bath and Wells, Salisbury[1]	Expedition and victory of Henry of Grosmont, duke of Lancaster, in Prussia	Prayers, processions, masses, sermons
1355	Lincoln, Exeter, Ely	Expedition of king, Black Prince, and Henry of Grosmont, duke of Lancaster, to France	Prayers, processions, masses, litanies

continued …

Table 2 continued

Year	*Dioceses*	*Occasion*	*Response*
1356	Lincoln, Winchester, Exeter, Hereford, York[2]	Expedition of Black Prince, and Henry of Grosmont, duke of Lancaster, to France; king and Henry of Grosmont going overseas for peace; victory of Black Prince at Poitiers	Prayers, masses, processions, nocturns, psalms, fasts, sermons, publication of victory
1359	Carlisle, Exeter, Winchester	King's expedition to France	Prayers, processions, litanies, psalms, fasts, almsgiving
1361	York	Peace and plague	Prayers, litanies, processions
1363	Winchester, York	Expedition of Black Prince to Aquitaine; well-being of king and realm and good weather	Prayers
1366	Lincoln[3]	Peace, good weather and harvest	Prayers, masses, processions
1367	Lincoln, Canterbury, Salisbury[4]	Expedition and victory of Black Prince at Nájera, Spain	Prayers, processions, masses, psalms, litanies, almsgiving, bell-ringing
1369	Lincoln, Winchester	Peace and plague	Prayers, masses, processions, psalms, litanies, sermons
1370	Lincoln, Winchester	Peace; expeditions of Black Prince and John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, in France and Spain	Prayers, processions, masses, psalms, litanies
1372	Lincoln, Exeter, Winchester, Carlisle[5]	Peace negotiations with France; peace and well-being of king and realm; king's expedition to relieve La Rochelle	Prayers, processions, masses, psalms, litanies, fasts, vigils, almsgiving
1373	Winchester, Exeter	Expedition of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, and William of Montagu, earl of Salisbury, to France	Prayers, processions, masses, fasts
1374	Lincoln, Ely, Exeter, Winchester	Peace and well-being of king and realm	Prayers, processions, masses, litanies, fasts

Year	*Dioceses*	*Occasion*	*Response*
1375	Lincoln, Ely, Winchester, Exeter	Expedition overseas of Edmund of Langley, earl of Cambridge, and John of Montfort, duke of Brittany; peace and well-being of king and realm	Prayers, processions, masses, psalms, litanies, almsgiving, bell-ringing
1376	Lincoln	Peace of realm; convalescence of king; soul of Black Prince	Prayers, processions
1377	Lincoln, Winchester	Expedition of Thomas of Woodstock, earl of Buckingham, and John of Montfort, duke of Brittany, to Sluys, France	Prayers, processions, masses

1 No date given, but probably 1352
2 Year illegible, but probably 1356
3 No date given, but probably 1366
4 No date given, but probably 1367
5 No date given, but probably 1372

Sources: Cambridge University Library, Ely Diocesan Records: G/1/1, Register Simon Montacute, fols. 69r.–70r., 84v.–85r., and Register Thomas de Lisle, fols. 58r.–59r., 68r.–69r., 73r.; G/1/2, Register Thomas Arundel, fols. 2v., 7r.; Borthwick Institute, York, Register 11 (John Thoresby), fols. 37v., 48r., 55v.; Wiltshire County Record Office, Trowbridge, Register Robert Wyvil, volume 1, fols. 75v.–76r., 212r., 228v.; Cumbria County Record Office, Carlisle, Carlisle Diocesan Records: DRC/1/2, Register Gilbert Welton, fols. 59–60; Register Thomas Appleby, fol. 253; *The Register of William Edington, Bishop of Winchester, 1346–1366*, ed. S. F. Hockey, 2 parts (Hampshire Record Series, 7, 8, 1986), 1:7–8; 2:3, 42–43, 49, 56; *Wykeham's Register*, ed. T. F. Kirby, 2 vols. (Hampshire Record Society, 1896–99), 2:82–83, 89–90, 105, 108–9, 116–17, 160, 171–72, 188, 192–93, 218, 233–35, 278, 576–77, 579, 585–86; *Registrum Johannis de Trillek, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1344–1361*, ed. J. H. Parry (Canterbury and York Society, 8, 1912), 65, 77–78, 149–50, 160, 242, 264–67, 273–74, 279–81, 318, 350–51; *A Calendar of the Register of Wolstan de Bransford, Bishop of Worcester, 1339–49*, ed. R. M. Haines (Worcestershire Historical Society, new ser., 4, 1966), 206, 286–87, 290, 296, 315, 321; *Registrum Simonis Langham, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi*, ed. A. C. Wood (Canterbury and York Society, 53, 1956), 151–52, 161–63; *The Register of John Kirkby, Bishop of Carlisle, 1332–52, and The Register of John Ross, Bishop of Carlisle, 1325–32*, ed. R L. Storey (Canterbury and York Society, 79, 81, 1993–95), 1:82–83, 110, 173; *The Register of Ralph of Shrewsbury, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1329–1362*, ed. T. S. Holmes, 2 vols. (Somerset Record Society, 9, 10, 1896), 1:305–6, 334–36, 386–87, 400–401, 415, 2:571–78, 534–35, 602, 643–44, 685, 705; *Registrum Palatinum Dunelmense*, ed. T. D. Hardy, 4 vols. (Rolls Series, 62, 1873–78), 1:323, 499–501; *The Register of John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter (A.D. 1327–1369)*, ed. F. C. Hingeston-Randolph, 3 parts (London and Exeter, 1894–99), 2:66–67, 1158–59, 1173–74, 1190–91, 1200–3; *The Register of Thomas de Brantyngham, Bishop of Exeter (A.D. 1370–1394)*, ed. F. C . Hingeston-Randolph, 2 parts (London and Exeter, 1901–6), 1:186–87, 190–91, 199, 299–300, 342–44; Lincolnshire Archives Office: Episcopal Register 7, Thomas Bek, fols. 3v.–4v.; Episcopal Register 8, John Gynwell, fols. 65r.–v., 76r.; Episcopal Register 12, John Buckingham, fols. 34v., 41r.–v., 71r., 96v.–97r., 107r.–v., 125v., 128r., 133r.; A. K. McHardy, "Liturgy and Propanganda in the Diocese of Lincoln during the Hundred Years War," in *Studies in Church History: The Church and War*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Ecclesiastical History Society, 20, 1983), 225.

Table 3 Clerical Mortality, 1348–50

Diocese	*Calendar Year*	*Percent*
Bath and Wells	Sept. 1348–August 1349 (?)	47.60
Coventry and Lichfield	1349	39.28
Ely	April 1349–March 1350	47.00
Exeter	1349	51.50
Hereford	1349	45.86
Lincoln	March 25, 1349–March 24, 1350	39.85
Norwich	1349	48.80
Winchester	1349 (?)	48.80
Worcester	Nov. 1348–Oct. 1349 (?)	44.50
York	March 25, 1349–March 24, 1350	39.85
Average		45.30

Sources: A.H. Thompson, "Registers of John Gynewell, Bishop of Lincoln, for the Years 1347–1350," *Archaeological Journal* 68 (1911):333–38; idem, "The Pestilences of the Fourteenth Century in the Diocese of York," *Archaeological Journal* 71 (1914):128–31; G.G. Coulton, *Medieval Panorama: The English Scene from Conquest to Reformation* (New York and Cambridge: Macmillan Co and Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 496; Ransom Pickard, *The Population and Epidemics of Exeter in Pre-Census Times* (Exeter, 1947), pp. 24–25; J.F.D. Shrewsbury, *A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 60–107; R.A. Davies, "The Effect of the Black Death on the Parish Priests of the Medieval Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 62 (1989):87; W.J. Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership: The Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 42; John Aberth, "The Black Death in the Diocese of Ely: The Evidence of the Bishop's Register," *Journal of Medieval History* 21 (1995):279. It should be noted that question marks refer to the Ph.D. dissertation of J. Lunn, "The Black Death in the Bishops' Registers," registered in 1930 at the University of Cambridge but which is now lost. Its information is incorporated into the works of Coulton and Shrewsbury.

