



The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time (P.S.)

By John Kelly

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A compelling and harrowing history of the Black Death's apocalyptic sweep through Europe in the mid-14th century, from its arrival in Sicily to its devastation of medieval Britain. 'The bodies were sparsely covered that the dogs dragged them forth and devoured them! And believing it to be the end of the world, no one wept for the dead, for all expected to die.' Agnolo di Turo, Sienna, 1348 In just over a thousand days, from 1347 to 1351, the Black Death swept across medieval Europe killing almost a third of its population - 25 million people. The deadly Y. Pestis virus was brought to the continent aboard Genoese ships fleeing the plague-ridden Crimea, arriving in Sicily in October 1347. By the spring of 1348 it was devastating the cities of central Italy, by June 1348 it had swept in to France and Spain, wiping out entire communities and leaving utter desolation in its wake. By August it had reached England, where among the thousands dead was the King's own daughter. One graphic testimony can be found at St Mary's, Ashwell, Hertfordshire, where an anonymous hand carved a harrowing inscription for 1349: 'Wretched, terrible, destructive year, the remnants of the people alone remain.' In *The Great Mortality*, John Kelly retraces the journey of the Black Death, explaining the scientific reasons behind its lightning spread, and why medieval Europe, with its famine, filthy cities and interminable wars, was such a ready host for the virus. Using original source material - diary fragments, letters, manuscripts - Kelly describes the suffering wrought by the plague, and paints a harrowing portrait of a continent gripped by an epidemic of biblical proportions. However, *The Great Mortality* is more than just a historical account - it also tells a very personal story narrated by the individuals whose lives were touched by it, from soldiers to bishops, peasants to kings.

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The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time (P.S.) By John Kelly Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1725331 in Books
- Published on: 2006
- Format: Import
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.76" h x .98" w x 5.08" l, .56 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 384 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

'There has never been a better researched, better written or more engaging account of the worst epidemic the world has ever known than this: the countless controversies that have raged around the origins and the true nature of this terrible period in human history seem now all to have been settled by the gimlet accuracy of John Kelly's superb and fascinating book.' Simon Winchester

About the Author

John Kelly has been writing about science, medicine and human behaviour for more than 20 years, and has an MA in European history from New York University. He is the author of nine previous books. He lives in New York.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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