**Plagues and Contagion in Pre-modern Europe**

History 4004/7004

Spring 2016

MWF 9:00 – 9:50 / Strickland 217

Dr. K. Wilson Bowers Office hours: MW 10:30-11:30, T 9-11

213 Read Hall and by appointment

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**Course description:**

This course is an examination of both the medical and social contexts of disease and contagion as related to a variety of diseases: leprosy, plague, smallpox and syphilis. The focus is on just a few of the most feared and noted diseases afflicting Europeans (and others around the world) so that we may situate the concepts of health, disease, contagion and medicine within a broader context of social norms and attitudes in the premodern era.

**Required Texts**

John Aberth, *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350*

Arrizabalaga, Henderson and French, *The Great Pox: The French Disease in Renaissance Europe*

Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*

Course readings on Blackboard (Bb)

**Assignments**

Summary/response papers (4) 10% each

Analytical papers (2) 10% each

Research paper 20%

Oral presentation of research 5%

Participation 15%

**Grade Scale:**

A+ 97-100 C+ 76-79

A 93-96 C 73-75

A- 90-92 C- 70-72

B+ 86-89 D+ 66-69

B- 80-82 D 63-65

B 83-85 D- 60-62

F 59 and below

**Assignments for Honors students and graduate students:**

In place of 1 summary/response, a book review/analysis

Additional group discussion meetings with professor (to be scheduled)

Expanded research paper – expanded presentation of research

**Accessibility Statement**

If you anticipate barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need to make arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please let me know as soon as possible.

If disability related accommodations are necessary (for example, a note taker, extended time on exams, captioning), please register with the Disability Center (<http://disabilitycenter.missouri.edu> ), S5 Memorial Union, 573- 882-4696, and then notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. For other MU resources for persons with disabilities, click on "Disability Resources" on the MU homepage.

**Behavior Expectations**

As a member of this class you are expected to attend regularly, to arrive on time, and to participate during class. While 1-4 absences during the semester are acceptable, **repeated unexcused absences will be reflected in your final grade**. **In addition, continual late arrival or inattention during class (texting, doing other homework, chatting with others) will lower your final grade**.

**You are expected to abide by the Code of Academic Integrity**. The university’s official statement on academic integrity is as follows: “Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards breaches of the academic integrity rules as extremely serious matters. Sanctions for such a breach may include academic sanctions from the instructor, including failing the course for any violation, to disciplinary sanctions ranging from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, collaboration, or any other form of cheating, consult the course instructor.” We will discuss paraphrasing and plagiarism in further detail in class, but if you have any questions please do come talk to me.

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**Class Schedule**

**Week 1- Contexts: Health, Disease, Epidemics**

**Friday 1/22**:

Rosenberg, “Explaining epidemics” and “Framing disease”

Hays, “Historians and Epidemics: Simple Questions, Complex Answers”

**Questions**:

\* What is meant by the “social construction” or “framing” of disease?

\* What does Rosenberg mean by “configuration” vs “contamination” as

explanatory systems?

\* What is the difference between “illness” and “disease”?

\* Why are the answers for Hays’ “simple questions” so complex?

**Week 2 Retrospective Diagnosis**

**Monday 1/25:**

Cunningham, Andrew. “Identifying Disease in the Past: Cutting Through the

Gordian Knot” *Asclepio* 54 (2002): 13-34.

Mitchell, Piers D. “Retrospective diagnosis and the use of historical texts for

investigating disease in the past”

**Questions**:

\* What are some of the issues/problems with retrospective diagnosis?

\* How can historians use other kinds of evidence in diagnosing diseases

from the past?

**Wednesday 1/27**:

Diamond “Lethal Gift of Livestock”

**Questions**:

\* How old are some disease and why are some newer?

\* How do different diseases originate and spread?

\* How do they change over time?

**Friday 1/29**:

Primary sources (online):

(1) Hippocrates, “Epidemics” – Read Book I: Section I, First Constitution ; Fourteen

Cases – read the first two about Philiscus and Silenus

<http://classics.mit.edu/Hippocrates/epidemics.html>

**Questions**:

\* What does Hippocrates focus on when describing epidemics?

