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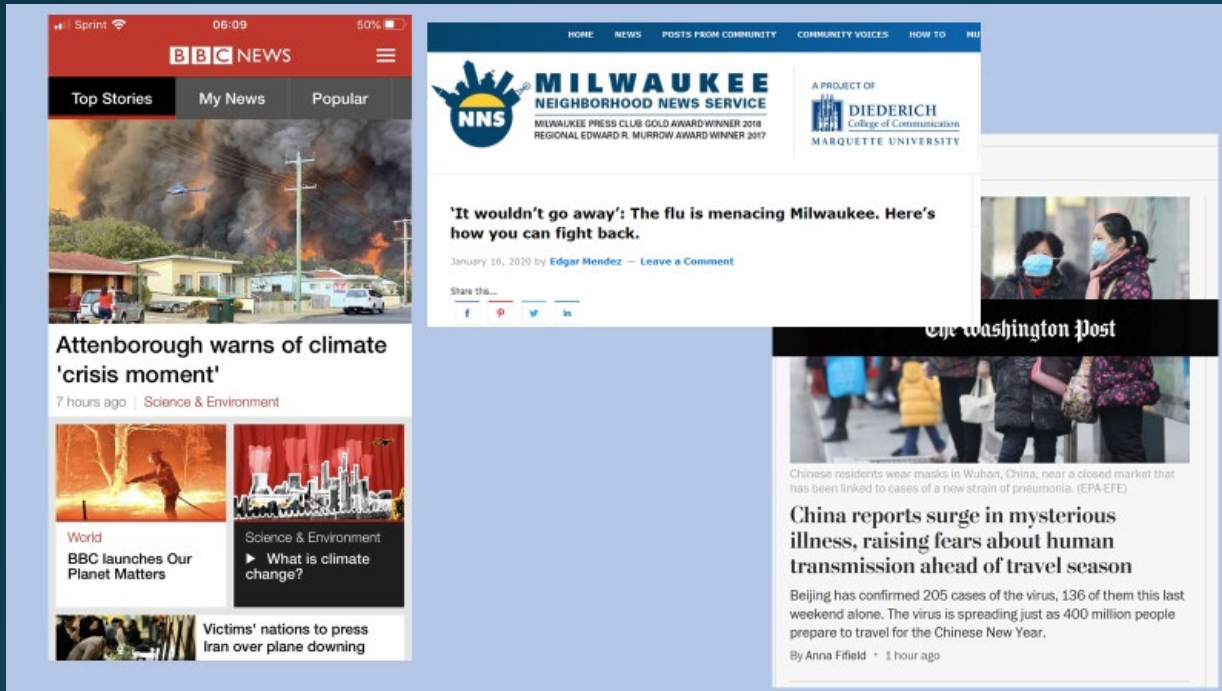
Lessons from Medieval Pandemics



The burial of plague victims in Tournai – the sole contemporary image of the Black Death in Europe, 1350s

from Gilles li Muisit, *Chronicon Maius*, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, MS 13076-77, f. 24v

HIST 4210: The Black Death



Slide from the first day of the spring 2020 semester

“Officials have confirmed 218 cases, and although they’re centered on Wuhan, infections have been reported from Beijing in the north to Guangdong in the south. Three people have died, the most recent on Saturday, and eight people are in critical condition. Authorities do not know what the virus is, beyond saying that it is a type known as a coronavirus .”

(Washington Post, 1/20/2020)

Opinions

Could America's pandemic response be any more medieval?



Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) during a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing on Tuesday. (Kevin Dietsch/AP)



Opinion by **Dana Milbank**
Columnist

June 30, 2020 at 5:09 p.m. CDT

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Academic rigor, journalistic flair

Arts + Culture Economy + Business Education Environment + Energy Ethics + Religion Health + Medicine Politics + Society **Science**

Coronavirus and the Black Death: spread of misinformation and xenophobia shows we haven't learned from our past

March 5, 2020 9:37am EST



A 1411 depiction of a man and woman suffering with bubonic plague, or "Black Death". Everett Historical/Shutterstock

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Although some media outlets have begun referring to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus as a "modern plague", the threat of COVID-19 remains negligible compared with historic outbreaks of plague. The latest World Health

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History Today

The Black Death: The Greatest Catastrophe Ever | History Today

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The Black Death - Historic UK
historic-uk.com



中世の天然痘 ポストカード | Zaz...
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Salud de la población mejoró tra...
rpp.pe



A 15th-century Bible depicts a couple suffering from the blisters of the bubonic plague. The same bacterium that ravaged medieval Europe as the "black death" occasionally re-emerges.

Corbis

The plague is making headlines again.

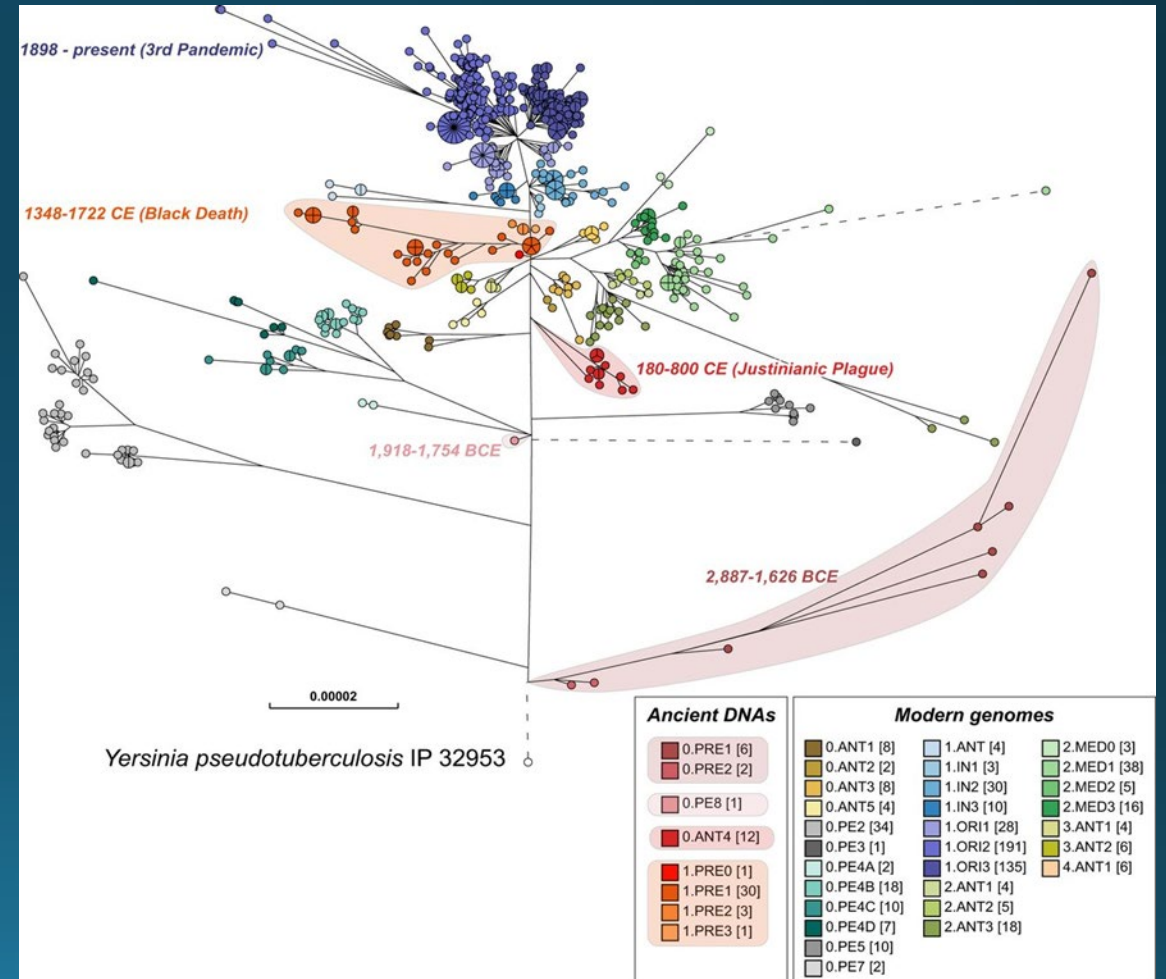
Three lessons from medieval pandemics

- Our understanding of the past and its legacies for the present changes as we ask new questions and bring in evidence from different fields.
- Pandemics do not have clear start and finishing points
- Pandemics intensify changes in culture and society that are *already* occurring (~~collapseology~~).

Three Plague Pandemics: *Yersinia Pestis*

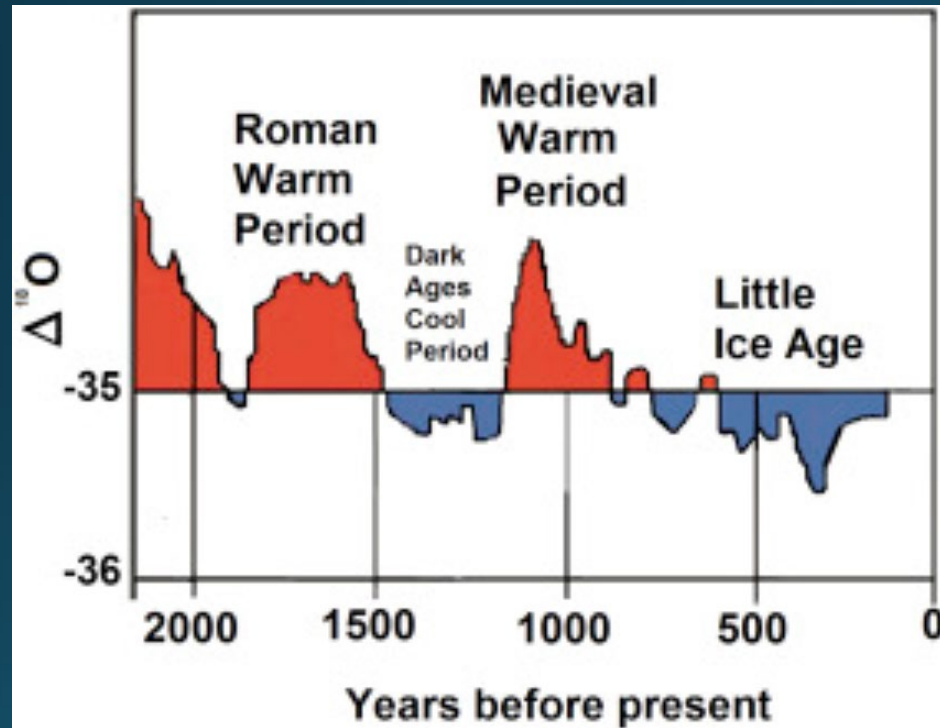
- Justinianic Plague (mid-6th-9th centuries)
- Black Death (14th century)
- Modern Plague Pandemic (late 19th -mid 20th centuries)

Maximum-likelihood tree of modern and ancient genomes of *Y. pestis*, published by Zhemin Zhou, et al. *Genome Research* 30 (2020): 138-152



Paleoclimatology: temperatures from proxy measures

Greenland ice core evidence from D.J. Easterbrook, Evidence-Based Climate Science (2nd ed. 2016)