Table 4 Mortality in England

Source	*Percent*
10 dioceses recording parish vacancies (see Table 3)	45.30
15 manors recording loss of tenants in Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, and Warwickshire owned by the Bishop of Worcester, 1351/53	47.80
17 manors recording deaths of "garciones" paying head tax in Somerset, Wiltshire, Berkshire, and Dorset owned by Glastonbury Abbey	55.41
24 other manors recording loss of tenants and heriot payments in Cornwall, Berkshire, Cambrideshire, Durham, Essex, Hampshire, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Suffolk, Wiltshire, and Worcestershire owned by various lay and ecclesiastical lords	54.83
28 townships in Northumberland and Durham owned by Durham Cathedral Priory	49.68
7 tithing communities in Essex and one in Kibworth Beauchamp in Leicestershire, 1345/46–1354/56	43.56
Average	49.43

Source: Ole J. Benedictow, *The Black Death, 1346–1353: The Complete History* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 360–79. Note that the total percentages of 42 and 57 that Benedictow gives respectively for the 15 manors owned by the bishop of Worcester and the 17 manors owned by Glastonbury Abbey in tables 32 and 37, even though faithfully reproduced from his original sources, do not accurately reflect an average taken from the individual figures for each manor, and thus I have corrected them accordingly. I have also averaged each of the individual figures for Essex, rather than using the total percentages given by Benedictow in table 35.

Table 5 Mortality in Spain

Source	*Percent*
Diocese of Barcelona in the kingdom of Aragon recording parish vacancies between May 1348 and April 1349	60.00
2 Catalonian parishes of St. Ándreu and Taradell recording tax-payers in kingdom of Aragon, 1352	70.08
Scribes and legists of Perpignan in the kingdom of Aragon	58.00
3 *merindads* of Estella, Pamplona, and Sangüesa recording tax- and rent-payers in the kingdom of Navarre, 1330–1350	51.04
Average	59.78

Sources: Richard Gyug, "The Effects and Extent of the Black Death of 1348: New Evidence for Clerical Mortality in Barcelona," *Mediaeval Studies* 45 (1983):391; Ole J. Benedictow, *The Black Death, 1346–1353: The Complete History* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 273–84. In the case of St. Ándreu, Taradell, Estella, and the combined communities of Pamplona and Sangüesa, I made my own percentage calculations, rounded off to two decimal places.

Table 6 Mortality in Italy

Source	*Percent*
Tax-paying households of Florence, Tuscany, 1347–1352	55.00
Salt tax-payers in city and *contado* of San Gimignano, Tucany, 1332–1350	51.88
Tax-paying households in city and *contado* of Prato, Tuscany, 1339–1351/52	39.47
Military companies enrolling men 16–70 eligible for service in Siena, Tuscany	51.16
Military registers enrolling men 18–69 eligible for service in Bologna in Emilia-Romagna region, 1349	35.13
8 villages of tax-paying households in Piedmont, 1335–1356	40.32
Average	45.49

Source: Ole J. Benedictow, *The Black Death, 1346–1353: The Complete History* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 285–307. Note that total percentages for San Gimignano, Prato, and Piedmont are taken as averages of individual figures for each village, city, or *contado* rather than for the region as a whole. Except for Florence, all percentages are based on my own calculations, rounded off to two decimal places

Table 7 Mortality in France

Source	*Percent*
16 towns and villages of tax-paying households in Provence, 1340–1356	52.56
36 parishes and communities of tax-paying households in the Savoy, 1329–48 to 1349–59	47.97
2 cities of Millau and Albi recording tax-paying households in Languedoc	47.32
Tax-paying households within the walls and suburbs of Saint-Flour in Auvergne, 1343–1356	49.06
Parish register of Givry in Burgundy, July–Nov. 1348	50.00
Average	49.38

Source: Ole J. Benedictow, *The Black Death, 1346–1353: The Complete History* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 308–37. Note that total percentages for Provence and Savoy were taken, where possible, as averages of individual figures for each town, village, or parish rather than for the region as a whole. The same applies to the total percentage for Saint-Flour. Except for the parish of Sallanches, the parishes of Montmélian, the castellany of Aiguebelle, the parishes of Saint-Michel, and the hamlet of Grenis in the Savoy and for the parish of Givry in Burgundy, all percentages are based on my own calculations, rounded off to two decimal places. My one major difference with Benedictow in terms of these calculations is for Saint-Paul in Provence, where he gives a percentage of 72.5 based on 92 households in 1345 and 40 in 1349. (My own calculation here is 56.52 percent.)

Table 8 Mortality in the Diocese of Hereford, 1345–1400

Year	*Deaths*[a]	*% of total*[b]	*% from Exeter*[c]
1345	4	1.30	
1346	3	1.00	
1347	4	1.34	
1348	8	2.75	4.36
1349	147	45.86	51.50
1350	22	7.48	11.68
1351	15	5.12	4.52
1352	14	4.75	
1353	20	6.78	
1354	2	0.67	
1355	10	3.34	
1356	8	2.67	
1357	6	2.00	
1358	2	0.68	
1359	7	2.37	
1360	incomplete		
1361	31	10.33	10.12
1362	9	2.68	20.25
1363	13	4.26	6.23
1364	6	1.95	
1365	3	0.97	
1366	10	3.26	
1367	12	3.96	
1368	12	3.99	
1369	40	13.20	
1370	6	1.94	
1371	6	1.94	
1372	6	1.94	
1373	13	4.20	
1374	11	3.56	
1375	9	2.90	
1376	0	0.00	
1377	9	2.92	
1378	7	2.27	
1379	2	0.65	
1380	1	0.32	
1381	1	0.32	

Continued…

Table 8 continued…

Year	*Deaths*[a]	*% of total*[b]	*% from Exeter*[c]
1382	2	0.65	
1383	10	3.24	
1384	13	4.20	
1385	12	3.90	
1386	12	3.90	
1387	15	4.85	
1388	9	2.91	
1389	1	0.32	
1390	34	11.00	
1391	28	8.77	6.7
1392	19	6.17	
1393	24	7.44	
1394	24	7.77	
1395	23	7.44	
1396	32	10.32	
1397	17	5.48	
1398	13	4.20	
1399	23	7.42	
1400	19	6.13	

a Figures adjusted in order to account for the probable death dates of incumbents, usually one month prior to the institution of successors.
b Figures adjusted in order to account for non-resident priests and multiple institutions, which will explain slightly different percentages in years that have same number of deaths, such as 1367–68, 1375 and 1377, and 1393–94. Deaths taken as a percentage of 310 total benefices in the diocese.
c Deaths taken as a percentage of 642 total benefices in the diocese.

Sources: *Registrum Willelmi de Courtenay, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1370–1375*, ed. W.W. Capes (Canterbury and York Society, 15, 1914), pp. 11–12; *Registrum Johannis Gilbert, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1375–1389*, ed. J.H. Parry (Canterbury and York Society, 18, 1915), pp. 115–22; *Registrum Johannis Trefnant, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1389–1404*, ed., W.W. Capes (Canterbury and York Society, 20, 1916), pp. 174–84; R. Pickard, *The Population and Epidemics of Exeter in Pre-Census Times* (Exeter, 1947), pp. 24–26; W.J. Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership: The Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 41–42.

