**HC 231: Epidemics and Epistemologies**

Professor Melissa Graboyes, MPH, Ph.D.

University of Oregon—Fall 2017

Office Hours: Mondays 1.30-3.30, 370 PLC

Tuesdays 1.30-3.30 pm, MAC Court Lobby

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**Course Description**

This course examines the Black Death of 1347 (bubonic plague, *Yersinia pestis*), which killed an estimated 1/3 of Europe’s population. In addition to reconstructing scientific and medical knowledge during the medieval period, we will explore how disease is related to epistemology (how people understood and explained disease), nosology (how diseases were classified) and cosmology (how disease, ill health or general misfortune was explained within a society). Through this devastating case of disease, we will learn about how the public understood and explained disease, how states responded, and how epidemics changed the role of government in protecting the public’s health. We will also take note of the larger changes occurring politically, socially and culturally during the Middle Ages (such as urbanization, mercantilism, and increased global contact) that laid the groundwork for new disease ecosystems.

Our class is divided into roughly three sections. We are beginning with a classic text, William McNeill’s, *Plagues and Peoples.* This book was written 40 years ago, and we will read it for content (to understand his arguments about global history and the un-heralded role of disease), we will read it critically (to consider if his arguments were sound, and have stood the test of time), and we will read it to better understand historiography (how historians’ assessment has changed over time). We will also consider some of McNeill’s claims next to primary source materials he drew upon and more recent historical and scientific scholarship. A careful, thoughtful and critical reading of McNeill should help us set the tone for the quarter.

During the second part of the course, we will focus on Florence, Italy. Ann Carmichael’s work, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence,* will allow us to delve deeply into the primary source materials available to historians, and discuss how historians of disease can work on multiple scales and registers. While focusing on Europe, we will also consider artwork as sources for medical history, working with Cynthia Boeckl’s book, *Images of Plague and Pestilence*.

In the final part of the course, we will turn to sub-Saharan Africa and review very recent research about whether or not the Black Death crossed the Sahara Desert. Many non-historians are involved in this debate, drawing on new techniques such as genetic sequencing of *Yersinia pestis* and aDNA (ancient DNA) analysis of bones throughout Europe. We will engage with a set of provocative questions that until recently have been largely ignored by historians: was plague in Africa in the 1300s? Why do we know so little about plague in Africa? What kinds of sources and methods can help fill in these gaping holes?

During the quarter, we will learn a lot about disease, but the goal is not to learn about plague per se, but to foster skills of critical reading and analysis of sources, and to work toward clear writing and strong argumentation skills. This class requires high level participation and great commitment on the part of students. Students are expected to arrive at class having read carefully and thought critically about the texts.

**Learning Outcomes**

* Analyze primary sources related to the history of medicine, including: government reports and ordinances, medical texts, art work, pieces of literature, letters and diaries, maps, and early forms of epidemiological data
* Demonstrate knowledge of the sources used in the history of science and medicine, and the methods used by historians when analyzing primary and secondary sources
* Demonstrate the ability to analyze and integrate primary and secondary sources into a multi-paged essay that includes a coherent thesis and argument and a logical progression of thought expressed in clear, convincing, prose.
* Identify, understand and explain biomedical conceptions of plague
* Identify multiple systems for explaining disease and ill health in the medieval period, and explain differences with the current biomedical system
* Identify examples of indigenous knowledge, folk knowledge, and practices that were used to avert plague infections
* Identify and explain chronologically important events in the history of plague in medieval Europe
* Identify and explain historiographical changes in how plague has been studied, specifically in regards to: plague in sub-Saharan Africa; the spread of plague from the East into Europe; Islamic responses to plague
* Explain the different sources and methods used by various disciplines that are involved in reconstructing the history of plague, including but not limited to: medical history, environmental history, bio-archeology, genetics
* Explain the relationship between history of medicine and new scientific techniques such as aDNA anlaysis and genome sequencing to discuss how the history of plague is being reexamined with a multi-disciplinary approach.

**Required Texts (to be purchased)**

William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples.* Anchor Books: New York. 1998 [original 1976].

Anne Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. 2011.

Christine M. Boeckl, *Images of Plague and Pestilence: Iconography and Iconology*. Truman State University Press: Kirksville, MI. 2000.

