



Quas Jury cl. 3[^]LMA sez. B

**SUMMARY OF THE VIDEO ON
BOCCACCIO AND THE BLACK DEATH**

<https://www.ancient.eu/article/1537/boccaccio-on-the-black-death-text-commentary/>

THE BLACK DEATH



The black death is the name given to the plague outbreak in Europe between 1347 to 1352. It came from the east where it raged between 1346 to 1360 and was a combination of bubonic, septicemic and mnemonic plague. One of the primary sources on the outbreak was the Italian writer and poet Giovanni Boccaccio, lived 1313 to 1375. Best known for his work the

Decameron which tells the story of 10 people who entertain themselves with stories while in isolation from the plague. In the First chapter, before introducing the character, he describes how the plague struck the city of Florence in 1348, how people reacted and the staggering death toll which would finally amount to between 30 to 50 million before it wore itself out.

Epoch scene

The plague was caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, which was carried by the fleas of rodents, primarily rats, who were transported between regions through trade or by troops returning from or heading toward deployment. This bacterium was not isolated and identified however until 1894, and so the people of 14th century had no idea as to the cause of the plague or how to fight against it. The disease was therefore attributed to God's wrath, primarily although marginal communities such as the Jews were also singled out as the cause and persecuted accordingly. The plague entered Europe from the east, via Genoese trading ships, but is also thought to have possibly been spread along the silk road routes. The disease had been taking a significant toll in the east, since at least 562, thought to be a continuation of the plague of Justinian, 541 to 542 and afterwards, quieted down in 749 and flared up again in 1218. The city had been under siege by the Mongol golden horde, under the command of Khan Jonabek reigned 1342 to 1357, whose troops were infected by the plague of the near East. When soldiers died, Jonabek ordered their corpses catapulted over the walls of Kapha and this is thought to have infected the city's population. Merchant ships fleeing city went first to Sicily, then Marseille and Valencia infecting them, and the plague then spread across Europe.

Narrative of Boccaccio

Florence, Boccaccio's native city, was struck in 1348. His father worked in finance and, as a consequence, he died together with Boccaccio's stepmother. For this reason, the same year Boccaccio began to write the Decameron: a story about 10 young people, who fled Florence during the plague and take shelter in a villa in the city's outskirts and, to entertain themselves, they tell the stories which make up the hub of the book. The introduction details the outbreak in the city before the appearance of the ten main characters who meet at an empty church previous their

scape. Although Boccaccio claims that the first symptom of the disease is the appearance of buboes, most records of the plague indicate that it began with fever, body aches and fatigue.

Text

In 1248 CE in Florence there was a fatal plague. Due to the influence of the heavenly bodies for the righteous wrath of God as a punishment for mortals for the evil deeds of men, the pestilence, which started a few years earlier in the East, killed many people, spreading throughout the West.

In early spring, the plague began to manifest its effects. In the east, when the nose was bleeding, it was a sign of inevitable death, while in the west the signs of death were defined by buboes that formed first in the groin and under the armpits and then spread throughout the body. These buboes then turned into spots.

There were some people who thought that living moderately and avoiding any excess might help a great deal in resisting this disease, and so they gathered in small groups and lived entirely apart from everyone else. They shut themselves up in those houses where there were no sick people and where one could live well by eating the most delicate of foods and drinking the finest of wines, allowing no one to speak about or listen to anything said about the sick and dead outside; these people lived, entertaining themselves with music and other pleasures that they could arrange. Others thought the opposite: they believed that drinking excessively, enjoying life, going about singing and celebrating, satisfying in every way the appetites as best one could, laughing, and making light of everything that happened was the best medicine for such a disease. Many others adopted a middle course between the two attitudes just described: neither did they restrict their food or drink so much as the first group nor did they fall into such dissoluteness and drunkenness as the second.

When all the graves were full, huge trenches were dug in all of the cemeteries of the churches and into them, the new arrivals were dumped by the hundreds; and they were packed in there with dirt, one on top of another, until the trench was filled.

CONCLUSIONS

Boccaccio observed that religious supplications were of no use, while the medieval Italian writer Tommaso Del Garbo offered practical advice for people entering the homes of the infected: "notaries, confessors, relations and doctors who visit plague victims should open the

windows in order to renew air and wash their hands with vinegar and rose water, also their faces especially around their mouths and nostrils; before entering the room, you ought to place in the mouth several cloves and eat two slices of bread soaked in the best wine and then drink the rest of it; when leaving the room you might pulse with a sponge soaked in vinegar; Don't stay too close to the patient". Unfortunately, just the suggestion regarding social distancing, was an effective precaution against the disease. On the other hand, the harbour city of Ragusa, controlled by Venice, was the first to implement practical measures by isolating ships for 30 days to 40 days, which gives English its word quarantine. In the end, every other religious response was instead useless. The failure of religion to stop or at least alleviate the suffering and death eventually gave people the view of the renaissance.