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THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR IN MEDIEVAL HEALING

This volume challenges and redefines the traditional distinction made between the sacred and the secular in medieval healing, medical practice, and theory as evidenced in the historic, text record, and by material culture (sites and objects).

The studies here are interdisciplinary and are grouped into two parts. Part I focuses on secular and religious texts, demonstrating how the language of sacred and secular healing blurs and merges in both Latin and vernacular textual traditions. Chapters critically examine how medieval English literature draws directly from medical discourse when representing the physical and moral consequences of wrath; the reasons why empirical experience in medical education is central to the writings of Valesco de Tarenta; the narrative significance of Bede's representation of plague in his eighth-century prose *Life of Cuthbert*; and the implications of distinctions between late medieval religious sermons and secular discourse on plague. Authors also discuss how secular medicine and religious faith intersect in two, recorded, late medieval English miracles and present the largely unexplored impact of access to food on people's everyday health.

Part II investigates how the concepts of the sacred and the secular are seen in material culture. Chapters explore how the practice of lapidary medicine by early practitioners and midwives used the protective and healing properties ascribed to gemstone amulets, eagle-stones, and lodestones. At pilgrimage sites, the dynamic nature of cure and spiritual interaction is evidenced in art and artifact. One type of object, pilgrim badges from English sites, is used to explore statistically the wider social context of faith and healing.

Barbara S. Bowers, AVISTA, USA, and **Linda Migl Keyser**, Medica: The Society for the Study of Healing in the Middle Ages, USA.

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AVISTA Studies in the History of Medieval Technology, Science and Art
Volume 10

The Sacred and the Secular in Medieval Healing

Sites, Objects, and Texts

Edited by

BARBARA S. BOWERS
AVISTA: Association Villard de Honnecourt for the Interdisciplinary Study of Medieval Technology, Science and Art

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Medica: The Society for the Study of Healing in the Middle Ages

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Contents

List of Figures vii
List of Color Plates xi
Notes on Contributors xiii
Preface: Barbara S. Bowers and Linda Migl Keyser xv

Introduction: The Mandatory Matters of Sickness and Healing in the Middle Ages 1
Lindsay Jones

PART I SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS TEXTS

1 Sacred and Secular Wrath in Medieval English Sources 13
Virginia Langum

2 Writing about Medicine *per viam experimenti*: Valesco de Taranta (fl. 1382–1426) and the Presentation of Empirical Medical Knowledge in the Later Middle Ages 26
William H. York

3 Plague in Bede's Prose *Life of Cuthbert* 65
Michelle Ziegler

4 Doctors and Preachers against the Plague: Attitudes toward Disease in Late Medieval Plague Tracts and Plague Sermons 78
Ottó Gecser

5 Describing Death and Resurrection: Medicine and the Humors in Two Late Medieval Miracles 103
Leigh Ann Craig

6 Getting Enough to Eat: Famine as a Neglected Medieval Health Issue 116
Iona McCleery

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PART II SACRED AND SECULAR OBJECTS AND SITES

7 Early Medieval Crystal Amulets: Secular Instruments of Protection and Healing 143
Genevra Kornbluth

8 Loadstones are a Girl's Best Friend: Lapidary Cures, Midwives, and Manuals of Popular Healing in Medieval and Early Modern England 182
Nichola E. Harris

9 Performative Thaumaturgy: The State of Research on Curative and Spiritual Interaction at Medieval Pilgrimage Shrines 219
James Bugslag

10 Life (and After-Life) Insurance in the Medieval Period: Insights Offered by the Distribution of Pilgrim Badges Recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme in England; Geoff Egan, in Memoriam 266
Michael Lewis

Index 305

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List of Figures

6.1 Albrecht Dűrer, *The Riders of the Apocalypse*, from Arthur M. Hind, *Great Engravers: Albrecht Dűrer, his Engravings and Woodcuts* (William Heinemann, 1911). Image courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London. 117
6.2 *Death and the Ploughman*. Wellcome Library MS 49, f. 50v, *Apocalypsis S. Johannis cum glossis et Vita S. Johannis*. Image courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London. 137

