

Year 8 History: Cause and Effect in Medieval Europe

Concept Map – Term 3 Research Task

Create a concept map to identify and explain the factors that contributed to the catastrophe of the Black Death in 1348-9 and to summarise its impact on medieval Europe.

Below are some ideas to help you get started. Use these brief explanations to guide your research, both in books and on the internet. Make notes in your own words and draw or find pictures and symbols to decorate your concept map.

Origin • Causes • Contributing Factors • Exacerbating Factors

The most direct and obvious cause of the disease was Yersinia Pestis, the bacterium that lived on the Black Rat. Find out more about this bacterium and the three different kinds of plague.



Trade Routes from East to West

The factors that contributed to the spreading of the plague in Europe included the trade routes from the East that allowed the bacteria to be carried westwards from China, where it is believed that the disease was first seen. The power of the Mongols and their conquests had opened up this trade route; the bacterium that caused the plague was one of the travellers.

Poor hygiene in Europe made it easier for the disease to take hold there. One could say that the living conditions exacerbated the situation or made it worse.

The poverty of a large proportion of the population and the hunger the peasants commonly experienced, meant that the plague struck a population that was already vulnerable and therefore less resistant to the plague.

Another critical factor was the lack of medical knowledge in Christian Europe. The Roman Catholic Church did not allow the dissection of bodies, so knowledge of anatomy was limited. In addition to this, the approach taken by Christian doctors was generally superstitious, unsystematic and ignorant, in contrast to the more scientific approach of the Islamic doctors, who were scientifically and medically more advanced at this stage.



People tended to jump to conclusions about the cause of the plague. Many assumed that the plague was a punishment from God, while some concluded that bad air (a “miasma”) was the cause. Many blamed the Jewish people and persecuted them mercilessly. Ignorance and prejudice stopped people from reacting to the plague in a reasonable and effective way.

Effects • Results • Impacts • Outcomes • Consequences

Once the plague had struck, the most obvious and immediate effect was the devastating loss of life. It is believed that about 1/3 of the population in Europe died.

In the short term, this led to a period of panic and chaos, with some people choosing to live only for the present, others secluding themselves and many trying to invent and sell remedies that achieved nothing or conceivably made matters worse.

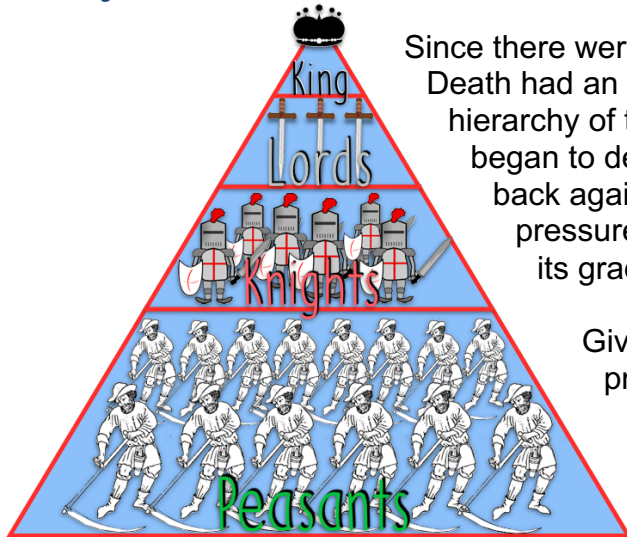
In the towns, even the inadequate attempts at hygiene broke down. The streets became even more filthy.



The Flagellants

The Brotherhood of Flagellants, fanatics who whipped themselves to pacify God's anger and to show their remorse for their sins, came into being. They walked from town to town and flogged themselves in each town marketplace, whipping up (so to speak) mass hysteria.

Prejudice against minorities, always stronger in times of anxiety and panic, took the form of persecution of the Jewish people, who were accused of poisoning wells and causing the plague. The consequent attacks on the Jews were brutal and murderous and many Jewish communities were forced to flee.



A Simple Diagram of the Feudal System

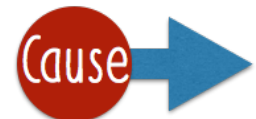
Since there were fewer labourers to harvest the crops, the Black Death had an impact on the agricultural system and undermined the hierarchy of the feudal system. Many bonded labourers (serfs) began to demand wages. Although the powerful lords fought back against these claims, the population changes placed pressure on the accepted social structure and contributed to its gradual breakdown.

Given that the Roman Catholic Church was powerless to prevent the plague and protect sufferers, people's faith in its doctrine was shaken. The Church remained powerful and dominant, but there was now a question mark over the assertions made by popes and priests.

Key Terms

Some key phrases for describing causes:

- The filthy living conditions contributed to...
- The Church's stance influenced...
- This exacerbated the situation/crisis... (made it worse)
- Ignorance of the cause of the plague led many people to...
- This situation produced...
- Fear and prejudice gave rise to...



Some key phrases for describing effects:

- A consequence of depopulation was that...
- As a result of the reduced number of labourers, ...
- This had an impact on...
- One effect of medical ignorance was that...
- The outcome of the persecution of the Jewish people was that...



Some Useful Links on this Topic:

- BBC Bite Size History: The Black Death from www.bbc.co.uk
- The Plague in Sydney, 1900: A Picture Gallery
- The Black Death and Early Public Health Measures from www.sciencemuseum.org.uk
- Death Defined: Black Death – Causes and Symptoms from <http://historymedren.about.com/>
- How the Black Death Worked from www.howstuffworks.com
- A General Account, including Boccaccio's Description of the Plague's Symptoms from <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/>
- Global Impacts of the Black Death from www.abouteducation.com
- Decoding the Black Death through Archaeology from www.sciencedaily.com