**Secondary Sources: Available on Canvas, to be printed and brought to the relevant class**

* Andrew Cunningham, “Transforming Plague: The Laboratory and the Identity of Infectious Disease” in Andrew Cunningham and Perry Williams (eds.), *The Laboratory Revolution in Medicine* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 224-230.
* Lester Little, “Historians in Lab Coats” *Past and Present,* 213 (2011): 267-290.
* Monica Green, “Thinking Historically about Stem: Genetics as a Historicist Discipline” *Perspectives on History.*
* George Sussman, “Was the Black Death in India and China?” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* 3 (2011): 319-355.
* Simon Neerinckx, Eric Bertherat, Herwig Leirs, “Human Plague Occurrences in Africa: an Overview from 1877 to 2008,” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 104(2010): 97-103.
* Monica Green, “Editor’s Introduction” in Special Issue *Medieval Globe,* “Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death.” 2014: 9-26.
* Monica Green, “Taking ‘Pandemic’ Seriously: Making the Black Death Global” in Special Issue *Medieval Globe,* “Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death.” 2014: 9-26.
* Sharon DeWitte, “The Anthropology of Plague: Insights from Bioarcheological Analyses of Epidemic Cemeteries,” in Special Issue *Medieval Globe,* “Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death.” 2014: 97-124.
* Nukhet Varlik, “New Science and Old Sources: Why the Ottoman Experience of Plague Matters,” in Special Issue *Medieval Globe,* “Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death.” 2014: 193-228.
* Fabian Crespo and Matthew Lawrenz, “Heterogeneous Immunological Landscapes and Medieval Plague: An Invitation to a New Dialogue between Historians and Immunologists,” in Special Issue *Medieval Globe,* “Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death.” 2014: 9-26.
* Monica Green, Kathleen Walker-Meikle, Wolfgang Muller, “Diagnosis of a ‘Plague’ Image: a Digital Cautionary Tale,” in Special Issue *Medieval Globe,* “Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death.” 2014: 9-26.
* Kenneth Kiple, ed., *The Cambridge World History of Disease* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1993“Black Death,” 612-616.
* WHO, “Plague Factsheet”
* Gordon Cook, Alimuddin Zumla, eds., *Manson’s Tropical Diseases* (Saunders, Elsevier) 2009*, “*Plague”

**Primary Sources: Available on Canvas, to be printed and brought to the relevant class**

* Boccaccio, *The Decameron,* “Introduction”
* Pistoia “Ordinances for Sanitation in a Time of Mortality”
* The Black Death in Messina
* Gabriele de’ Mussi, Piacenza
* Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, “The Florentine Chronicle”
* Angolo di Tura, Siena
* Morelli, et al., “*Yersinia pestis* Genome Sequencing Identifies Patterns of Global Phylogenetic Diversity,” *Nature Genetics* 42 (December 2010): 1140-1145.
* Schuenemann, et al., “Targeted Enrichment of Ancient Pathogens Yielding the pPCP1 plasmid of *Yersinia pestis* from victims of the Black Death,” *PNAS* 108 (September 2011).
* Haensch, et al., “Distinct Clones of *Yersinia Pestis* Caused the Black Death,” PLoS Pathogens 10 (October 2010): 1-8.
* Wagner et al., “*Yersinia pestis* and the Plague of Justinian, 541-541 AD: a Genomic Analysis,” *Lancet Infectious Disease* 14 (2014): 319-326.
* Green, et al. “*Yersinia pestis* and the three plague pandemics,” *Lancet Infectious Disease* 14 (2014): 918.
* Wagner, et al., “Author’s Reply” *Lancet Infectious Disease* 14 (2014): 919.

**Assignments and Grades**

Students will be assessed in the following manner:

Class Participation 15%

Group Presentation 10%

Essay 1 25%

Essay 2 25%

Essay 3 25%

TOTAL 100%

*Participation (15%)*

Class participation will be based on a student being present and on time, with readings completed, notes taken, ready to discuss materials, and actively participating in class. Merely being present assures you an attendance grade of “C-.”

*Presentation (10%)*

All students will be required to make a group presentation (12-15 minutes, groups of 3-4) on a topic we’ve covered in class. Presentation expectations will be discussed with students in the first week, and a sheet of expectations will be posted on Canvas.

*Essays (75%)*

Each student will be required to write three essays during the quarter. The first two essays will be 3-4 pages in length. The final essay will be 5-6 pages long, and will require students to integrate primary and secondary sources to make a unique historical argument addressing one of the class’s themes. A complete draft outline and thesis of the paper will be due class 20, and we will spend time doing self and peer editing activities. The final essay will be due 8 am, Friday, December 8, via Canvas.

Prompts and detailed instructions will be given for each essay in advance, the assignments will be discussed in class, and assignment descriptions will be posted on Canvas. For each essay assignment, I require students to bring a hard copy of the paper’s outline to class; without seeing an outline the highest grade a student can earn is an 80%.

**Extra Credit**

There will be at least two opportunities for extra credit during the quarter, by way of attending relevant public lectures and events on campus. I have noted two of these events on our syllabus, and if I become aware of other events, I will announce them during class time and post relevant information on Canvas. Attendance at one of these events will add .05% to your grade for the class. Attendance at both events will add 1% to your final grade.

**Attendance**

To each class, you should bring the texts we are reading in addition to your notes on that text. You are allowed two absences without penalty. Each additional absence will result in a deduction of a third of letter grade from your final grade. More than five absences will result in a failing grade.

**Technology**

I do not permit the use of laptop computers or other electronic devices (i.e., recording equipment) in the classroom without specific permission from me. Please silence your cell phone or turn it off before you come in. If you need to be reachable during class, or you are physically unable to write and must take notes by laptop, come and see me.

**Plagiarism**

Although you will spend time reading and commenting upon each other’s work in class, your written words should be *your own*. If you are uncertain about how to avoid plagiarism, please read the information available on the library website: <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/>. We will discuss plagiarism in class, but a general rule is: when in doubt, cite it. I will be report all cases of plagiarism to the Dean’s Office.