7.1 Raising of Lazarus, sarcophagus from S. Giovanni Battista, Ravenna, marble, early fifth century, Ravenna Museo Nazionale, no. 600 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth). 144
7.2 Tree with bird, ca. 11 × 9 mm, sard intaglio in a modern gold ring, second–fourth century, The British Museum, London, no. 1856,0425.14 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth). 145
7.3 Mars ring stone, exposed stone 12.3 × 10.4 mm, niccolo agate intaglio, second to third century, set on gold quatrefoil fibula ca. 630/40–80 from Kobern, Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, no. 3068 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth). 149
7.4 Two-handled cup, rock crystal, Roman, Römisch-Germanisches Museum, Cologne, no. V337 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth). 152
7.5 Monolithic ring with cameo woman, 35.5 × 29.7 × 19.7 × 18.8 mm, rock crystal, Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn (photo: Genevra Kornbluth). 158
7.6 Monolithic ring with intaglio bezel worn on the author's hand, 36.45 × 50.2 × 21.7 mm, rock crystal, Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, no. 58.1028 f (photo: Genevra Kornbluth). 159
7.7 Cock-headed anguipede, jasper intaglio, first–sixth century, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Ann Arbor, no. 0000.02.6054 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth). 169
7.8 Reaper, 23 × 18 mm, hematite intaglio, first–sixth century, Taubman Health Sciences Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, amulet 115 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth). 170
7.9 Figure pierced by 13 nails, from a fourth-century assemblage from the region of Antinooupolis, ceramic, Musée du Louvre, Paris, E27145 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth). 180

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8.1 Two early medieval iron ore amulets. Left: pendant from an unknown context, probably sixth- to seventh-century Continental. St-Germain-en-Laye, Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, Diergardt 70534. Right: pendant from grave V, 217 at St Severin, Cologne (feminine grave assemblage), first third of the sixth century. Cologne, Römisch-Germanisches Museum 57,101 (photos: Genevra Kornbluth). 202

8.2 Seventeenth-century *aetites* (eagle-stone) amulet set in silver from the Bavarian and Austrian amulet collection of W.L. Hildburgh. Image courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London. 203

8.3 Title page of Nicholas Culpeper's English translation of the *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*, 1649 (photo: Yale University, Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library). 206

8.4 Chart of lapidary materials in the Estwick and Coningsby inventory, 1675: A Comparison of Lapidary Material on Hand. 217

9.1 Pilgrims at the *foramina* tomb of St Edward the Confessor at Westminster Abbey, *La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei* (Cambridge, University Library MS Ee.3.59, f. 29v), ca.1250–60 (photo: Reproduced with the kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library). 237

9.2 Reliquary procession of St Honoré, south transept tympanum, Amiens Cathedral, mid-thirteenth century (photo: Chris Henige). 238

9.3 Ostension of the Reliquary of the Holy Blood, Chapel of the Holy Blood, Bruges, 2008 (photo: Claire Labrecque). 242

9.4 Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel (Montaigu), engraving, J.C. Philips del., 1737, collection of author (photo: James Bugslag). 246

9.5 Guillaume Allabre, *Pilgrims venerating Notre-Dame du Pilier in Chartres Cathedral*, 1763–91 (photo: Yves Delaporte, *Les Trois Notre-Dame de la cathédrale de Chartre*s, Chartres, E. Houvet, 1955, Figure 19). 249

9.6 Tomb of St Erkembode, Cathedral of Saint-Omer (photo: © 2014 Alastair N. Ross, used by permission). 250

9.7 Shrine of the Schöne Maria at Regensburg, etching, ca.1600, after the print of 1521 by Michael Ostendorfer. Detail showing pilgrimage activity (photo: © Trustees of The British Museum). 258

9.8 St William Window, York Minster, panel 22a: A man offers a measured wax replica of his leg to St William's shrine in the sanctuary, ca. 1414 (photo: Gordon Plumb). 259

9.9 St William Window, York Minster, panel 16a: Cripples Collect Healing Oil at St William's Tomb in the nave, ca.1414 (photo: Gordon Plumb). 262

