

A Global History of Plague

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Yersin and his Hongkongese Plague Hut, 1894; 14th C Mors Spreading Plague along the Loire; Late Antique Yersina Victim, Bavaria.

Description

This course considers the global history of *Yersinia pestis*, the zoonotic bacterium (a microorganism causing disease in people and other animals) that causes plague. It adopts an interdisciplinary approach to both tease out macro- and micro-histories of the three pandemics associated with the pathogen –the Justinianic Plague, Black Death, and Third Pandemic– and also to pin down transitions in plague’s past – biological, cultural, and ecological– fundamental for understanding the bacterium’s inconstant pandemicity. Students will travel considerable time and space –the sixth century to the present, Alexandria to Buenos Aires– and draw on diverse sources –like Byzantine hagiography, the New York Times, and plague-victim teeth– to engage scholarly debates, unravel plague’s complexity, and assess plague’s impact.

Readings, Assignments, Dates and Grading

Students will read weekly a number of articles and book chapters. Readings will be available on Blackboard. No textbooks are to be purchased. **Per week** readings will total about **100-150 pages**. Do not be intimidated by the number of readings assigned -- some are one or two pages in length and many are five or six. On many occasions (for example, meetings on 24 January, 31 January and 7 February) the readings will be divided up among students (according to the indentations made in the assigned readings). Supplementary readings are not required for class discussion. They are meant to assist students who select one of the weekly topics for their annotated bibliography, presentation and essay.

The course is deeply interdisciplinary and the assigned readings will stem from a number of fields of study relevant to the investigation of disease in the past, including palaeogenomics (the study of pathogen genomes using ancient DNA), history, and palaeoclimatology (the study of pre-instrumental climate using ‘natural archives’ like trees).

Students are expected to read, and be prepared to discuss, the assigned readings in weekly seminar meetings. This **participation in class** is worth **30 percent** of the final grade. We will have 11 class discussions throughout the term, on topics I through XII (see below). Students can earn 3 percent towards their participation mark per class if they are present and contribute often to the discussion. One can, as such, earn 33 percent. On **7 February**, students will submit a **500-word analysis** of a **primary source** for the Justinianic Plague, worth **10 percent**. Other student work will revolve around the preparation and completion of a **4,000-word research essay**, valued at **30 percent**. The term paper is **due** the last day of class, **25 April** (via email before 11:59PM). On **21 March** (via email before 11:59PM), students will submit a **1,000-word annotated bibliography**, a first step toward their term paper, worth **20 percent**. They will also give a **presentation**, worth **10 percent**, on their project in class on **4 April**. Term-paper projects will be developed in consultation with the professor before February 8.

Weekly Participation 30 percent / Primary Source Analysis, February 7, 10 percent / Annotated Bibliography, March 21, 20 percent / Presentation, April 4, 10 percent / Research Essay, April 25, 30 percent.

Primary Source Analysis

Late antique accounts of plague are likely the most foreign sort of source material students will engage in this class. A number of sixth-century accounts of the Justinianic Plague will be pre-selected. Students will

select one and compose a 1000-word report on the source. Students must summarize in relatively few words the contents of the source, the views of the author, and how we, as moderns, might use the source to understand the early history of plague. You may consider what the source you select to study does not report or compare the source you select to the others provided -- are they in agreement about the causes, scope, effects, and responses? You may read the source you select against the knowledge of plague ecology and etiology you have already acquired in the class (remembering, of course, that premoderns could not have known about the bacterium, hosts or vectors, does the source talk about 'rat falls' (epizootics) or possible environmental shocks to enzootic foci?). Ask: why does the author write what they write and why does the author leave out what they leave out? These sources, like all medieval sources, were written for a reason, often one that served the author. Do not cite scholarship, please focus on the contents of the source. Do not include long quotations (quotes that span more than one line of text). *Nota bene*, writing style counts. This assignment is due February 7.

Annotated Bibliography

The annotated bibliography is the first step towards the research essay. It is due March 21 via email before 11:59. **Students must select a single topic for their annotated bibliography, presentation, and research paper** (...shifting plague endemicity, the Justinianic Plague's diagnosis, controlling plague in the Americas, climate as a driver of plague pandemicity, evolutions in pneumonic plague's epidemiology...). The annotated bibliography comprises five short 200-word reports on individual pieces of scholarship (academic articles, books, or chapters in collected volumes) relevant to that topic. Entries should be interrelated: arguments, sources and methods used by different authors should be observed and contrasted. Note a single-authored book cannot be divided up into chapters and treated as multiple entries in your annotated bibliography, though individual essays in an edited collection of papers should be treated separately. Blogs, encyclopedia entries, and newspaper articles, as well as primary sources, do not qualify as proper entries for the annotated bibliography, nor do 'popular' historical books. If the article or book is not written by a professional historian or a scientist working in a field relevant to your chosen topic it cannot be considered for your annotated bibliography. Indeed, the first line of your annotated bibliography should detail the author's background (e.g., Christer Bruun is a professor of imperial Roman history at the University of Toronto who has published multiple pieces on the Antonine Plague using epigraphic and written sources). Assigned and supplementary readings may be used for the annotated bibliography.