Table 9 Exchanges, 1328–1400

Year	*Exeter*	*Hereford*	*Winchester*
1328	3	1	unavailable
1329	3	1	unavailable
1330	12	0	unavailable
1331	73	0	unavailable
1332	5	1	unavailable
1333	11	2	unavailable
1334	5	2	unavailable
1335	1	2	unavailable
1336	7	1	unavailable
1337	10	0	unavailable
1338	3	0	unavailable
1339	3	1	unavailable
1340	2	6	unavailable
1341	4	4	unavailable
1342	4	3	unavailable
1343	7	3	unavailable
1344	6	1	unavailable
1345	3	2	unavailable
1346	9	3	10
1347	3	4	12
1348	5	5	14
1349	3	6	20
1350	2	6	8
1351	3	5	12
1352	5	6	12
1353	2	3	14
1354	7	7	14
1355	3	6	10
1356	2	4	9
1357	5	9	11
1358	4	4	11
1359	3	3	6
1360	1	incomplete	8
1361	4	incomplete	6
1362	2	3	8
1363	5	3	9
1364	0	6	6
1365	1	1	10
1366	3	5	7
1367	5	4	7
1368	3	3	7
1369	incomplete	1	9
1370	incomplete	3	23
1371	18	7	17

Continued…

Table 9 continued…

Year	*Exeter*	*Hereford*	*Winchester*
1372	7	6	12
1373	10	3	10
1374	7	6	9
1375	8	1	6
1376	12	0	15
1377	13	4	16
1378	8	2	15
1379	6	8	8
1380	6	1	20
1381	13	6	17
1382	14	2	I8
1383	7	8	17
1384	11	6	9
1385	14	7	11
1386	13	14	9
1387	17	7	15
1388	incomplete	4	19
1389	incomplete	0	5
1390	incomplete	14	15
1391	11	8	14
1392	18	7	9
1393	16	9	4
1394	18	14	18
1395	6	13	11
1396	10	6	16
1397	8	9	19
1398	6	6	6
1399	15	9	10
1400	13	6	17

Sources: *The Register of John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter, A.D. 1327–1369*, ed. F. C. Hingeston-Randolph, 3 parts (London and Exeter, 1894–99), 3:1263–1507; *The Register of Thomas de Brantyngham, Bishop of Exeter, A.D. 1370–1394*, ed. F. C. Hingeston-Randolph, 2 parts) London and Exeter, 1901–6), 1:13–137, 141–42, 155–56, 162, 171, 173–78,413; *The Register of Edmund Stafford, A.D. 1395–1419: An Index and Abstract of Its Contents*, ed. F. C. Hingeston-Randolph (London and Exeter, 1886), pp. 140–220; *Registrum Thome de Charlton, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1327–1344*, ed. W. W. Capes (Canterbury and York Society, 9, 1913), pp. 83–84; *Registrum Johannis de Trillek, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1344–1361*, ed. J. H. Parry (Canterbury and York Society, 8, 1912), pp. 373–92, 404–10; *Registrum Ludowici de Charltone, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1361–1370*, ed. J. H. Parry (Canterbury and York Society, 14, 1914), 66, pp. 71–72; *Registrum Willelmi de Courtenay, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1370–1375*, ed. W.W. Capes (Canterbury and York Society, 15, 1914), p. 11, 13–14; *Registrum Johannis Gilbert, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1375–1389*, ed. J. H. Parry (Canterbury and York Society, 18, 1915), pp. 115–26; *Registrum Johannis Trefnant, Episcopi Herefordensis, A.D. 1389–1404*, ed. W. W. Capes (Canterbury and York Society, 20, 1916), pp. 187–91; *Wykeham's Register*, ed. T. F. Kirby, 2 vols. (Hampshire Record Society, 1896–99), 1:5–230; 2:122, 444; *Registrum Simonis Langham, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi*, ed. A. C. Wood (Canterbury and York Society, 53, 1956), pp. 246–51; *The Register of William Edington, Bishop of Winchester, 1346–1366*, ed. S. F. Hockey, 2 parts (Hampshire Record Series, 7, 8, 1986), 1:17–251.

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Prologue

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Famine

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M. M. Postan published his important article on his neo-Malthusian theory of the late-medieval English economy in "Some Economic Evidence of Declining Population in the Later Middle Ages," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 2 (1950): 221–46. Reevaluation of the Postan thesis is taken up in *Before the Black Death* and, from a Marxist perspective, in another essay collection, *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, eds. T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (Cambridge, 1985). The case for medieval birth control is made in: P. P. A. Biller, "Birth-Control in the West in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries," *Past and Present* 94 (1982):3–26; A. McLaren, *A History of Contraception from Antiquity to the Present Day* (Oxford, 1990); J. M. Riddle, "Oral Contraceptives and Early-Term Abortifacients during Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Past and Present* 132 (1991):3–32; idem, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA., 1992). Some regional studies that reevaluate

Postan in terms of the viability of medieval farming include: P. F. Brandon, "Demesne Arable Farming in Coastal Sussex during the Later Middle Ages," *Agricultural History Review* 19 (1971): 113–134; C. Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming, 1349–c.1520: Preparations for Agricultural Revolution* (Dugdale Society Occasional Papers, 27, 1981); M. Mate, "Medieval Agrarian Practices: The Determining Factors?" *Agricultural History Review* 33 (1985):22–31; B. M. S. Campbell and M. Overton, "A New Perspective on Medieval and Early Modern Agriculture: Six Centuries of Norfolk Farming, c. 1250–c.1850," *Past and Present* 141 (1993):38–105. Mark Bailey revisits the role of marginal land in the medieval economy in "The Concept of the Margin in the Medieval English Economy," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 42 (1989):1–17.

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Foligno, *Consilium contra Pestilentiam* (Colle di Valdelsa, c. 1479); T. Dinānah, "Die Schrift von Abī Ǧa'far Ahmed ibn 'Alī ibn Mohammed ibn 'Alī ibn Hātimah aus Almeriah über die Pest," *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 19 (1927):27–81; and Karl Sudoff's compilation of plague treatises in "Pestschriften aus den ersten 150 Jahren nach der Epidemie des 'schwarzen Todes' 1348," *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 4–17 (1911–1925), with an index on pp. 264–291 of vol. 17.

War

A good, general book on war in the Middle Ages is by P. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. M. Jones (Oxford, 1984). A work that focuses on the medieval art of war in England is Michael Prestwich's *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience* (New Haven and London, 1996). For textbooks on the Hundred Years War, see J. Favier, *La Guerre de Cent Ans* (Paris, 1980); C. Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War, c. 1300–c.1450* (Cambridge, 1988); R. Neillands, *The Hundred Years War* (London and New York, 1990); J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War: Trial by Battle* (Philadelphia, 1991); idem, *The Hundred Years War, Volume 2: Trial by Fire* (London, 2001); A. Curry, *The Hundred Years War* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London, 1993). A useful collection of primary and secondary sources on the first phase of the Hundred Years War during the fourteenth century is *The Wars of Edward III: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. C.J. Rogers (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY, 1999). A similar collection for the battle of Agincourt in 1415 is *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. A. Curry (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY, 2000).

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The Wars of Edward III; and idem, *War Cruel and Sharp: English Strategy under Edward III, 1327–1360* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY, 2000).

On the subject of chivalry and the laws of war during the later Middle Ages, see M. G. A. Vale, *War and Chivalry: Warfare and Aristocratic Culture in England, France, and Burgundy at the End of the Middle Ages* (London, 1981); J. Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and its Context, 1270-1350* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1982); M. H. Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages* (London, 1965); idem, *Chivalry* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1984); T. Meron, *Henry's Wars and Shakespeare's Laws* (Oxford, 1993); R. W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1999); and Geoffroi de Charny, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, trans. E. Kennedy, with an introduction by R. W. Kaueper (Philadelphia, 2005). W. Matthews, *The Tragedy of Arthur* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960), presents the thesis that the alliterative *Morte Arthure* is an allegorical criticism of Edward III's war polices during the fourteenth century. Matthew's interpretation, however, is somewhat contested by J. Barnie, *War in Medieval English Society: Social Values in the Hundred Years War, 1337–99* (Ithaca, NY, 1974). The exact date of the poem is also a matter of some debate.