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10.1 Dr Geoff Egan, expert on all things medieval. Image courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). 267
10.2 Table: Metallic composition of pilgrim badges recorded by PAS. 271
10.3 Table: Distribution of pilgrim badges recorded by PAS by region. 274
10.4 Table: Distribution of pilgrim badges recorded by PAS by county. 274
10.5 Table: Attribution of pilgrim badges recorded by PAS. 276
10.6 Pilgrim badge of St Thomas Becket (LIN-D80A35). Image courtesy of PAS. 280
10.7 Table: Distribution of pilgrim badges and badges of St Thomas recorded by PAS. 281
10.8 Pilgrim badge of Our Lady of Willesden (LON-FEC2A2). Image courtesy of PAS. 283
10.9 Pilgrim badge of St Anne (SOMDOR148). Image courtesy of PAS. 285
10.10 Pilgrim badge of St Barbara (IOW-B00471). Image courtesy of PAS. 287
10.11 Pilgrim badge of St George (LANCUM-619B37). Image courtesy of PAS. 289
10.12 Pilgrim badge of Henry VI (NLM-FACEC6). Image courtesy of PAS. 292
10.13 Pilgrim badge of John Schorne (BM 1983,1203.2). Image courtesy of The British Museum. 293
10.14 Pilgrim badge of St Alban (BM 1856,0701.2095). Image courtesy of The British Museum. 295
10.15 Fragmentary pilgrim badge of St Alban (LON-D6B298). Image courtesy of PAS. 296
10.16 Pilgrim badge of St Edmund (BH-CB9BB7). Image courtesy of PAS. 298
10.17 Pilgrim badge of Edward the Confessor (LON-19F1D6). Image courtesy of PAS. 299
10.18 Pilgrim badge of St Margaret (SWYOR-EB3223). Image courtesy of PAS. 301
10.19 Pilgrim badge of Richard Caister (LON-40822). Image courtesy of PAS. 303

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List of Color Plates

1 The third and the fourth horsemen, London, Wellcome Library MS 49, f. 5v, *Apocalypsis S. Johannis cum glossis et Vita S. Johannis*. Image courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.
2 Bound pendant, 18.4 × 29.2 mm, rock crystal and gold, mid-fifth to seventh century, Merovingian cemetery at Saint-Denis, Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, St-Germain-en-Laye, no. 87.204 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth).
3 Bound pendant (ca. 30 mm) and other goods from Szentendre grave 56 displayed on reconstructed clothing, rock crystal and silver, burial ca. 550–70, Hungarian National Museum, Budapest (photo: Genevra Kornbluth).
4 Amber and glass beads now strung with rock crystal spindle whorl (center, 30.5 × 17.5 mm) from Selmeston cemetery 7, mid-fifth to seventh century, Lewes Castle Museum 52.42.6 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth).
5 Rayed serpent with bee, jasper intaglio, first to sixth centuries, Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Ann Arbor, no. 0000.02.6126 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth).
6 Gorgon cameo from a pendant, 33 × 37 × 15 mm, jet, late third century, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, no. XI 1309 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth).
7 Lion-headed snake (Chnoubis), 11 × 8 mm, chalcedony, third century?, The British Museum, London, no. OA.9662 (photo: Genevra Kornbluth).
8 Window nIV, Trinity Chapel ambulatory, Canterbury Cathedral: above, The Cure of Henry of Fordwich; below, The Cure of Etheldreda (photo: Gordon Plumb).
9 Josse Lieferinxe, in collaboration with Bernardino Simondi, Pilgrims at the Shrine of St Sebastian, panel painting, 1497–98, Palazzo Barberini, Rome (photo: Art Resource).
10 Pilgrims at the Tomb of St Wolfgang, panel on the wing of the altarpiece on the high altar of the Church of St Wolfgang, Pipping bei München, ca. 1480 (photo: Lenz Kriss-Rettenbeck, *Ex voto: Zeichen und Abbild im christlichen Votivbrauchtum*, Zürich, Buchclub Ex Libris, 1972, Abb. 11).

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Preface

Barbara S. Bowers and Linda Migl Keyser

The genesis of this volume lies in papers presented at the 46th International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University in sessions titled: "The Sacred and the Secular in Medieval Healing." These sessions were co-sponsored by AVISTA, The Association Villard de Honnecourt for the Interdisciplinary Study of Medieval Technology, Science and Art, and Medica, The Society for the Study of Healing in the Middle Ages. They kindled the interdisciplinary dialogue about medieval health and illness that culminated in the following collection of chapters.