\* How do his descriptions reflect a humoral understanding of disease?

(2) Hippocrates, “Nature of Man”- pdf on Blackboard

**Questions**:

\* What causes disease?

\* What is the best way to treat disease?

Secondary source:

Roy Porter, “Antiquity”

**Questions**:

\* What is the humoral theory and how does it relate to epidemics?

**Week 3 Athens and Plague of Justinian**

**Monday 2/1**:

Thucydides (read passages excerpted in Longrigg article)

**Questions**:

\* How does Thucydides describe and “frame” this disease?

\* How does his description reflect humoral theory?

Secondary sources:

Longrigg, “Epidemic, ideas and classical Athenian society”

**Questions**:

\* What is Longrigg’s main argument/purpose in this article?

\* What was the experience of pestilence in Athens?

Cunha, Burke A. “The cause of the plague of Athens: plague, typhoid, typhus,

smallpox, or measles?”

Kazanjian, Powell. “Ebola in Antiquity?” *Clinical Infectious Diseases* (2015)

**Questions**:

\* What types of scholars have analyzed this outbreak of disease?

\* What have been their conclusions and why do they differ?

**Wednesday 2/3 and Friday 2/5 [initial research topics due Friday]:**

Primary source:

Procopius

[<http://www.academia.dk/MedHist/Sygdomme/Pest/prokopios.php> ]

Secondary sources:

Lester K. Little, “Life and Afterlife of the First Plague Pandemic”

Stathakopoulos, “Crime and Punishment: The Plague in the Bzyantine Empire,

541-749”

Maddicott, “Plague in Seventh-Century England”

**Questions:**

\* What do we know about the waves of plague in the Byzantine Empire

and what do we not know (or have clear records of)?

\* What sources are available for this pandemic?

\* What makes them either reliable at face value or in need of

interpretation?

**Week 4 Medieval leprosy – social/religious response**

**Monday 2/8:**

Katherine Park, “Medicine and society in medieval Europe, 500-1500”

**Questions:**

\* How did medieval views of health/disease/the body continue earlier

ancient ideas and in what ways did they differ?

**Wednesday 2/10 and Friday 2/12**

Primary sources:

Leviticus 13 <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/0313.htm>

Mass of Separation <http://www2.kenyon.edu/projects/margin/lepmos.htm>

Secondary sources:

Nirenberg, “Shepards’ Crusade and Lepers’ Plot”

Barber, “Lepers, Jews and Moslems”

Rawcliffe, “Life in a Medieval Leper House”

**Questions:**

\* How did ancient and medieval society view leprosy?

\* What conflicts emerged?

\* How did the response to leprosy change over time?

\* Compare Barber and Niremberg in how they analyze the Lepers’ Plot

\* Compare Barber and Niremberg with Rawcliffe for views of lepers

**Week 5 Medieval leprosy – medical response**

**Monday 2/15:**

Primary source: Jordan of Turre, “On the Symptoms of Lepers”

Secondary source:

Luke DeMaitre, “*Iudicium leprosorum*: Medical judgement” esp. pp. 34-59

**Questions:**

\* When and how was the diagnosis of leprosy medicalized?

\* Why the shift from leprosy as menace to credibility question for patients (and

examiners)? How does this relate to “medicalization”?

**Wednesday 2/17:**

DeMaitre,

**Questions:** “Une maladie contagieuse et héréditaire”

\* What is meant by a disease being both contagious and hereditary?

\* What were premodern views of the transmission of leprosy?

\* When did views of leprosy as contagious disease develop?

**Friday 2/19:**

DeMaitre, “Prognosis, Prevention, and Treatment”

**Questions:**

\* Could leprosy be cured? How/under what conditions?

\* Could it be treated? To what end?

\* How was it treated?

**Week 6 Black Death – what disease?**

**Monday 2/22:**

Little, “Historians in Lab Coats”

Monica Green, “Taking ‘Pandemic’ Seriously: Making the Black Death Global”

<http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/medieval_globe/1/>

Zimmer, “In Ancient DNA, Evidence of Plague Much Earlier Than Previously

Known” (on Bb)

Ziegler, “Keeping Bronze Age Yersinia pestis in Perspective” (on Bb)

**Questions:**

\* How has science helped answer questions about the Black Death?