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For studies of English Church propaganda and array in support of the Hundred Years War, see B. McNab, "Obligations of the Church in English Society: Military Arrays of the Clergy, 1349–1418" in *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Joseph R. Strayer*, ed. W. C. Jordan, B. McNab, and T. F. Ruiz (Princeton, 1976); W. R. Jones, "The English Church and Royal Propaganda during the Hundred Years War," *Journal of British Studies* 19 (1979): 18–30; A. K. McHardy, "Liturgy and Propaganda in the Diocese of Lincoln during the Hundred Years War" and R. M. Haines, "An English Archbishop and the Cerberus of War" in *Studies in Church History: The Church and War*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Ecclesiastical History Society, 20, 1983). For the issue of papal diplomacy during the war, see E. Déprez, "La Conférence d'Avignon, 1344: L'Arbitrage Pontifical entre la France et l'Angleterre" in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Thomas Frederick Tout*, eds. A. G. Little and F. M. Powicke (Manchester, 1925); H. Jenkins, *Papal Efforts for Peace under Benedict XII, 1334–42* (London and Philadelphia, 1933); and D. Wood, "*Omnino Partialitate Cessante*: Clement VI and the Hundred Years War" in *Studies in Church History: The Church and War*.

Some of the most important works, both in English and French, on the fate of noncombatants and the destruction wrought in France by English *chevauchées* and the Free Companies during the Hundred Years War are the following: H. Denifle, *La Désolation des*

Églises, Monastères et Hopitaux en France pendant la Guerre de Cent Ans, 2 vols. (Paris, 1897–99); C.T. Allmand, "The War and the Non-Combatant" in *The Hundred Years War*, ed. K. Fowler (Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London, 1971); idem, "War and the Non-Combatant in the Middle Ages" in *Medieval Warfare*; R. Boutruche, "The Devastation of Rural Areas during the Hundred Years War and the Agricultural Recovery of France" in *The Recovery of France in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. P. S. Lewis and trans. G. F. Martin (New York, 1971); P. Contamine, "Les Compagnies d'Aventure en France pendant la Guerre de Cent Ans," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome* 87 (1975):365–396; G. Bois, *The Crisis of Feudalism: Economy and Society in Eastern Normandy, c. 1300–1550* (Cambridge, 1984); N. Wright, *Knights and Peasants: The Hundred Years War in the French Countryside* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1998); C. J. Rogers, "By Fire and Sword: *Bellum Hostile* and 'Civilians' in the Hundred Years War" in *Civilians in the Path of War*, eds. M. Grimsley and C. J. Rogers (Lincoln, NE, 2002). English scholars who debated the "costs" of the Hundred Years War to their country include: K.B. McFarlane, "War, the Economy, and Social Change: England and the Hundred Years War," *Past and Present* 22 (1962):3–13; M. M. Postan, "The Costs of the Hundred Years' War," *Past and Present* 27 (1964):34–53; A. R. Bridbury, "The Hundred Years' War: Costs and Profits" in *Trade, Government, and Economy in Pre-Industrial England: Essays Presented to F .J. Fisher*, eds. D. C. Coleman and A. H. John (London, 1976), and repr. in idem, *The English Economy from Bede to the Reformation* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1992); J. W. Sherborne, "The Cost of English Warfare with France in the Later Fourteenth Century," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 50 (1977):135–150, and repr. in idem, *War, Politics, and Culture in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. A. Tuck (London and Rio Grande, OH, 1994).

For accounts and discussions of Richard II's peace negotiations with France, see J. J. N. Palmer, "The Anglo-French Peace Negotiations, 1390–1396," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser. 16 (1966):81–94; idem, "English Foreign Policy, 1388–99" in *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*, ed. F. R. H. Du Boulay and C. M. Barron (London, 1971); idem, *England, France, and Christendom, 1377–99* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1972); A. Tuck, "Richard II and the Hundred Years War" in *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth-Century England*, eds. J. Taylor and W. Childs (Gloucester, 1990); and N. Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven and London, 1997). For a survey of the pacifist movement so far as this can be traced in late medieval and early modern England, see B. Lowe, *Imagining Peace: A History of Early English Pacifist Ideas, 1340–1560* (University Park, PA, 1997). War's impact in Renaissance Italy is surveyed in W. P. Caferro, "Warfare and Economy in Renaissance Italy, 1350–1450," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 39 (2008):167–209. Primary sources used in this section include *Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History, Composed during the Period from the Accession of Edw. III to that of Ric. III*, ed. T. Wright (London, 1859–61); William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, trans. H. W. Wells (London, 1935); Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, trans. and ed. G. Brereton (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1968); Philippe de Mézières, *Le Songe du Vieil Pelerin*, ed. G. C. Coopland (Cambridge, 1969); idem, *Letter to King Richard II: A Plea Made in 1395 for Peace between England and France*, ed. G. C. Coopland (Liverpool, 1975); *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381–1394*, eds. L. C. Hector and B. F. Harvey (Oxford, 1982).

On the interrelationship between war and plague, I consulted J. N. Biraben, *Les Hommes et la Peste en France et dans les Pays Européens et Méditerranéens*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1975–76). Source quotations are taken from *The Black Death*, ed. R. Horrox (Manchester, 1994); J. Aberth, *The Black Death. The Great Mortality of 1348–1350: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston,

2005); S. K. Cohn, Jr., *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance* Europe (London and Oxford, 2002); Gentile da Foligno, *Consilium contra Pestilentiam* (Colle di Valdelsa, c. 1479); Marsilio Ficino, *Consiglio contro la Pestilenza* (Florence, 1481); Jacme d'Agramont, "Regiment de Preservacio a Epidimia o Pestilencia e Mortaldats," trans. M. L. Duran-Reynals and C. E. A. Winslow, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 23 (1949): 57–89; M. V. Amasuna Sárraga, *La Peste en la Corona de Castilla durante la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XIV* (Valladolid, 1996); and Karl Sudoff's compilation of plague treatises in "Pestschriften aus den ersten 150 Jahren nach der Epidemie des 'schwarzen Todes' 1348," *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 4–17 (1911–25), with an index on pp. 264–291 of vol. 17. For a discussion of the chronicler Gabriele de Mussis' account of the Black Death as a biological weapon, see V. Derbes, "De Mussis and the Great Plague of 1348: A Forgotten Episode of Bacteriological Warfare," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 196 (1966): 59–62. The role of plague and other diseases in more recent episodes of bioterrorism and bacteriological warfare are explored in A. J. Bollet, *Plagues and Poxes: The Impact of Human History on Epidemic Disease* (New York, 2004), and in a television documentary, "Nature's Weapon: The Hidden Plague," that originally aired on March 16, 2003 on MSNBC.

Plague

Some general texts on the Black Death that are still widely used or cited today are nonetheless badly out of date. These include P. Ziegler, *The Black Death* (New York, 1969); R. S. Gottfried, *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (New York, 1983); and the essay collection, *The Black Death: A Turning Point in History?*, ed. W. M. Bowsky (New York, 1978). Still worth consulting, however, is the essay collection, *The Black Death: The Impact of the Fourteenth-Century Plague*, ed. D. Williman (Binghamton, NY, 1982). William McNeill's *Plagues and Peoples* (New York, 1976) is also valuable for its discussion of the Black Death's origins in the Mongol Empire of Central Asia. It should be noted that David Herlihy's *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*, ed. and with an introduction by S. K. Cohn, Jr. (Cambridge, MA, 1997) is based on three lectures Herlihy delivered at the University of Maine in 1985. Norman Cantor's more recent *In the Wake of the Plague: The Black Death and the World It Made* (New York, 2001) grossly oversimplifies and distorts many issues surrounding the disease. Ole Benedictow's *The Black Death, 1346—-1353: The Complete History* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY, 2004) provides the most up-to-date survey of the geographical spread of the Black Death and its demographic impact, but it makes for some dense reading. Three works that focus on reassessing the identity of the Black Death with plague are: J. F. D. Shrewsbury, *A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge, 1970); G. Twigg, *The Black Death: A Biological Reappraisal* (New York, 1984); and S. K. Cohn, Jr., *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* (London and New York, 2002). Cohn also published a summary of his revisionist argument in an article, "The Black Death: End of a Paradigm," *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 703–738. Aside from Shrewsbury's book, two other works that focus on England are C. Platt, *King Death: The Black Death and Its Aftermath in Late Medieval England* (Toronto, 1996), and the essay collection, *The Black Death in England*, ed. W. M. Ormrod and P. G. Lindley (Stamford, Lincolnshire, 1996). A work that focuses on France that is still worth consulting is J. N. Biraben, *Les Hommes et la Peste en France et dans les Pays Européens et*

Méditerranéens, 2 vols. (Paris, 1975–76). Plague epidemiology in Scandinavia is the focus of O. Benedictow, *Plague in the Late Medieval Nordic Countries: Epidemiological Studies* (Oslo, 1992). For the Black Death in the Middle East, see M. W. Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ, 1977). Good selections of primary sources on the Black Death are available in *The Black Death*, ed. R. Horrox (Manchester, 1994), and J. Aberth, *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348–1350: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, 2005). A collection of secondary sources on the topic is *The Black Death*, ed. E. A. Lehfeldt (Boston and New York, 2005).