Admittedly the distinction between sacred and secular was put forward in this book only as an organizing principle to look at what is a very complex and interconnected relationship. The division between sacred and secular served as a way of seeing that in medieval health and healing, these categories are, in fact, inexorably intertwined rather than forming mutually exclusive categories. In the Middle Ages, the sufferer would seek any and all means to be healed. While death and salvation was the ultimate healing, there was fluidity in "avenue of access" to health for the body.

Many individuals helped to make this volume a reality, contributing their expertise, advice, and critique. First, special thanks goes to our contributors, whose insightful analyses have deepened and expanded our understanding of the complex intersections between the sacred and the secular for one living in the Middle Ages. We would also like to thank Melitta Adamson, Nicole Archambeau, Louise Bishop, Sarah Blick, Erika Bourguignon, George Brown, Martha Carlin, Sharron Coplin, Richard Firth Green, Mark Hall, Karen Jolly, Genevra Kornbluth, Jos Koldeweij, Iona McCleery, Michael McVaugh, James Robinson, Phillipp Schofield, Sharon Schweitzer, M. Teresa Tavormina, Linda Ehsram Voigts, Faith Wallis, and Joseph Ziegler. A particular note of thanks goes to Lindsay Jones, who wrote the introduction to this volume. As a scholar of religion and a generalist, his insight into how the individual chapters relate to one another makes the point that all religious rhetoric is, to some considerable extent, self-serving and therefore deceptive, medieval discourses on healing being no exception. We would also like to thank John Smedley, our editor at Ashgate, for his advice, support, and, yes, "saintly" patience. Last but not the least, we thank AVISTA for financial support in allowing us to print color plates for the volume and to cover additional expenses involved in photo editing by Kornbluth Photography.

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Chapter 4

Doctors and Preachers against the Plague: Attitudes toward Disease in Late Medieval Plague Tracts and Plague Sermons

Ottó Gecser

The last two or three decades have witnessed an upsurge in research on the cultural history of the Black Death and subsequent plague epidemics, including the study of religious views and practices. Regarding the latter, scholars have studied in a more focused and systematic fashion than before the masses, processions, and prayers used to avert or halt the disaster, the miracles believed to restore health, the erection of votive churches and sanctuaries, the cult of plague saints in its various manifestations, the religiously motivated scapegoating and the ensuing persecutions, the opinions and debates about fleeing the infected areas, the interpretation of pestilence as God's punishment, and the religious beliefs of doctors who gave expert advice on the disease or tried to explain it in scientific terms.[1]

Acknowledgments: The comments and criticisms of the four anonymous reviewers of this chapter, together with the thorough proofreading of the text by the editors of the volume, helped me very much to clarify my argument and improve my style. In addition, I am also grateful to the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA) for providing financial support for my research (project identifier: PD 75642) as well as to the librarians of the Central European University for obtaining for me several publications not available in Budapest libraries. The finishing touches were put on the text during a research stay in the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, with a grant by the Federal State of Lower Saxony. If not indicated otherwise, all translations and emendations of the sources are mine.

1 In addition to the literature reviewed in Justin Stearns, "New Directions in the Study of Religious Responses to the Black Death," *History Compass* 7 (2009): 1–13, I have found the following works particularly useful: Louise Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994): 485–532; Thilo Esser, *Pest, Heilsangst und Frömmigkeit: Studien zur religiösen Bewältigung der Pest am Ausgang des Mittelalters* (Altenberge: Oros, 1999); Mario Sensi, "Santuari politici 'contra pestem': L'esempio di Fermo" and "Santuari, culti, riti 'ad repellendam pestem' tra medioevo ed età moderna," in *Santuari, pellegrini, eremiti nell'Italia centrale* (Spoleto: CISAM, 2003), 1:333–80 and 1:381–95; Heinrich Dormeier, "Pestepidemien und Frömmigkeitsformen in Italien und Deutschland (14.–16. Jahrhundert)," in *Um Himmels Willen: Religion in Katastrophenzeiten*, ed. Manfred Jakubowski-Tiessen and Hartmut Lehmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 14–50 (with references to his numerous other contributions to the subject); and Nicole Archambeau, "Healing Options during the Plague: Survivor Stories from a Fourteenth-Century Canonization Inquest," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 85 (2011): 531–59. See also notes 2, 47, and 71 below.

