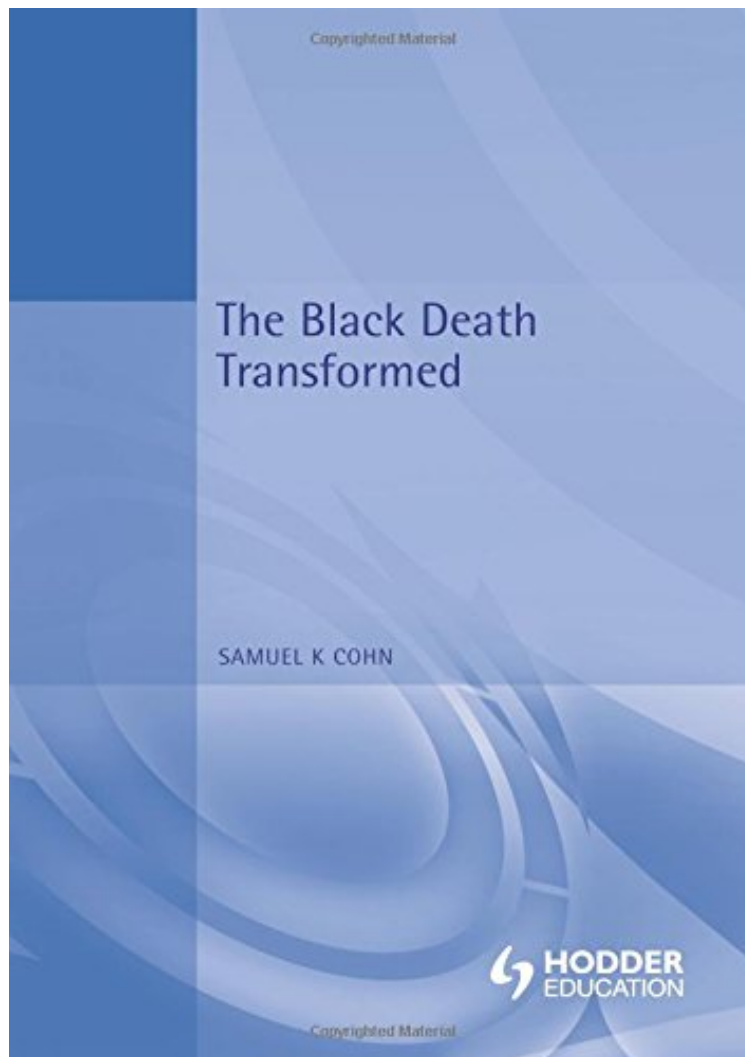


(Download pdf) The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe (Arnold Publication)

## The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe (Arnold Publication)

*Samuel K. Cohn Jr.*

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#826826 in Books Sam Cohn 2003-01-30 2003-01-30Ingredients: Example IngredientsOriginal language:EnglishPDF # 1 233.93 x .67 x 6.14l, 1.25 #File Name: 0340706473336 pagesThe Black Death Transformed Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe | File size: 23.Mb

**Samuel K. Cohn Jr. : The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe (Arnold Publication)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe (Arnold Publication):

17 of 19 people found the following review helpful. The Truth about the Black DeathBy H. CampbellI feel compelled to counter the San Diegan's review. While there is a lot of information in there to buttress the author's apparently

overwhelmingly convincing premise, it is true that only the most statistically minded will find all of the quantitative information intriguing. I skipped over most of the charts and diagrams, but there is no denying that much of the author's recounting is fascinating, especially with regards to the social implications of each plague outbreak. Anyone interested in the middle ages should read (most of) this book.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