On the First Pandemic of plague between c.541 and 750 in the Mediterranean and the rest of Europe, readers should consult the 1981 Princeton University Ph.D. thesis of L. I. Conrad, "The Plague in the Early Medieval Near East," and D. Ch. Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire: A Systematic Survey of Subsistence Crises and Epidemics* (Aldershot, Hants, and Burlington, VT, 2004), and the essay collection, *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541–750*, ed. L. K. Little (New York, 2007). Plague research during the Third Pandemic in India and China at the turn of the twentieth century is summarized in: J. K. Condon, *The Bombay Plague, being A History of the Progress of Plague in the Bombay Presidency from September 1896 to June 1899* (Bombay, 1900); Wu Lien-Teh (Wu Liande), *A Treatise on Pneumonic Plague* (Geneva, 1926); Wu Lien-Teh, J. W. H. Chun, R. Pollitzer, and C. Y. Wu, *Plague: A Manual for Medical and Public Health Workers*, (Shanghai, 1936); and R. Pollitzer, *Plague* (Geneva, 1954). For the contemporary context of the Third Pandemic in terms of British imperial policies in India, see D. Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993).

Debate over the geographical origins of the Black Death is taken up in Benedictow, *The Black Death*, and in J. Norris, "East or West? The Geographic Origin of the Black Death," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 51 (1977):1–24. Benedictow's *The Black Death* has conveniently collated many regional studies of the geographical spread of the Black Death throughout Europe, so that it has now effectively replaced older surveys, such as Biraben's *Les Hommes et la Peste* and E. Carpentier, "Autour de la Peste Noire: Famines et Épidémies dans l'Histoire du XIVe Siècle," *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisation* 17 (1962):1062–1092. It has done the same with regard to plague demography, compiling the many regional mortality statistics derived from local records, such as the bishops' registers, and thus replacing older surveys such as J. C. Russell's *British Medieval Population* (Albuquerque, NM, 1948), and T. H. Hollingsworth, *Historical Demography* (Ithaca, NY, 1969). However, for population statistics beyond the first outbreak of 1348–53, I have consulted M. Livi Bacci, *The Population of Europe: A History* (Oxford, 2000). On whether the Black Death was spread by pneumonic plague, see: S. R. Ell, "Interhuman Transmission of Medieval Plague," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 54 (1980):497–510; Benedictow, *Plague in the Late Medieval Nordic Countries*; and G. Karlsson, "Plague without Rats: The Case of Fifteenth-Century Iceland," *Journal of Medieval History* 22 (1996):263–284.

Aside from the works by Shrewsbury, Twigg, and Cohn cited earlier, the debate over whether the Black Death was plague is conveniently summarized by R. Sallares, "Ecology, Evolution, and Epidemiology of Plague" in *Plague and the End of Antiquity*, and by S. Scott and C. J. Duncan, *Biology of Plagues: Evidence from Historical Populations* (Cambridge, 2001). Sallares favors identifying the Black Death with plague, whereas Scott and Duncan take

the opposite point of view, advancing their own alternative of "haemorrhagic plague." Opposing points of view on the viability of medieval rat populations for sustaining a bubonic plague epidemic are also taken by D. E. Davis, "The Scarcity of Rats and the Black Death: An Ecological History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16 (1986):455–470, and M. McCormick, "Rats, Communications, and Plague," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34 (2003):14–24. A good, up-to-date summary of current knowledge about the bacterial agent of plague, *Yersinia pestis*, and the mechanisms of its spread through fleas and rats is available in K. L. Gage and M.Y. Kosoy, "Natural History of Plague: Perspectives from More than a Century of Research," *Annual Review of Entomology* 50 (2005):505–528. Biomolecular archaeology on *Yersinia pestis*, some of it as yet unpublished, is presented by R. Sallares and M. McCormick in their respective articles in *Plague and the End of Antiquity*.

With regard to the medical response to the Black Death, I have mainly relied on my own research into the medieval plague treatises, most of which are available in K. Sudhoff, "Pestschriften aus den ersten 150 Jahren nach der Epidemie des 'schwarzen Todes' 1348," *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 4–17 (1911–25), with an index on pp. 264–291 of vol. 17. However, a number of treatises I consulted that are not in Sudhoff's series are instead to be found in: Gentile da Foligno, *Consilium contra Pestilentiam* (Colle di Valdelsa, c. 1479); *Documents Inédits sur la Grande Peste de 1348*, ed. L. A. Joseph Michon (Paris, 1860); M. J. Müller, "Ibnulkhatīb's Bericht über die Pest," *Sitzungsberichte der Königl. Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenchaften* 2 (1863):2–12; R. Hoeniger, *Der Schwarze Tod in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1882); L. Zunz, *Jubelschrift zum Neunzigsten Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1884); H.E. Rébouis, *Étude Historique et Critique sur la Peste* (Paris, 1888); H. Pinkhof, *Abraham Kashlari, over Pestachtige Koorsten* (Amsterdam, 1891); T. Dinānah, "Die Schrift von Abī Ǧa'far Ahmed ibn 'Alī ibn Mohammed ibn 'Alī ibn Hātimah aus Almeriah über die Pest," *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 19 (1927):27–81; Jacme d'Agramont, "Regiment de Preservacio a Epidimia o Pestilencia e Mortaldats," trans. M. L. Duran-Reynals and C. -E. A. Winslow, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 23 (1949): 57–89; M. V. Amasuna Sárraga, *La Peste en la Corona de Castilla durante la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XIV* (Valladolid, 1996); Guy de Chauliac, *Inventarium sive Chirurgia Magna*, vol. 1: text, ed. M. R. McVaugh (Leiden and New York, 1997). I also consulted the plague treatise of Muhammad Ibn 'Alī ash-Shaqūrī from a microfilm copy of Escorial MS 1785, which was translated for me from the Arabic by Russell Hopley of Bowdoin College. The fifteenth-century English leech book and medical compendium mentioned in this section were consulted personally by me in MS 404 in the Wellcome Library and in Additional MS 6716 in the British Library in London. My research will be presented in fuller detail in a forthcoming book, *Doctoring the Black Death: Europe's Late Medieval Medical Response to Epidemic Disease*. At present, the only full-length book on the subject is Anna Montgomery Campbell's badly outdated *The Black Death and Men of Learning* (New York, 1931), which deals only with the first outbreak of 1348–49. However, some articles have been published on various aspects of the medical response to plague, which include: D. W. Singer, "Some Plague Tractates (Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries)," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 9 (1915–16):159–211; M. P. Chase, "Fevers, Poisons, and Apostemes: Authority and Experience in Montpellier Plague Treatises," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 441 (1985):153-69; J. Henderson, "The Black Death in Florence: Medical and Communal Responses" in *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100–1600*, ed. S. Bassett (London and New York, 1992);

J. Arrizabalaga, "Facing the Black Death: Perceptions and Reactions of University Medical Practitioners" in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, eds. L. García-Ballester, R. French, J. Arrizabalaga, and A. Cunningham (Cambridge, 1994); and C. Crisciani and M. Pereira, "Black Death and Golden Remedies: Some Remarks on Alchemy and the Plague" in *The Regulation of Evil: Social and Cultural Attitudes to Epidemics in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. A. P. Baliani and F. Santi (Sismel, 1998). I have also consulted three as yet unpublished Ph.D. dissertations, one by D. Palazzotto from 1973 at the University of Kansas, "The Black Death and Medicine: A Report and Analysis of the Treatises Written between 1348 and 1350"; another by C. N. Fabbri from 2006 at Yale University, "Continuity and Change in Late Medieval Plague Medicine: A Survey of 152 Plague Tracts from 1348 to 1599"; and a third by Justin K. Stearns from 2007 at Princeton University, "Infectious Ideas: Contagion in Late Medieval Islamic and Christian Thought."