\* What disputes remain within scientific community?

\* How do historians and scientists work together on these questions?

\* What conclusions can be drawn from the new data discussed by Zimmer and

Ziegler? What questions still remain?

**Wednesday 2/24**

Cohn, “The Historian and the Laboratory: The Black Death Disease”

Bolton, “Looking for Yersinia Pestis: Historians and the Black Death”

**Questions:**

\* What is the current state of debates on what caused Black Death?

\* What evidence does each side rely upon?

\* Why does this question matter?

**Friday 2/26:**

Green, “Diagnosis of a “Plague” Image: A Digital Cautionary Tale”

Mengel, “A Plague on Bohemia? Mapping the Black Death”

**Questions:**

\* How and why do images and maps become misread?

\* Why do these misinterpretations matter?

**Week 7 Plague – social/religious response**

**Monday 2/29 - religion**

Primary sources: Aberth, pp.94-97, 117-159

Secondary sources:

Stearns, “New Directions in the Study of Religious Responses to the Black

Death”

Laura Smoller, “Of Earthquakes, Hail, Frogs, and Geography: Plague and the

Investigation of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages”

Christine Boeckl, “Visual Sources of Plague Iconography”

**Questions:**

\* How have studies of the religious response to plague changed in recent

years?

\* How did Europeans relate plague to the religious idea of apocalypse?

\* What were the religious responses?

\* What iconic images/saints became associated with plague? Why?

**Wednesday 3/2** – society

Primary sources: Aberth, pp.67-84

Secondary sources:

Pullan, “Plague and perceptions of the poor in early modern Italy”

Defoe, pp. 1-80

**Questions:**

\* What is Pullan’s argument on how the poor were perceived?

**Friday 3/4 [revised topic/working questions and initial bibliography due]**

Defoe, pp. 81-160

**Questions: see handout**

**Week 8 Plague - medical response**

**Monday 3/7:**

Defoe pp. 161-238

**Questions: see handout**

**Wednesday 3/9:**

Primary sources: Aberth, pp. 37-66

Secondary sources:

John Henderson, “The Black Death in Florence: medical and communal

responses”

**Questions:**

\* What were the medical views of plague during the 14th C Black Death?

\* How did these ideas fit into existing philosophies of disease?

\* Was there a difference in medical and lay (popular or non-medical) beliefs?

**Friday 3/11:**

Patrick Wallis, “Plagues, Morality and the Place of Medicine in Early Modern

England”

Crawshaw, “Syrups and Secrets: Treating the Plague”

**Questions:**

\* Was the question of whether to flee plague a moral one? For whom?

\* Was there an ethical obligation for doctors to stay and treat patients?

\* How was plague used by some medical practitioners to gain legitimacy?

\* How was plague treated in the later

**Week 9 Plague and public health (governmental response)**

**Monday 3/14**

Primary sources: Aberth, pp. 87-93

Secondary sources:

Carmichael, “Plague Legislation in the Italian Renaissance”

Kristy Wilson Bowers, “Balancing Individual and Communal Needs: Plague and

Public Health in Early Modern Seville”

**Questions:**

**\*** What did people believe about plague spreading and why?

\* What were their responses to these fears?

\* How did plague change public perception of risk and the role of government?

**Wednesday 3/16 [Defoe paper due ]**

Greenberg, “Plague, the Printing Press, and Public Health in Seventeenth-

Century London”

**Questions:**

\* When and why was the Bill of Mortality developed?

\* What do they tell us about life and death in early modern London?

\* What questions are left unanswered?

**Friday 3/18 No class meeting**

**Week 10 Contagion and pollution**

**Monday 3/21**

Primary sources:

Fracastoro “Contagion”

Secondary sources:

Nutton, “The Seeds of Disease: An explanation of contagion and Infection from

the Greeks to the Renaissance” *Medical History* 27 (1983): 1-34;

Kinzelbach, “Infection, Contagion, and Public Health in Late

Medieval German Imperial Towns”

**Questions:**

\* How did premodern thinkers conceive of contagion?