iconoclastic in its reassessment of the Plague

By doc peterson

Samuel Cohen is a professor of Medieval History, his book written for academic audiences (or the serious armchair historian). In *The Black Death Transformed*, Cohen reconsidered whether the 'Great Mortality' of 1348 - 1351 was indeed *Yersinia pestis* - the bubonic plague. Contrary to most contemporary historians (Plagues and Peoples, Disease and History, *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe*, *The Black Death: A Chronicle of the Plague*, *Black Death, In the Wake of the Plague: The Black Death and the World It Made*), Cohen argues that the disease that struck Western Europe in the 14th century (and remained in successive waves of epidemic outbreak into the 18th century) couldn't have been *Y. pestis*. Cohen's argument rests on several claims: 1) the medieval plague's pattern of infection was fundamentally different from modern outbreaks, "recurring year after year with mounting and then erratic ups and downs in mortality before declining." 2) the symptoms described in primary sources from the 1340s (black blisters and spots occurring all over the body; buboes under the armpits and under the jaw) do not match well with symptoms of modern plague 3) physical complaints of the afflicted in the medieval outbreak (odd stench, stiffness in the joints, severe headaches, spitting of vomiting of blood) are very different from those of the modern bubonic plague 4) the vector for bubonic plague is through flea bites. Most flea bites occur below the knee, the nearest lymph nodes to be affected, therefore are in the groin - how, Cohen asks, would the disease have spread to the armpits or neck? 5) The areas of the city where most rats would congregate would be near grainaries (an abundant food source). Yet in examining the locations of where the outbreak of the plague took place, the epicenters of disease are not near the grainaries, but in the poorer parts of town. 6) the assertion that the bubonic plague became pneumonic is also challenged, Cohen arguing that pneumonic plague is virtually unheard of in modern (since 1894) outbreaks of the bubonic plague, and that it is not as virulent as that transmitted by fleas 7) in comparing the mortality across Europe, there is a seasonal variation that is incongruent with fleas (and their hosts, rats): in the Mediterranean the greatest mortality took place in the hot, dry summer months, while in northern Europe they took place in the cooler, wetter autumn. 8) Cohen also demolishes the long-held belief that the plague was brought west via Central Asian merchants, the fleas living in bundles of wool; wool, Cohen claims, is not a suitable host for fleas, and therefore cannot be the way in which the disease was introduced to Europe. While his reconsideration of what has been long-considered canon is controversial, he makes a strong case. Each of his points are meticulously cited and researched from sources across Europe. His analysis of this evidence is carefully considered and convincingly argued. Even when there may be evidence to the contrary (as in the findings by paleomicrobiologists in 2000 that DNA taken from the tooth pulp of plague corpses in Montpellier that it was indeed *Y. pestis*) is brought up, even the scholar, Cohen rightly calls for corroboration from other grave sites. What troubles me wasn't his challenge to what has long been accepted as historical and epidemiological fact, but the lack of a plausible alternative to *Y. pestis*, and the consideration that perhaps modern *Y. pestis* may have evolved in the 600-plus years since the 14th century. As Cohen writes in his conclusion, "... I contend that the unquestioned orthodoxy that the late-medieval plagues had to have been modern bubonic plague is not only wrong, it has retarded our knowledge of both the disease and its social and cultural consequences." Even though nothing has been contributed to address what caused the Great Mortality if not *Y. pestis*, his scholarship is honest and first-rate, and the questions he raises (and his role as historical iconoclast) warrant attention. An excellent history and a brilliantly argued reconsideration.

17 of 29 people found the following review helpful. Mindnumbingly comprehensive

By Dinobrago

"It is clear from the evidence presented in this account that the Black Death was almost any disease other than the rat-based bubonic plague whose bacillus was discovered in 1894." The author starts off well and the premise is fascinating and well supported. No one can claim that the author has not done his homework. However, the catalog of study after study may play well for an academic treatise, it becomes monotonous and mind-numbing for the rest of the world. I can't imagine someone without an advanced degree and a really keen interest in the research of the black plague finding this book enjoyable. After reading the first five chapters or so I ended up reading the first two pages of each chapter and moving on. Definitely would not recommend this for the lay person. Extremely marginal recommendation even for a scientist unless you are really specialized in this area.

The Black Death in Europe, from its arrival in 1347-52 through successive waves into the early modern period, has been seriously misunderstood by historians. This revolutionary account provides compelling evidence that the Black Death could have been almost any disease other than the rat-based bubonic plague whose bacillus was discovered in 1894. Since the late nineteenth century, the rat and flea have stood wrongly accused as the agents of transmission and historians and scientists have uncritically imposed the epidemiology of modern plague on the past. Unshackled from this misconception, *The Black Death Transformed* returns to its subject afresh, using sources spread across a huge geographical tract, from Lisbon to Uzbekistan, Sicily to Scotland and more than 40,000 death documents (from last wills and testaments to the earliest surviving burial records), over 400 chronicles, 250 plague tracts, 50 saints' lives,

merchant letters and many more. These sources confirm the terror of the medieval plague, the rapidity of its spread, and the utter despondency left in the wake of its first strike. But they also point to significant differences between the medieval and modern bubonic plague, none more significant than the ability of humans to acquire natural immunity to the former but not the latter.

A work of revisionism that holds most other studies up to close scrutiny, this is an important book and one that demands careful reading. Cohn's encyclopedic and polyglot command of the secondary sources, combined with the sheer volume of records that he has scoured for his evidence, presents a dense and detailed read...A serious revisionist study...essential reading for any scholar whose work touches on the plague or the Renaissance. History: s of New BooksA wealth of information. Death StudiesDelightfully readable. Conveys an ambitious and ultimately convincing argument in precise, often amusing prose. Cohn displays a combination of academic rigor and the ability to render the complex intriguing. The IndependentAbout the AuthorSamuel K. Cohn is a professor at the University of Glasgow.