Outline Lecture Fifteen—The Black Death

Key Questions:
1) How did the Christian and Islamic worlds respond differently to the onslaught of the Black Death?
2) What lasting social, economic, and cultural repercussions did the Black Death have on late medieval Europe?

I) The Magnitude of the Black Death
a) Ripe Preconditions
   i) Demographic changes
      (1) Warming Trend from 800 to 1200
      (2) The Great Famine 1315-1322 in northern Europe
   ii) Interlocking Trade Networks
      (1) From local epidemics to global pandemic
      (2) Effect of the Mongol expansion in late 1200s
b) How the Plague Spread in Europe 1347-1350
   i) Contours of the trade routes
   ii) Death toll of the Plague

II) Responses to the Plague
a) In Europe
   i) Boccaccio’s *Decameron*
      (1) Preemptive measures
   ii) Range of psychological responses
   iii) The futility of flight
   iv) Idea of original sin and innate depravity
      (1) Flagellants—extreme acts of penance
      (2) Scapegoating Jews and other minorities
      (3) Apocalyptic vision
b) In Islamic Regions—esp. Sunni Mamluk territory
   i) Emphasis on maintenance of community
   ii) Plague as a “collective social calamity”
   iii) Overall response was one of “reverent resignation”
      (1) Ibn al-Wardi: “God creates and recreates…it is God’s Will”
      (2) Detractors like Ibn-al Khatib in Granada

III) The Plague as “Watershed in Medieval History”
a) “Reverent resignation” vs. Individual agency
   i) Community vs. each for oneself
   ii) Status quo vs. by whatever radical means possible
b) Social Impact of Depopulation
   i) Bargaining Power of Peasantry
   ii) Shift to skilled labor jobs that paid more
c) Economic Impact of New Trend in Consumption
   i) Harry Miskimin’s “The Economy of Early Renaissance Europe 1300-1460”
(1) Increase in purchasing power of survivors
(2) Precariousness of life inspired greater propensity to consume
   ii) Spurred higher demand for manufactured luxury goods
   iii) Rising prominence and size of a manufacturing middle-class?
   d) Implications of Demographic Changes for Europe’s Renaissance