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Nevertheless, despite the centrality of preaching to religious life and, more generally, to the communication of ideas in the Middle Ages, sermons delivered in the course of, or in relation to epidemics have been largely ignored by historians of the plague—with the notable exception of Heinrich Dormeier, who partly relied on sermons in his study of the *fuga pestis*, and Jussi Hanska, who examined sermons in the context of coping with natural disasters by religious means.[2] Given the general interest in religious responses to pestilence and the fact that historians of early modern plagues do analyze sermons,[3] this lack of attention must be attributed to the scarcity or the inaccessibility of the relevant texts, which I will discuss below. By ignoring sermons, however, we lose the best kind of source material that can inform us about the religious interpretations of the plague in a form that was both elaborate and accessible to lay contemporaries. Due to their elaborateness and accessibility, sermons also offer insight into how the clergy, or a part of the clergy, reacted to medical ideas, or how they wanted their listeners to react to them. It is precisely this issue, the confrontation of religious and medical views on the plague in sermons—as well as the presence of religious ideas in plague tracts—that will be the focus of the present chapter. First, I will analyze one well-documented case of how a Latin plague tract written by university doctors was translated for a more general audience comparable to that of sermons. The lessons of this case will be further explored in the second section, in the context of plague tracts transmitted by non-medical manuscripts. In the third section, I will turn to plague preaching as an event and its representations in chronicles as well as to sermons as texts and the problems of their composition and transmission. Finally, the attitudes of preachers to plague medicine will be discussed in the last section.

---

2 Heinrich Dormeier, "Die Flucht vor der Pest als religiöses Problem," in *Laienfrömmigkeit im späten Mittelalter: Formen, Funktionen, politisch-soziale Zusammenhänge*, ed. Klaus Schreiner and Elisabeth Müller-Luckner, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, Kolloquien 20 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1992), 331–97; Jussi Hanska, *Strategies of Sanity and Survival: Religious Responses to Natural Disasters in the Middle Ages*, Studia Fennica Historica 2 (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2002).

3 See, among others, Paul Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), index, s.v. "sermons"; Matthias Lang, "'Der Vrsprung aber der Pestilentz ist nicht natürlich, sondern übernatürlich . . .': Medizinische und Theologische Erklärung der Seuche im Spiegel protestantischer Pestschriften, 1527–1560," in *Die leidige Seuche: Pest-Fälle in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Otto Ulbricht (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), 133–80; Marina Arnold, "Das Pestjahr 1626 in Norddeutschland: Leichenpredigten als seuchengeschichtliche Quellen," in *Gotts verhengnis und seine straffe: Zur Geschichte der Seuchen in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Ausstellungskataloge der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel 84 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 37–47; and Anna Manko-Matysiak, "Zwischen Glaube und Wissensvermittlung: Auf den Spuren der Pest im Schlesien des Reformationszeitalters," in *Seuche und Mensch: Herausforderung in den Jahrhunderten; Ergebnisse der internationalen Tagung vom 29.–31. Oktober 2010 in Rostock*, ed. Carl Christian Wahrmann, Historische Forschungen 95 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2012), 99–120. John M. Frymire refers to a number of additional plague sermons in his *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 147 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), which is intended to be the groundwork for his future "monograph on preaching and disaster in early modern Germany" (8); I am grateful to Paul Strauss (University of Nebraska, Lincoln) for calling my attention to this excellent book.

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Plague Tracts and the Divulgation of Medical Knowledge

The Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century gave rise to a new genre of medieval scientific literature or, more precisely, to a new cluster of texts connected by content and purpose: the so-called *plague tract* or *plague treatise*.[4] In fact, the cluster includes a number of genres, among others, *tractatus*, *consilia*, *quaestiones*, and *regimina*—not to mention their vernacular counterparts and variants—and it is also not very easy to delimit them from chapters about pestilential fever in general works of medicine. Likewise, the intended readership of this cluster was far more varied than the words "tract" or "treatise" evoke; it ranged from learned physicians reading in Latin and interested in a detailed explanation of the epidemic to potential plague victims looking for practical advice in case they should contract the disease—with many possible intermediaries between these two ends of the continuum. As a consequence, *Pestschrift*, the term used by Karl Sudhoff—who catalogued or edited almost 300 related texts at the beginning of the twentieth century[5]—is a more fitting term than *plague tract* or *plague treatise* current in English. Even so, for the purposes of the present study, the standard English terms are not misleading because those *Pestschriften* that tried to paint a full panorama of plague medicine from etiology to therapy and spread as separate and compact texts, easy and worthwhile to copy (or edit in print), do fall into the category of tracts or treatises.[6]

