The Effect Of The Plague In Medieval Europe

INTRODUCTION

The Black Death (Yersinia pestis) was the most catastrophic event in the middle ages and it had several very important impacts on European society. While the Black Death had a huge impact in Europe killing 30-70% of its population, it also had several long-term consequences. The plague exposed the flaws in medieval medicine, prompting new approaches to dealing with diseases and understanding the importance of hygiene. The tremendous loss of life also resulted in a rebalancing of power in medieval societies, giving peasants the ability to find the weak spots in the feudal system and take advantage of it. There are 3 main types of plague, bubonic (short for buboes) Septicaemic effected the circulatory system (blood flow) and the pneumonic plague effected the lungs.

Short Term Effects

In the short term, the plague had a devastating impact on society in medieval Europe, due to the huge numbers of people killed. The impact that was caused in villages, cities and even countries is that they all rely on each other from food from farmers, to income from city areas. But with this deadly disease everything just went to pot. Everyone just started to die without explanation or knowledge of what it was. Another flaw was that they had a 2-6-day incubation period, meaning it could be spread with a single cough for up to 6 days.

The plague originated on the golf of Mongolia soon making its way across trading routes to Italy, starting in Mongolia making its way from the silk road then along common sea travelling routes. Reaching Italy in 1347 and taking roughly three years to concur most of Europe. 30% of the world’s population was killed by the plague just in Europe alone. It took roughly 10-14 days to kill the infected citizen. People responded with all sorts of techniques from cutting open infected wounds, filling bird beaks with herbs and flowers, to even using leaches to move clotted blood around the body. In the short term, the plague was a deadly, scary and sad experience for all European society, resulting in a huge loss of life as well as the witness of a weakened society.

Changes in Medicine

Over the longer term, the failure of medicine to respond to the Black Death resulted in important developments in the field of medieval medicine.

There were many different approaches when trying to combat medically towards the plague. Such as surgically removing limbs, filling bird beaks with herbal mixes and flowers, doctors even referred to urine (Not always making the correct decision.)

After the black death there were a few bonuses such as profit raises to peasants, New laws referring to hygiene and doctors slowly learning what caused the plague as well more logical techniques on how to deal with it.

A fair few years later doctors were inventing pain killers and most importantly antibiotics this started curing diseases as well as the plague, the plague is still around today! But thankfully isn't as contagious or dangerous thanks to antibiotics.

While the Black Death resulted in rapid deaths across Europe, it did help to expose some of the problems with medieval beliefs about medicine and allowed for more accurate ways of thinking about medicine and sanitation to emerge.

Decline of Feudalism

Because of the large numbers of people killed, the Black Death weakened the feudal system. By shifting power away from landowners and facilitating movement between the previously well-structured hierarchy, the feudal 'pyramid'.

This occurred because there were a thousand plus more peasants then kings or nobilities, strength came in numbers, everyone had a chance to catch the plague but when 1/3 of the world's population died, its guaranteed that people higher up in the hierarchy would've been killed as well not just peasants.

With all classes experiencing the plague some lucky peasants found ways to move up classes to fill for others who had died. This sometimes could weaken the feudal system. In saying this I think with all the moving of classes around the feudal system lead to weak points and targeted areas. When peasants went into other roles even higher roles like nobility other classes who were still higher up then peasants such as knights for example may have had something to say about it. It didn't help when the king and catholic church where dealing with all sorts of problems at the time meaning they couldn't focus completely well on their roles in society.

It is therefore possible to argue that the effects of the Black Death had an important role in weakening the well-structured feudal system, that had been relied on for many years.

Effect on the Catholic Church

The faith of the catholic church was greatly questioned through the period of the plague. Most believed it was a punishment by god, but then why where the priests dying. Aren't they the pathway to God? Therefore, the Church was greatly questioned during this time.

During the early time of the plague catholic priests were so busy baptises babies, blessings kings and doing funerals, with all of this there soon wasn't going to be enough priests to cover Europe. One problem was priests died as well as others and priest were trained to be able to read Latin which is what the bible was written in back in the 1350s. The citizens of Europe didn't have understanding on what caused the plague, so they referred to the only power stronger to what had swept through Europe, God. Seeing the priests were dying they were giving their holy power to young priests/ other members who followed the church closely. Flagellants were religious people who would beat themselves for sins they have committed. Such as whipping, hitting and overall beating. They were usually a group of people and it was considered a heresy (against the catholic church)

It is therefore possible to argue that people had very interesting understanding on what

could’ve caused the plague. This had its effects on the catholic church, community and over all weakening the feudal system.

CONCLUSION

The black death was the most catastrophic event in the middle ages. With the plague came positive new outlooks on life but it was mostly negative, resulting in 30-60% of Europe’s population dead. In the longer term the plague resulted in better understanding across many aspects of life back in the 1350s, such as a better understanding on medieval medicine, short term effects, the problem with the changing of the feudal system and the catholic church. With saying all this the plague had several significant changes that have gone on to reshape Europe and its history.