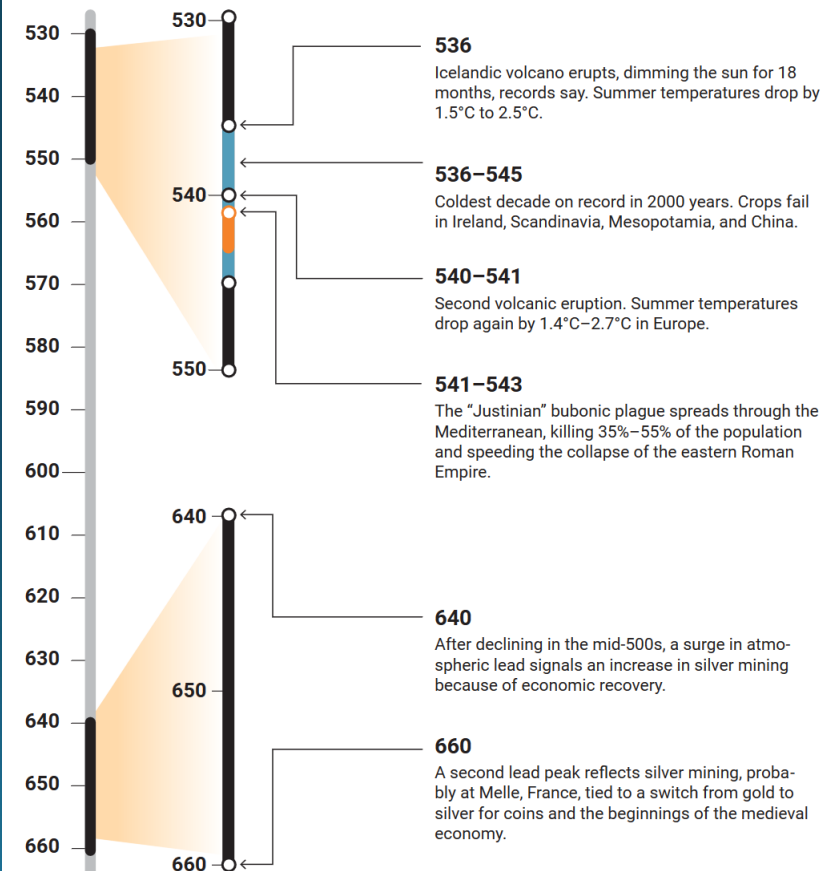
- Roman Climate Optimum, c. 200 BCE-150 CE
- Roman Transitional, 150-450: Antonine Plague, Plague of Cyprian
- Late Antique Little Ice Age, 450-700: Justinianic Plague
- Medieval Climate Optimum, 700-1280s
- Little Ice Age, 1300-1750: Black Death

Justinianic Plague and the environment

- 536—massive volcanic eruption, perhaps in Iceland
 - Dendrochronology and speleothems: minimal growth
 - Ice cores confirm particles (right, doi:10.1126/science.aawo632)
 - "... during this year [536] a most dreadful portent took place. For the sun gave forth its light without brightness ... and it seemed exceedingly like the sun in eclipse, for the beams it shed were not clear." (Procopius)
- 541 plague in Egypt spreads around Mediterranean on ships
- 542 plague in Constantinople (capital Byzantine Empire)
- 6th century increased horde burials in Scandinavia and British Isles; Ragnarök as cultural memory of event?

Darkest hours and then a dawn

A high-resolution ice core record combined with historical texts chronicles the impact of natural disasters on European society.



(GRAPHIC) A. CUADRA/SCIENCE; (DATA) C. P. LOVELUCK ET AL., ANTIQUITY 2018; M. SIGL ET AL., NATURE 2015; M. MCCORMICK

“Collapsology” and the Justinianic Plague

- Ended the Roman Empire/Antiquity
- Enabled the Germanic Migrations/Barbarian Invasions
 - “Germs are far deadlier than Germans (Harper, *The Fate of Rome*, 2017, p. 18).”
- Enabled the establishment of Christianity (hospices)
- Origins of European society

Basilica at Philippi—construction abandoned due to plague?





