

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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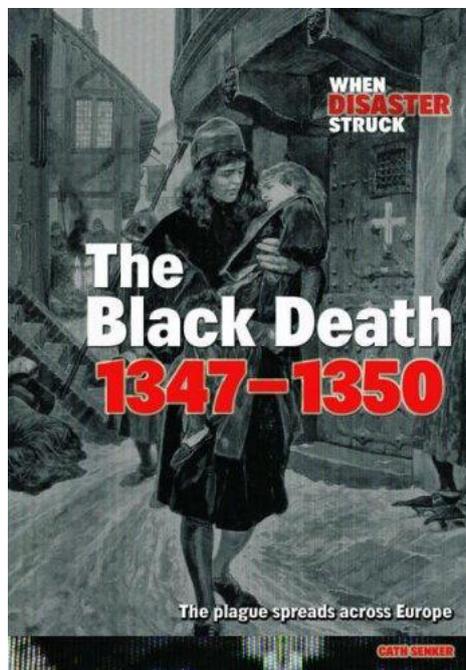
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Senker, C. (2006). *The Black Death 1347-1350 : the plague across Europe..* Oxford : Raintree.





BLOODLETTING AND STINKS

Medieval Europeans tried all kinds of things to prevent the plague spreading. People rang church bells, wore lucky charms, or bathed in urine.

ADVICE FROM THE POPE

Pope Clement VI advised people to stay at home and avoid the cold. He told them to converse little, except with “those whose breath is sweet”.

European doctors had no idea how the plague spread. Many believed it was caused by poisonous air. They told people to fill their houses with pleasant-smelling plants and flowers. Some doctors burned sweet-smelling herbs to clear the air.

One doctor, John Colle, thought sniffing bad smells would protect people from catching the plague. Some people spent hours crouching over a filthy public **latrine**, breathing in the disgusting smells. Others put “stinks” (dead animals) in their homes.

Some physicians **lanced** people’s buboes. This was very painful. Others washed their patients in vinegar or rose water. They told them to avoid strong-tasting foods. Many **physicians** thought **bloodletting** would help. Others gave out herbal remedies.

A Swedish bishop, Bengt Knutsson, said people should avoid bathing. He thought that washing opened the pores in the body and allowed the disease to enter. None of these practices were helpful.

Some physicians suggested eating a good diet. This idea was sensible because good food strengthens the body against disease.

A few people did survive bubonic plague. After days of terrible pain, their buboes burst, and pus poured out. They gradually recovered.

Most people realized that contact with someone with the plague, or even with his clothing, was dangerous. Some were even scared of a sufferer looking at them!



There were reports of people leaving their loved ones to die painful, lonely deaths. They were fearful of catching the plague themselves. In Avignon in France, a musician called Louis Heyligen complained, "Everyone who is healthy looks only after himself."

Others helped the sick, although at risk to their own lives. One story tells of Simonia, a kind woman in Genoa. She nursed her friend Aminigina until she died, ignoring the danger to herself. Some monks in Avignon cared for plague victims. They fed them, washed their bodies, and eased the pain of their buboes. Most of the monks soon died of plague themselves.



A doctor is using bloodletting to try to cure the plague. He cuts the patient's arm and allows some blood to flow into a bowl.