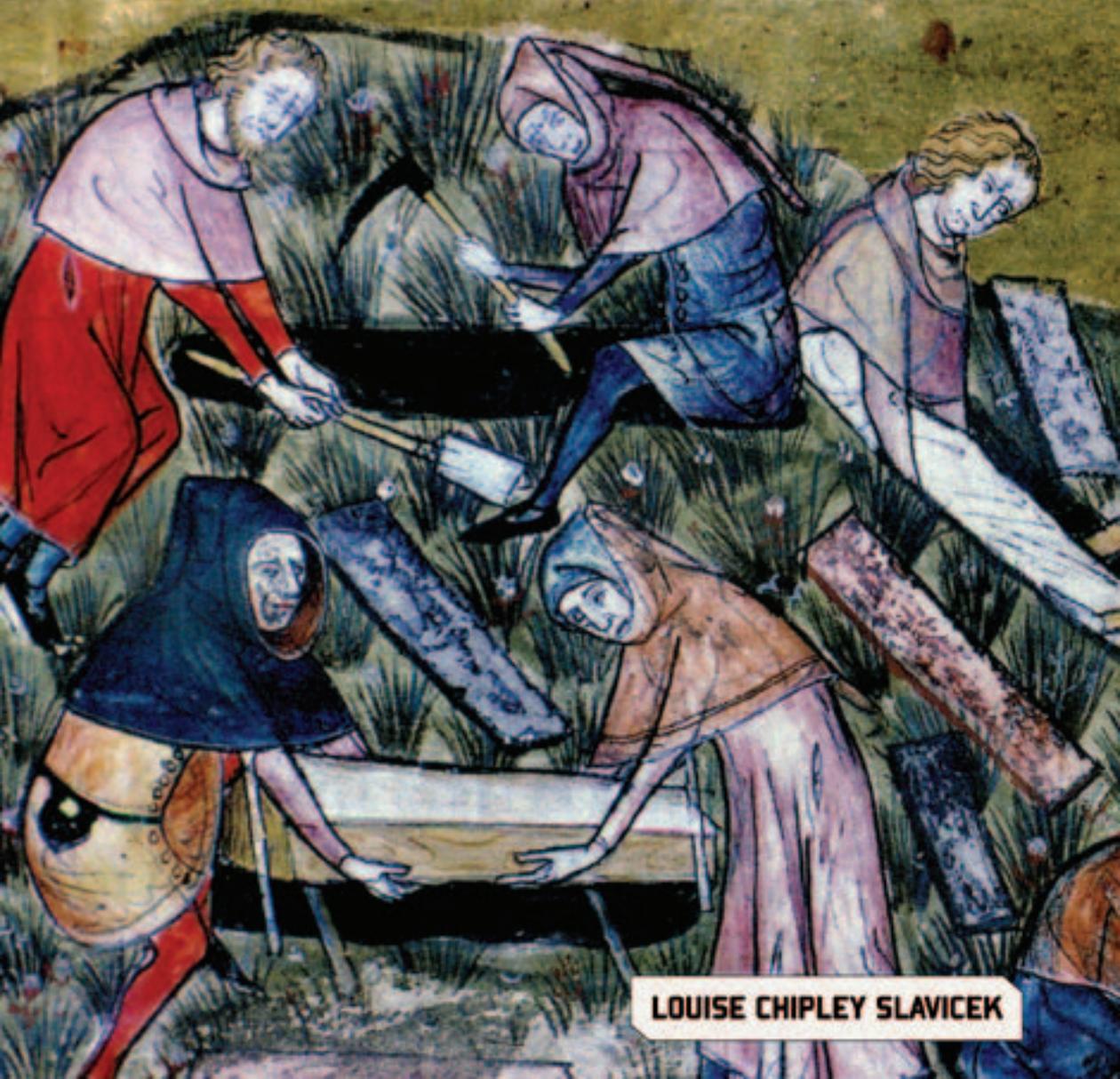


**GREAT HISTORIC DISASTERS**

# THE BLACK DEATH



**LOUISE CHIPLEY SLAVICEK**

## The Black Death and Education

**T**he Black Death's impact on educational institutions, particularly those of higher learning, was significant. In the pandemic's wake, a number of new colleges and universities were founded throughout Europe to help train replacements for the thousands of Catholic clerics who succumbed to the plague. England's two great universities, Cambridge and Oxford, gained a total of six new colleges during the two decades following the Black Death, while major new universities were founded in Florence, Prague, Vienna, and several other cities on the European continent during the same period.

The Black Death's most significant effect on medieval education in Europe may have been within the realm of language, however. The death of scores of primary and secondary school instructors along with many university professors appears to have greatly accelerated a change in the status of national languages in Europe that had begun decades earlier. For many centuries, Latin, the tongue of the ancient Romans, had been the language of scholarship and high culture throughout most of Europe. By the time the Black Death struck the continent, a gradual shift toward using the vernacular (a country or region's common native language such as English or German) had already begun among scholars and university-trained professionals, including lawyers and physicians. But most historians agree that the use of the vernacular by Europe's educated elite was given an enormous boost by the Great Mortality and the severe depletion in the ranks of those capable of teaching Latin to the rising generation that the pandemic created.