The language of plague tracts was predominantly Latin until the second half of the fifteenth century, but a few vernacular works had already been composed

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4 On plague tracts in general (with references to earlier literature), see Anne Campbell, *The Black Death and Men of Learning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 6–92; Melissa P. Chase, "Fevers, Poisons, and Apostemes: Authority and Experience in Montpellier Plague Treatises," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 441 (1985): 153–69; Jon Arrizabalaga, "Facing the Black Death: Perceptions and Reactions of University Medical Practitioners," in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, ed. Luis García-Ballester, Roger French, Jon Arrizabalaga, and Andrew Cunningham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 237–88; Irma Naso, "Individuazione diagnostica della 'peste nera': Cultura medica e aspetti clinici," in *La peste nera: Dati di una realtà ed elementi di una interpretazione; Atti del XXX Convegno storico internazionale, Todi, 10–13 ottobre 1993* (Spoleto: CISAM, 1994), 349–81; Thilo Esser, "Die Pest—Strafe Gottes oder Naturphänomen? Eine frömmigkeitsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Pesttraktaten," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 108 (1997): 32–57; Esser, *Pest, Heilsangst und Frömmigkeit*, 27–59; Nicolas Weill-Parot, "La rationalité médicale à l'épreuve de la peste: Médecine, astrologie et magie (1348–1500)," Médiévales 46 (2004): 73–88; Christiane Nockels Fabbri, *Continuity and Change in Late Medieval Plague Medicine: A Survey of 152 Plague Tracts from 1348 to 1599* (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006). See also notes 8 and 58 below.

5 Karl Sudhoff, "Pestschriften aus den ersten 150 Jahren nach der Epidemie des 'schwarzen Todes' 1348," *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 4 (1911/12): 191–222, 389–424; 5 (1912/13): 36–87, 332–96; 6 (1913/14): 313–79; 7 (1914/15): 57–114; 8 (1915/16): 175–215, 236–87; 9 (1916/17): 53–78, 117–67; 11 (1918/19): 44–92, 121–76; 14 (1922/23): 1–25, 79–105, 129–69; 16 (1924/25): 1–69, 77–188; 17 (1925/26): 12–139, 241–91.

6 On the concept of the *tract* in the later Middle Ages and its relevance, see Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 128–51.

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during the Black Death, with that of the Catalan doctor, Jacme d'Agramont, being the most famous among them.[7] In one early case, the vernacular texts seem to fit into a conscious program of divulgating medical ideas about the plague in considerable detail. The lessons of this case are useful for understanding the relation between plague tracts and plague sermons as well.

In the summer of 1348, before the epidemic had reached Paris, the medical faculty of the university was commissioned by the king, Philip VI of France, to compose an overview of plague medicine. The resulting *Compendium de epidimia*, completed in October 1348, became the standard account both in form and content of what contemporary learned medicine could say about pestilence.[8] It has survived in at least 25 manuscripts, and its influence can be shown in a great number of plague texts. Its fast diffusion is attested by the fact that it was already known in Prague in 1349.[9] Apart from the connections that existed between the courts and universities of Europe in general, and between those of Paris and Prague in particular, the *Compendium* must have owed its success to its official and eminently learned character. It is written in an authoritative tone in the first person plural, just like a charter of the king. It is divided into parts and parts of parts as one would expect from a work of scholastic culture: it consists of two *summae*, with three *capitulae* in the first, and two *tractatus* of four and three *capitulae* in the second. And finally, it is packed with authorities including Hippocrates, Ptolemy, Pliny the Elder, Aristotle, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Haly Abbas (al-Majusi), and Albert the Great, who are usually cited with precise references to their works. Apart from its style and structure, the university-born character of the *Compendium* is also visible in the place reserved for the causes of the epidemic. Even if it was, most probably, not a theoretical scientific work that the king expected from the medical faculty on the eve of the great pestilence, they nevertheless decided to

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7 Jacme d'Agramont, "Regiment de preservacio a epidimia o pestilencia e mortaldats: Epistola de Maestre Jacme d'Agramont als honrats e discrets seynnors pahers e conseyll de la Ciutat de leyda, 1348; Regimen of Protection Against Epidemics or Pestilence and Mortality," trans. M.L. Duran-Reynals and C.-E.A. Winslow, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 23 (1949): 57–89.