On the religious response to the Black Death, the general terms of the debate are still set by the pessimistic tones of Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Dawn of the Renaissance*, trans. F. Hopman (New York, 1924), and Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th–18th Centuries*, trans. E. Nicholson (New York, 1990). Lately, however, this negative paradigm has been challenged by L. Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994):485–532, and by David Herlihy in *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West* and by his student, Sam Cohn, in *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy* (Baltimore, 1992), and idem, "The Place of the Dead in Flanders and Tuscany: Towards a Comparative History of the Black Death" in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. B. Gordon and P. Marshall (Cambridge, 2000). Primary sources in this section are mainly taken from *The Black Death*, ed. Horrox and Aberth, *The Black Death*. My quotations from Julian of Norwich are taken from Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, eds. E. Colledge and J. Walsh (New York and Ramsey, NJ, 1978), and Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, eds. E. Spearing and A. C. Spearing (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1998).

For works that mainly focus on the issue of the continued vitality of Catholicism in England in the aftermath of the Black Death and leading up to the English Reformation, see G. G. Coulton, *Medieval Panorama: The English Scene from Conquest to Reformation* (New York and Cambridge, 1938); L. G. Duggan, "The Unresponsiveness of the Late Medieval Church: A Reconsideration," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9 (1978): 3–26; C. M. Barron and C. Harper-Bill, *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society: Essays in Honour of F.R.H. Du Boulay* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1985); A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd ed. (London, 1989); C. Harper-Bill, "English Church and Religion after the Black Death" in *The Black Death in England*; idem, *The Pre-Reformation Church in England, 1400–1530*, rev. ed. (London and New York, 1996); and E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–c.1580* (New Haven, CT., 1992). Some local studies in this regard include: J. Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1988); A. D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury, 1250–1550* (Oxford, 1995); and W. J. Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership: The Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1995). Other local studies that make good use of wills left by the English gentry and urban communities include: J. A. F. Thompson, "Piety and Charity in

Late Medieval London," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 16 (1965):178–195; M. G. A. Vale, *Piety, Charity, and Literacy among the Yorkshire Gentry, 1370-1480* (Borthwick Papers, no. 50, 1976); N. P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370–1532* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts, 66, 1984); P. W. Fleming, "Charity, Faith, and the Gentry of Kent" in *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History*, ed. T. Pollard (Gloucester and New York, 1984); P. Heath, "Urban Piety in the Later Middle Ages: The Evidence of Hull Wills" in *The Church, Politics, and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. R. B. Dobson (Gloucester, 1984); C. Burgess, "'By Quick and by Dead': Wills and Pious Provision in Late Medieval Bristol," *English Historical Review* 102 (1987):837–858; idem, "Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered" in *Profit, Piety, and the Professions in Later Medieval England*, ed. M. A. Hicks (Gloucester, 1990); and R. Dinn, "Death and Rebirth in Late Medieval Bury St. Edmunds" in *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100–1600*, ed. S. Bassett (London and New York, 1992).

Recruitment of English clergy during the later Middle Ages is discussed in: R. L. Storey, "Recruitment of English Clergy in the Period of the Conciliar Movement," *Annuarium Historiae Conciliorum: Internationale Zeitschrift für Konziliengeschichtsforschung* 7 (1975):290–313; J. A. H. Moran, "Clerical Recruitment in the Diocese of York, 1340–1530: Data and Commentary," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34 (1983):19–54; V. Davis, "Rivals for Ministry? Ordinations of Secular and Regular Clergy in Southern England, c.1300–1500" in *Studies in Church History: The Ministry, Clerical and Lay*, ed. W. J. Sheils and D. Wood (Ecclesiastical History Society, 26, 1989). Two works that focus on the contributions that chantry priests and guild chaplains made to the overall service of the parish are B. A. Hanawalt, "Keepers of the Lights: Late Medieval English Parish Guilds," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 (1984):21–37, and C. Burgess, "'For the Increase of Divine Service': Chantries in the Parish in Late Medieval Bristol," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985):46–65. On the educational response to the Black Death, see W. J. Courtenay, "The Effect of the Black Death on English Higher Education," *Speculum* 55 (1980):696–714.

Surprisingly, there are not many major works out there exclusively focused on the Flagellants and Jewish pogroms during the Black Death. The recent article by Sam Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of the Jews," *Past and Present* 196 (2007):3–36, mainly examines the Jewish pogroms within the context of urban social unrest throughout the later Middle Ages. The following studies—R. Kieckhefer, "Radical Tendencies in the Flagellant Movement of the Mid-Fourteenth Century," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1974):157–176; F. Graus, *Pest, Geissler, Judenmorde: Das 14 Jahrhundert als Krisenzeit* (Göttingen, 1987); and M. Breuer, "The 'Black Death' and Antisemitism" in *Antisemitism through the Ages*, ed. S. Almog and trans. N. H. Reisner (Oxford and New York, 1988)—are by now dated. However, still worth consulting are S. Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death in the Contemporary Treaties of the Plague" in *Change in Medieval Society*, ed. S. L. Thrupp (New York, 1964), and the article on the "Black Death" by Joseph Jacobs in *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, ed. I. Singer, 12 vols (New York, 1916), 3:233–236. A detailed chronology of the pogroms is also available in C. Cluse, "Zur Chronologie der Verfolgungen zur Zeit des 'Schwarzen Todes'" in *Geschichte der Juden im Mittelalter von der Nordsee bis zu den Südalpen: kommentiertes Kartenwerk*, ed. A. Haverkamp, 3 vols. (Hannover, 2002), 1:223–242. A very

useful collection of primary sources on the Flagellants in Flanders is to be found in *Corpus Documentorum Inquisitionis Haereticae Pravitatis Neerlandicae*, 3 vols., ed. P. Fredericq (Ghent, 1889–1906). Also worth consulting is A. Colville, "Documents sur les Flagellants," *Histoire Litteraire de la France* 37 (1938):390–411. Otherwise, I have used the sources cited in *The Black Death*, ed. Horrox and Aberth, *The Black Death*, and those listed earlier in the medical response to plague. Worthwhile regional studies on Jewish pogroms during the Black Death include: C. A. M. Costa de Beauregard, "Notes et Documents sur la Condition des Juifs en Savoie," *Memoires de l'Académie des Sciences, Belles-Lettres et Arts de Savoie* 2 (1854):81–126; A. Prudhomme, "Les Juifs en Dauphiné au XIV et XV Siècles," *Bulletin Mensuel de l'Académie Delphinale* 17 (1881):129ff.; A. Nordmann, "Documents Relatif a l'Histoire des Juifs à Geneve," *Revue des Études Juives* 83 (1927):63–73; A. Crémieux, "Les Juifs de Toulon au Moyen Age et le Massacre du 13 Avril 1348," *Revue des Études Juives* 89-90 (1930–31):33–72, 43–64; A. López de Meneses, "Una Consecuencia de la Peste Negra en Cataluña: El Pogrom de 1348," *Sefarad* 19 (1959):92–131, 321–64; and J. Shatzmiller, "Les Juifs de Provence pendant la Peste Noire," *Revue des Études Juives* 133 (1974):457–480.