**Accessibility/Disability**

If you require accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible, and I will need a letter of accommodation from the Accessible Education Center. They can be contacted at [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu) or 541-346-1155.

**Part One—Plague and History**

What is Plague? What is the history of medicine, and what are the sources, methods, and ways of knowing in this field? Is the plague that we know today (2016) the same plague of the Middle Ages? In these first few weeks of class we will be reading some works meant to create a common ground for discussion about the scientific basis of plague, how the disease is rooted in the natural environment, and what we know about the Black Death and its global spread and larger effects.

**[1] Tuesday, September 26**

Introductions. What do we know? What do we *want* to know?

**[2]** **Thursday, September 28**

Carmichael, 1-9

Boeckl, 7-18

Manson’s Tropical Disease, 1119-1125

Cambridge World History of Disease, 612-616

McNeill, Preface, Intro, ch 1. (pg. 1-53)

**[3] Tuesday, October 3**

McNeill, ch 2. (pg. 54-93)

**[4] Thursday, October 5**

McNeill, ch 3, ch. 4 (pg. 94-207)

Guest Speaker: Dr. Tamara Giles-Vernick (Institut Pasteur)

**\*\*\*EXTRA CREDIT\*\*\***

**Friday, October 6,** 12-1.20. Crater Lake North Room, EMU146

Dr. Tamara Giles-Vernick (Institut Pasteur),

“A Pre-History of Zoonotic Outbreaks in Southeastern Cameroon”

**[5] Tuesday, October 10**

Sussman, “Was the Black Death in India and China?” 319-355

Varlick, “New Science Old Sources,” 193-227

**[6] Thursday, October 12**

No Reading—Catch up day

**DUE: Essay 1 Outline**

**DUE: Group 1 Presentation**

**Part Two: Plague in Italy**

We will narrow our focus to plague in one country (Italy) and even more carefully, within one town (Florence). By delving deep into the effects of plague in one place, we will engage with a variety of primary source archival materials. We will also engage with the vast imagery of the plague, examining works of art and literature.

**[7] Tuesday, October 17**

Carmichael, Intro, Ch 1, Ch 2 (pg. 1-58)

Choose 1 primary sources to read: Angolo Siena; Mussi Piacenza; Messina

**DUE: Essay 1**

**[8] Thursday, October 19**

Carmichael, ch 3. (pg. 59-89)

Primary—Pistoia Health Ordinance

Primary—Marchionne di Coppo

**DUE: Group 2 Presentation**

**[9] Tuesday, October 24**

Carmichael, ch 4, ch 5, conclusion (pg. 90-132)

**[10] Thursday, October** **26**

Boeckl, xi-1; 1-6; ch 2 (pg 33-44)

Primary—Boccaccio *Decameron* introduction

**DUE: Group 3 Presentation**

**[11] Tuesday, October 31**

Boeckl, ch 3 (pg 45-68)

Primary Source Images—view images

**[12] Thursday, November 2**

Boeckl, ch 7, ch 8 (137-160)

Green, “Plague Image Cautionary Tale” (307-314)

**DUE: Essay 2 Outline**

**DUE: Group 4 Presentation**

**[13] Tuesday, November 7**

No Reading—Catch up day

**DUE: Essay 2**

\*\*\*SPECIAL EVENT\*\*\*

Wednesday, November 8, 12-1.20. Knight Library Browsing Room

Dr. Nora Kenworthy (University of Washington)

Mistreated: The political aftermath of HIV treatment expansion in Lesotho

**Part Three: Plague in Africa?**

We’ll be reading primary sources of new technologies and approaches in the sciences, and consider whether we truly have a “global” history of the Black Death. We will discuss how research questions/projects are created, why so little research has been done in sub-Saharan Africa, and evaluate historiographical changes about how plague in Africa is written about.

**[14] Thursday, November 9**

Cunningham, “Transforming Plague”

Green, 1 page

Little, “Historians in Lab Coats”

**DUE:** **Group 5 Presentation**

**[15] Tuesday, November 14**

Green, “Introduction” (9-26)

Green, “Taking Pandemic Seriously” (27-62)

DeWitte, “Anthropology of Plague” (97-124)

**[16] Thursday, November 16**

NO CLASS—Professor Graboyes Away

**[17] Tuesday, November 21**

Crespo, “Historians and Immunologists” (229-258)

Wagner, “Yersinia Pestis and the Justinian Plague” (319-326)

Green, “Response to Wagner”

Wagner, “Response to Green”

**[18] Thursday, November 23**

NO CLASS—Thanksgiving

**[19] Tuesday, November 28**

Choose 1 primary sources to read: “Primary Sci—Distinct Clones”; “Primary Sci—Targeted Enrichment”; “Primary Sci—Yersinia Pestis Genome”

**[20] Thursday, November 30**

**DUE:** Final essay outline and thesis (paper copy)

**\*\*DUE to Canvas: Final papers must be uploaded by 8 am, Friday, December 8\*\***