Collapsology and the Black Death

- Completely changed “life as we know it” (cf. Siena’s cathedral, left)
- Destroyed the “feudal” “caste” system and ended serfdom
- Ushered in the Renaissance (secularism)
- Laid the groundwork for the Protestant Reformation
- Fostered the Great Divergence (rise European nation states and capitalism/colonialism)

Mongols and the origins of the Black Death

Traditional

- Biological Warfare in Kaffa
 - Mongol siege
 - Genoese merchants

New Research

- Mid-13th c emergence of plague in central Asia (scroll, c. 1280 showing Kublai Khan hunting)
- Global impact
- Climate change: shift NA), 1300-1700



Internal Concerns and Climate

- 1290s growing recession
 - 1315-1322 Agrarian Crisis
 - 1315-1317 Great Famine
 - 1330s famine throughout Mediterranean
 - 1327-1453 Hundred Years War and other internal wars
-
- R: Apocalypse from a *Biblia Pauperum*, produced in Erfurt, c. 1315



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 & aplius eadim mortalitas delect. Ex quo pda est tanta caxena
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 quot dia & ptares res & possessiones herites omi dmas & dntoz
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 tempserit. & poans ad distribucoo deffunctorz curretes qui laboray
 solebant oao & lacano & ceas flagiays vacare inapiebant. & sic pan
 peres & dulos omi dnti dntes & dntes. Vnde ita est qd

vide supra fol. 56. b.

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 finis

pestis homin
 parte delectat


pestis

Black Death in Europe

- Three plague "seasons:" 1348-49, 1349-50, 1350-51
- Second Wave: 1360-1363
- Mortality:
 - 1/3 in first wave
 - 1/2 by end of 14th century
- R: Chronicle pf Rochester Priory (BL Cotton MS Faustina BV), 1314-1350

Francesco Traini, *Triumph of Death*, Campo Santo, Pisa, post 1348?



A detailed fresco titled 'Triumph of Death' by Francesco Traini, located in the Campo Santo in Pisa. The scene is set in a landscape with a large, dark, rocky structure on the left, possibly a tomb or a cave. In the foreground, a skeleton lies on a wooden bier. A group of figures, including a woman in a red hat and a man in a blue tunic, are gathered around a horse. The horse is being led by a man in a white tunic and a red hat. The background shows a group of people on horseback, some of whom are carrying a body. The overall color palette is dominated by earthy tones, with a prominent use of red and brown. The style is characteristic of the Italian Gothic period, with a focus on narrative and emotional expression.

Francesco Traini, Triumph of
Death, Pisa, Campo Santo, post
1348-1330s

Flagellant confraternities
in Belgium and Florence (left—Giovanni
Villani, *Nuova Cronica*)



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ose venerunt a uilla bugen
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penitentie contolere et deo gra
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tencia sua et contritione sua

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quem finem tendant. et quia a
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nolo registrare qd' probare no
valerem. De moto facti qd' vi
di et audiui incendio postea face
re mentionem.

**De captione et destructione iu
deorum.**



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morabantur. Causa autem cap
tionis fuit. quoniam vehemens
suspectio erat super eos q' ipi p
pulum christianum maliciose per
venenum destruere nitabantur

et q' uenenum in piteis. in fon
tibus in aquis secrete proiecerant
prout poterant et hoc fecerunt
in pluribus locis sicut fama et
rumor eois laborabat. Erant
autem inter eos quidam de secta
eor' astrologi subtilis et periti qui
secundum cursum stellarum pre
noscebant eis mortalitatem

Burning of Jews
accused of well
poisoning, from Gilles li
Muisit, f. 12v

Omne Bonum ("fake news")

BL Royal 6 E VI, c. 1375



The History of Pandemics & Impact on Society – A Series

Upcoming...

Session 2: Global Bioethics & the Pandemic in Dialogue

with **Dr. Alexandre Martins** on Wednesday, Nov. 11th from 12 – 1 p.m. CT

Session 3: COVID-19 and Economic Inequality in the U.S.

with **Dr. Amber Wichowsky** on Wednesday, Nov. 18th from 12 – 1 p.m. CT

Session 4: Social & Political Consequences of Global Disease – What Could be the Long-Term Effects of COVID-19?

with **Dr. Risa Brooks** on Monday, Nov. 23rd from 12 – 1 p.m. CT

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