On Flagellant movements and poisoning accusations prior to 1348, readers should consult: E. Wickersheimer, *Les Accusations d'Empoissonnement Portées pendant la Première Moitié du XIVe Siècle contre les Lépreux et les Juifs: Leurs Relations avec les Épidémies de Peste* (Anvers, 1927); J. Henderson, "The Flagellant Movement and Flagellant Confraternities in Central Italy, 1260–1400" in *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems for the Church Historian*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford, 1978); G. Dickson, "The Flagellants of 1260 and the Crusades," *Journal of Medieval History* 15 (1989):227–267; and D. Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), which briefly discusses the Jewish pogroms during the Black Death in his conclusion. Connections between Jewish doctors and poisoning are addressed in M. R. McVaugh, *Medicine Before the Plague: Practitioners and their Patients in the Crown of Aragon, 1285–1345* (Cambridge, 1993), and J. Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994). The prognostication of the Jewish astrologer, Levi ben Gerson, with regard to the Black Death is available in B. R. Goldstein and D. Pingree, *Levi ben Gerson's Prognostication for the Conjunction of 1345* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 80, 1990). Also worth consulting are some general works on medieval anti-Semitism, including: J. Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (New Haven, CT, 1943); S. W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the* Jews, 2nd ed., 18 vols (New York, 1952–83); J. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY 1982); G. I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990); idem, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990); K. R. Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); S. T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context. Volume 1: The Holocaust and Mass Death before the Modern Age* (New York, 1994); R. Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997); M. Toch, *Die Juden im mittelalterlichen Reich* (Munich, 1998); and A. Foa, *The Jews of Europe after the Black Death*, trans. A. Grover (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000).

On the connections between plague and medieval witchcraft, see R. Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300–1500* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976), which includes a valuable "Calendar of Witch Trials," and C. Ginzburg,

Ecstacies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbbath (New York, 1991). Trials quoted in this section are taken from: J. Hansen and J. Franck, *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter* (Bonn, 1901); J. B. Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1972); and *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, eds. A. C. Kors and E. Peters, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 2001). On plague-spreading conspiracies in the early modern period, see W. G. Naphy, *Plagues, Poisons, and Potions: Plague-Spreading Conspiracies in the Western Alps, c. 1530–1640* (Manchester and New York, 2002).

With regard to the social and economic impact of the Black Death, reassessments of the testimony of Giovanni Boccaccio in the introduction to the *Decameron* are taken up in S. K. Wray, "Boccaccio and the Doctors: Medicine and Compassion in the Face of the Plague," *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004):301–322, and T. Kircher, "Anxiety and Freedom in Boccaccio's History of the Plague of 1348," *Letteratura Italiana Antica* 3 (2002):319–357. The plague's social and economic impact in England is summarized in: A. R. Bridbury, *Economic Growth: England in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1962); J. Hatcher, *Plague, Population and the English Economy, 1348–-1530* (London, 1977); idem, "England in the Aftermath of the Black Death," *Past and Present* 144 (1994):3–35; J. M. W. Bean, "The Black Death: The Crisis and its Social and Economic Consequences" in *The Black Death*, ed. Williman; and J. Bolton, "'The World Upside Down': Plague as an Agent of Economic and Social Change" in *The Black Death in England*. Comparable summaries for evidence on the Continent is to be had in Biraben, *Les Hommes et la Peste*; W. Abel, *Agricultural Fluctuations in Europe from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, trans. O. Ordish (New York, 1980); and M. Le Mené, *La France du XIe au XVe Siècle: Population, Société, Économie* (Paris, 1996). The Black Death's impact on urban environments, primarily in Renaissance Italy, is discussed in: D. Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia: The Social History of an Italian Town, 1200-1430* (New Haven, CT, 1967); H. A. Miskimin, *The Economy of Early Renaissance Europe, 1300–1460* (New York, 1969); R. Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore, 1980); and A. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, 1986). Some useful regional studies include: W. Bowsky, "The Impact of the Black Death upon Sienese Government and Society," *Speculum* 39 (1964):1–34; D. Herlihy, "Population, Plague, and Social Change in Rural Pistoia, 1201–1430," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 18 (1965):225–244; R. W. Emery, "The Black Death of 1348 in Perpignan," *Speculum* 42 (1967):611–623; W. P. Blockmans, "The Social and Economic Effects of Plague in the Low Countries, 1349–1500," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 58 (1980):833–863; L. R. Poos, *A Rural Society after the Black Death: Essex, 1350–1525* (Cambridge, 1991); and S. K. Wray, "The Experience of the Black Death in Bologna as Revealed by the Notarial Records," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 14 (1993):44–64.

Debate over the enforcement of labor legislation in England is taken up in: B. H. Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statutes of Labourers during the First Decade after the Black Death, 1349–1359* (New York, 1908); L. R. Poos, "The Social Context of Statute of Labourers Enforcement," *Law and History Review* 1 (1983):27–52; C. Dyer, "The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revolt of 1381" in *The English Rising of 1381*, eds. R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston (New York, 1984); S. A. C. Penn and C. Dyer, "Wages and Earnings in Late Medieval England: Evidence from the Enforcement of the Labour Laws," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 43 (1990):356–76; E. B. Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords in Later Medieval England* (New York, 1996); C. Given-Wilson, "Service, Serfdom and English

Labour Legislation, 1350–1500" in *Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages*, eds. A. Curry and E. Matthew (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000); idem, "The Problem of Labour in the Context of English Government" in *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England*, eds. J. Bothwell, P. J. P. Goldberg, and W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000). For comparative studies and discussion of similar kinds of evidence on the Continent, readers should consult: C. Verlinden, "La Grande Peste de 1348 en Espagne," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 17 (1938):103–146; *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, eds. T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (Cambridge, 1985); P. Freedman, *The Origins of Peasant Servitude in Medieval Catalonia* (New York, 1991); J. H. Munro, "Urban Wage Structures in Late-Medieval England and the Low Countries: Work-Time and Seasonal Wages" in *Labour and Leisure in Historical Perspective, Thirteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, ed. I. Blanchard (Stuttgart, 1994); idem, "Wage-Stickiness, Monetary Changes, and Real Incomes in Late-Medieval England and the Low Countries, 1300–1500: Did Money Matter?" in *Research in Economic History*, eds. A. J Field, G. Clark, and W.A. Sundstrom, vol. 21 (Amsterdam, 2003); R. Braid, "'*Et Non Ultra*': Politiques Royals du Travail en Europe Occidentale au XIVe Siècle," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 161 (2003):437–491; and S. K. Cohn, Jr., "After the Black Death: Labour Legislation and Attitudes Towards Labour in Late-Medieval Western Europe," *The Economic History Review* 60 (2007): 457–485. The relationship of the Black Death to late medieval popular revolts in Europe is discussed in S. K. Cohn, Jr., *Lust for Liberty: The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200–1425* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); idem, "Popular Insurrection and the Black Death: A Comparative View" in *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages: An Exploration of Historical Themes*, eds. C. Dyer, P. Coss, and C. Wickham (Past and Present Supplement, 2, 2007). The article by J. W. Thompson, "The Aftermath of the Black Death and the Aftermath of the Great War," *American Journal of Sociology* 26 (1920–21):565-72, should now be considered a cultural artifact.