NB: History Majors can use HIST 404 to satisfy a Western or non-Western degree requirement. To use HIST 404 as a non-Western course your annotated bibliography must concern a non-Western region. To use HIST 404 as a Western course your annotated bibliography must concern a Western region.

Presentation

Presentations take place on 4 April. They should address a) why you chose your topic, b) what your argument/thesis is and how it fits with the scholarship on your topic, c) how you will support/argue your thesis, d) the primary sources you will use, and e) the problems you have faced (and overcame) or are facing in preparing your paper and making your argument. Students are expected to ask their peers questions. How many students are in the class will determine the duration of presentations. PowerPoint is preferred but not required. Presentation should build on the annotated bibliography and take into consideration the instructor's comments on the annotated bibliography.

Research Paper

The research paper is an original 4,000-word research essay. It is due April 25 via email before 11:59PM. Once the annotated bibliography is returned students will set out to develop a research essay with an original argument on the same topic. It is expected that students in some way use, consult or cite 15 pieces of scholarship (eight articles, books, or chapters in collected volumes, in addition to the seven consulted for the annotated bibliography) relevant to their topic for their research essay. Research essays may not be historiographical or concern published scholarship alone. In all cases, at least 5 primary sources should be employed in order to construct and support a research essay thesis. In assembling the scholarship for your annotated bibliography and designing your research essay, students are strongly encouraged to consult with the instructor. Students must discuss potential topics for their research essay on or before February 7. Email consultation is also possible before this date.

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Some Annotated Bibliography and Research Essay Guidelines

- All text should be in Times New Roman and size 12.
- Each of the 5 annotated bibliography entries should be assigned a word count indicating how close to 200 words each entry is. Entries must be within the range of 175-225 words.
- Annotated bibliographic entries should not include proper citations to other works, footnotes or endnotes, etc., but should reference other works included in the annotated bibliography: 'While Slavin argues..., Horden and Cohn point out...' 'Slavin employs manorial accounts, but Horden and Cohn are forced to rely on narrative sources.'
- Citation formats for Annotated Bibliography and Research Paper bibliography:
 - Article in Academic Journal
 - Slavin, P., "The Great Bovine Pestilence and its Economic and Environmental Consequences in England and Wales, 1318-50" *Economic History Review* 65 (2012), pp. 1239-1266.
 - Chapter in Edited Book
 - Horden, P., "Mediterranean Plague in the Age of Justinian" in M. Mass ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 134-160.
 - Book
 - Cohn, S., *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in the Early Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 2002).
 - 4. Primary Sources:
 - 4.1 A Standalone book/volume:
 - Procopius, *The Secret History*, trans. G. Williamson and P. Sarris (London, 2007).
 - Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, eds. A. Thompson and N. Taylor (London, 2006).
 - 4.2 A source within a collection:
 - "The Report of the Paris Medical Faculty, October 1348," trans. R. Horrox, *The Black Death* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 158-167.
 - Note: If an article/chapter/book has two authors use 'and': Hufthammer, A. and Walløe, L. ...; if an article/chapter/book has three or more authors cite the first name and then 'et al.': Haensche, S. et al,...; the same rules apply to editors of edited books. Note all first names are shorted to an initial, no middle names are included and 'pp.' for pages is employed for articles and chapters.
- Note: for footnotes the initial of the author's first name appears first, A. Hufthammer and L. Walløe
- Note: Primary sources are not to be included in the annotated bibliography

Footnoting Guidelines for Research Essay

- 1. Footnotes, not endnotes.
- 2. Numerical, not Roman numerals.
- 3. Can contain material that further explains or clarifies a point made in the main text, but should not contain a short essay or material not relevant to the main text.
- 4. Should not contain extensive quotes.
- 5. May refer the reader to multiple pieces of scholarship. If this is the case, successive articles, chapters or books must be separated by a semicolon;
- 6. Should not reference all page numbers but the specific page you are referring to.
- 7. When you cite something a second time, use only the author's last name, abbreviate the title, and refer to the page number: Cohn, "End of a Paradigm," p. 710; Cohn, *Black Death Transformed*, p. 68; Procopius, *Secret History*, XVIII, p. 74; "Paris Medical Faculty," p. 167.
- 8. When referring to one page use 'p.', but when referring to multiple pages use 'pp.': Cohn, "End of a Paradigm," pp. 705-8; Cohn, *Black Death Transformed*, p. 67; Slavin, "Great Bovine Pestilence," pp. 1260-61, 1263; Procopius, *Secret History*, XVIII, p. 75.
- 9. Re-read these tips and follow them closely!

Topics

I Introduction

II Plague Now: Global Niches and Epidemics (Indian and Madagascan)

III Late Antique Mass Death: The Justinianic Plague's Origins, Contours, and Effects

IV Late Medieval Mass Death: The Black Death's Origins, Contours and Effects

V Retrospective Diagnosis and Premodern Plague

VI The Bioarchaeology and Palaeogenomics of Plague

VII Pre-Laboratory Plague Thinking and Control

VIII The Plague of Marseilles and Plague's Early Modern Persistence and Disappearance

IX Third Pandemic: Himalayan Plague Meets the Laboratory

X Third Pandemic: Plague Globalizes Again

XI Plague Gets Pneumonic: The Last Great Mortality, Manchuria and Siberia, 1910-1911

XII The Future of *Yersinia pestis*