\* How did these perceptions change during and after the Black Death?

**Wednesday 3/23**

Naphy *Plagues, Poisons and Potions: Plague Spreading Conspiracies in the Western*

*Alps, 1530-1640* (ch. 1)

**Questions:**

\* What was Geneva’s approach to handling plague epidemics in the 16th C?

\* Who was accused and why?

\* What was believed to be their motivation(s)?

**Friday 3/25**

Naphy, *Plagues, Poisons and Potions: Plague Spreading Conspiracies in the Western*

*Alps, 1530-1640* (ch. 3)

**Questions:**

\* How were later accusations and trials of 1540s different from those of 1530?

**Week 11 Spring Break**

**Week 12 Other epidemics – English sweat, dancing mania**

**Monday 4/4**

Primary sources: John Caius

Secondary sources:

Marks and Beatty, “The Sweating Sickness”

Flood, “England, the ‘sweating sickness’ and the continent”

Heyman, Simons and Cochez, “Were the Sweating Sickness and the Picardy

Sweat Caused by Hantaviruses?”

**Questions:**

\* Who was affected by the sweat? How were they treated?

\* Were these diseases perceived differently from plague or leprosy?

\* What is current state of question on “cause” of the sweat?

**Wednesday 4/6 and Friday 4/8**

Waller, “A forgotten plague: making sense of dancing mania”

Schullian, “The Dancing Pilgrims at Muelebeek”

Marks and Beatty “The Dancing Mania”

Donaldson, Cavanaugh and Rankin, “The Dancing Plague: a public health conundrum”

**Questions:**

\* What was the dancing mania and who did it affect?

\* Was this a medical or psychological epidemic?

**Week 13 Syphilis – contagion and sin**

**Monday 4/11**

Primary sources:

*The Great Pox*, ch. 1-3

**Questions:**

\* How did Europeans respond to the “new” disease of syphilis?

\* Why was it associated with sin?

\* Were there class and/or gender differentials for how the disease was

viewed?

**Wednesday 4/13**

Cristian Berco, “The Great Pox, Symptoms, and Social Bodies in Early Modern Spain”

**Questions:**

\* How did people react to / attempt to hide visible symptoms of syphilis?

**Friday 4/15**

Eamon, “Cannibalism and Contagion: Framing Syphilis in Counter-Reformation

Italy”

**Questions:**

\* What was believed to be the link between cannibalism and syphilis?

\* How did this relate to other medical and religious beliefs of the time?

**Week 14 Syphilis - medical approaches**

**Monday 4/18**

Primary sources: Ulrich von Hutten, *De Morbo Gallico* ch. 1-12 <https://openlibrary.org/books/OL24474642M/De_morbo_gallico>

*The Great Pox*, ch. 4, 6

Stein, “Treating the Pox”

**Questions:**

\* How was syphilis viewed medically?

\* What treatments were believed useful and why?

**Wednesday 4/20 [Primary source analysis due]**

Great Pox ch. 7-8

**Friday 4/22**

Great Pox, ch. 9-10

**Week 15 Syphilis – new or old disease?**

**Monday 4/25**

Brothwell, “North American Treponematosis against the Bigger World Picture”

Powell and Cook, “Treponematosis: Inquiries into the Nature of a Protean

Disease”

**Questions:**

\* What are the main arguments for and against the Columbian origin of

introducing syphilis to Europe?

\* What kinds of evidence are being used by both sides?

**Wednesday 4/27**

Rothschild, “History of Syphilis”

Anteric, “Which Theory for the Origins of Syphilis?”

Harper, “Origin and Antiquity of Syphilis”

**Questions:**

\* What is the debate on the origins of syphilis?

\* Why does this matter?

\* What kinds of evidence are used on each side?

**Friday 4/29**

Begin student presentations

**Week 16 Presentations**

Monday 5/2 Student oral presentations of research

Wednesday 5/4 Student oral presentations of research