The effect of the Black Death on women, marriages, births, and family life is explored in the following works: D. Herlihy, "Deaths, Marriages, Births, and the Tuscan Economy (ca. 1300–1550)" in *Population Patterns in the Past*, ed. R. D. Lee (New York, 1977); R. S. Gottfried, *Epidemic Disease in Fifteenth Century England: The Medical Response and the Demographic Consequences* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1978); Z. Razi, *Life, Marriage, and Death in a Medieval Parish: Economy, Society, and Demography in Halesowen, 1270-1400* (Cambridge, 1980); M. -T. Lorcin, *Vivre et Mourir en Lyonnais à la Fin du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1981); R. M. Smith, "Hypothèses sur la Nuptialité en Angleterre aux XIIIe–XIVe Siècles," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisation* 38 (1983):102–136; D. Herlihy and C. Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven, CT, 1985); P. J. P. Goldberg, "Marriage, Migration, and Servanthood: The York Cause Paper Evidence" in *Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society, c. 1200–1500*, ed. idem (Stroud, Gloucestershire, 1992); idem, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire, c. 1300–1520* (Oxford, 1992); A. Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge, MA, 1994); M. E. Mate, *Daughters, Wives, and Widows after the Black Death: Women in Sussex, 1350–1535* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1998); M. Howell, *The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, and Gender in Cities of the Low Countries, 1300–1550* (Chicago, 1998); C. Klapisch-Zuber, "Plague and Family Life" in *The New Cambridge Medieval History. Volume 6: c.1300–c.1415*, ed. M. Jones (Cambridge, 2000); and S. K. Wray, "Women, Family, and

Inheritance in Bologna during the Black Death" in *Love, Marriage, and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages*, eds. I. Davis, M. Müller, and S. R. Jones (Turnhout, Belgium, 2003).

On the "Silver Lining" interpretation of the Black Death's overall impact on late medieval society, readers should consult F.M. Getz, "Black Death and the Silver Lining: Meaning, Continuity, and Revolutionary Change in Histories of Medieval Plague," *Journal of the History of Biology* 24 (1991):265–89. In the same vein are works cited earlier by Abel, Herlihy, and S. K. Cohn, Jr; Cohn also summarizes almost all his arguments with regard to the silver lining thesis in "Triumph over Plague: Culture and Memory after the Black Death" in *Care for the Here and the Hereafter: Memoria, Art and Ritual in the Middle Ages*, ed. T. van Bueren (Turnhout, Belgium, 2005). On the plague's impact on death and burial practices, see works cited in the next section on *Death*. Millard Meiss' interpretation of the artistic impact of the Black Death, originally explored in *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death: The Arts, Religion, and Society in the Mid-Fourteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 1951), has by now been considerably modified by the following: H. W. Van Os, "The Black Death and Sienese Painting: A Problem of Interpretation," *Art History* 4 (1981):237–249; J. Polzer, "Aspects of the Fourteenth-Century Iconography of Death and the Plague" in *The Black Death*, ed. Williman; and C. Boeckl, *Images of Plague and Pestilence: Iconography and Iconology* (Kirksville, MO, 2000).

Death

General works that explore death culture, primarily in literary and artistic terms, during the late Middle Ages include: J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought, and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Dawn of the Renaissance*, trans. F. Hopman (New York, 1924); T. S. R. Boase, *Death in the Middle Ages: Mortality, Judgment, and Remembrance* (London and New York, 1972); P. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. H. Weaver (Oxford, 1981); M. Vovelle, *La Mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos Jours* (Paris, 1983); *Dies Illa: Death in the Middle Ages. Proceedings of the 1983 Manchester Colloquium*, ed. J. H. M. Taylor (Liverpool, 1984); E. Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages. A Study of Medieval Iconography and its Sources*, trans. H. Bober (Princeton, NJ, 1986); J. Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th–18th Centuries*, trans. E. Nicholson (New York, 1990); E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–c.1580* (New Haven, CT., 1992); M. Aston, "Death" in *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England*, ed. R. Horrox (Cambridge, 1994); P. Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, NY, 1996); M. Lauwers, *La Mémoire des Ancêstres, le Souci des Morts: Morts, Rites et Société au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1997); C. Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550* (London and New York, 1997). More regional or specialized works, many based on testamentary evidence, include: J. Chiffoleau, *La Comptabilité de l'Au-Delà: Les Hommes, la Mort et la Religion dans la Région d'Avignon à la Fin du Moyen Âge* (Rome, 1980); M. -T. Lorcin, *Vivre et Mourir en Lyonnais à la Fin du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1981); S. T. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore and London, 1992); R. Dinn, "Death and Rebirth in Late Medieval Bury St. Edmunds" in *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100–1600*, ed. S. Bassett (London and New York, 1992); S. K. Cohn, Jr., *Death and Property in Siena: Strategies for the Afterlife* (Baltimore, 1988); idem, *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy* (Baltimore, 1992); idem, "The Place

of the Dead in Flanders and Tuscany: Towards a Comparative History of the Black Death" and C. Burgess, "'Longing to be Prayed for': Death and Commemoration in an English Parish in the Later Middle Ages" in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. B. Gordon and P. Marshall (Cambridge, 2000). Readers might also want to consult the 1993 unpublished Ph.D. dissertation at the Université Charles de Gaulle in Lille of J. -P. Deregnaucourt, "Autour de la Mort à Douai: Attitudes, Pratiques et Croyances, 1250–1500." On the significance of the resurrection, particularly as it relates to the medieval body, see C. W. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991), and idem, *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, 1995).

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La Danse Macabré des Charniers des Saints Innocents à Paris, ed. E. F. Chaney (Manchester, 1945); J. M. Clark, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Glasgow, 1950); H. Rosenfeld, *Der Mittelalterliche Totentanz* (Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgesichte, 3, 1954); E. Dubruck, *The Theme of Death in French Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London and Paris, 1964); J. Brossollet, "L'Influence de la Peste du Moyen Âge sur le Theme de la Danse Macabre," *Pagine di Storia della Medicina* 13 (1969):38–46; J. Saugnieux, *Les Danses Macabres de France et d'Espagne et leurs Prolongements Littéraires* (Paris, 1972); P. Vaillant, "La Danse Macabre de 1485 et les Fresques du Charnier des Innocents" in *La Mort au Moyen Âge* (Publications de la Société Savante d'Alsace et des Regions de l'Est, 25, 1975); P. Tristram, *Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature* (New York, 1976); J. Batany, "Les 'Danses Macabre': Une Image en Negatif du Fonctionnalisme Social" in *Dies Illa*; Mâle, *Religious Art in France*; I. le Masne de Chermont, "La Danse Macabre du Cimetière des Innocents" in *Les Saints-Innocents*, eds. M. Fleury and G. -M. Leproux (Paris, 1990); and D. A. Fein, "Guyot Marchant's *Danse Macabre*: The Relationship between Image and Text," *Mirator Elokuu* (August 2000):1–11.

The *Vado Mori* poems are discussed in E. P. Hammond, "Latin Texts of the Dance of Death," *Modern Philology* 8 (1910–11):399–410, and Rosenfeld, *Mittelalterliche Totentanz*. For poems that pose a dialogue between the body and soul, see R. W. Ackerman, "The Debate of the Body and the Soul and Parochial Christianity," *Speculum* 37 (1962):541–65. *A Disputacioun betwyx the Body and Wormes* and *A Dysputacion betwyx the Saule and the Body when it is Past Oute of the Body* are contained in Additional MS 37049 in the British Library, London. For discussions of the text and illustrations, see F. Wormald, "Some Popular Miniatures and their Rich Relations" in *Miscellanea pro Arte: Festschrift für Herman Schnitzler* (Dusseldorf, 1965), and M. M. Malvern, "An Earnest 'Monyscyon' and '[Th]inge Delectabyl' Realized Verbally and Visually in 'A Disputacion betwyx [th]e Body and Wormes,' a Middle English Poem Inspired by Tomb Art and Northern Spirituality," *Viator* 13 (1982):415–443.

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Shroud brasses are discussed in M. Norris, "Later Medieval Monumental Brasses: An Urban Funerary Industry and its Representation of Death" in *Death in Towns*. For English resurrection monuments, see the 1991 Ph.D. dissertation at Cambridge University by R. H. Bowdler, "Monuments of Decay and Resurrection: Themes of Mortality in 17th-Century English Church Monuments." Iconoclastic destruction of medieval art, including

tomb sculpture, in England during the Reformation is chronicled in J. Phillips, *The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535–1660* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973), and in Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*.

Epitaph

Quotations from Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* and from Huizinga's *Waning of the Middle Ages* are from the Spearing and Hopman translations, already cited earlier. Readers should also consult the works by Kaminsky and Gerhard cited previously in the *Prologue* section.

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