8 The *Compendium de epidimia* is edited with a modern French translation on facing pages in Hippolyte-Emile Rébouis, *Etude historique et critique sur la peste* (Paris: A. Picard; Croville-Morant & Foucant, 1888), 70–145. For the context and significance of the *Compendium*, see Campbell, *The Black Death*, 14–17; Alfred Coville, "Ecrits contemporains sur la peste de 1348 à 1350," in *Histoire littéraire de la France* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1938), 37:325–90, at 336–59; Arrizabalaga, "Facing the Black Death," 241–2; and Sylvie Bazin-Tacchella, "Rupture et continuité du discours médical à travers les écrits sur la peste de 1348: Le *Compendium de epidemia* (1348) et ses adaptations françaises; la relation de peste contenue dans la *Chirurgia Magna* de Guy de Chauliac (1363)," in *Air, miasme et contagion: Les épidémies de l'Antiquité au Moyen Age*, ed. Sylvie Bazin-Tacchella, Danielle Quéruel, and Evelyne Samama (Langres: Guéniot, 2001), 105–56, at 108–31.

9 Bazin-Tacchella, "Rupture et continuité," 107; Coville, "Ecrits contemporains," 37:357–9; Gundolf Keil, s.v. "Pariser Pestgutachten," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon* (henceforth *Verfasserlexikon*), 2nd edn, 11 vols (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978–2004), 7:cols 309–12. The short text known as the *Sinn der Höchsten Meister von Paris*, composed in Bohemia around 1350, is a very condensed translation–adaptation of some of the practical measures found in the *Compendium*. See Keil, s.v. "Sinn der Höchsten Meister von Paris," in *Verfasserlexikon*, 8:cols 1281–3.

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dedicate the first of the two main parts, the first *summa*, entirely to the causes, and turn to the preservatives and remedies only in the second.[10]

The *Compendium* has also survived in two contemporary French translations, or adaptations, completed during the Black Death.[11] Both have been transmitted by unique manuscripts of the mid-fourteenth century containing texts of practical medicine and related subjects in French. One of them, executed in a quality far above the handbooks of typical medical practitioners, may have even been produced for the king himself. An historiated initial at the beginning of "the treatise that the masters of medicine and astronomy made about the pestilence which is called the epidemic by medicine,"[12] represents the king with three of his doctors, and we know that king Philip's grandson, Charles V, had several books of medicine and, according to an inventory of 1373, one of them was entitled *Le Traitié de l'espidemie*.[13] At any rate, the intended readership of the translation must have been expected to take an interest in the exact content of the Latin original that the translator rendered very faithfully.

The other French version of the *Compendium*, transmitted in a coeval manuscript of humbler quality decorated with simple initials, is rather an adaptation than a translation: written in the first person singular, instead of the first person plural, it reduces the first *summa* to a few introductory sentences, replaces the medical and philosophical authorities with anonymous references to "the sages and the ancient masters" (*les sages et les anciens mestres*), and focuses on prevention and cure, elaborating here and there on the recommendations of its source. Nevertheless, quite interestingly, the anonymous translator–adaptor felt it necessary to apologize for the changes at the end of the text:

> I ask all those men and women who will read it and who will hear it to forgive me that this *regimen* is organized so poorly and that it is not divided into *summae*, into chapters or into treatises, but I made it so in order that it be shorter and that the [uneducated] laity could understand it better.[14]

The implication is that this vernacular adaptation of the *Compendium* is intended for both laymen and laywomen, including those who could not read, and that some of its intended readers or listeners knew enough about the structure of the

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10 To be sure, the length of the first *summa* is slightly less than half the length of the second.

11 Both are edited in Bazin-Tacchella, "Rupture et continuité," 132–45 (longer version, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 12323) and 146–53 (shorter version, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 2001).

12 Ibid., 132: "[L]e traictié que les maistres de medicine et les astronomiens de Paris firent de la pestilence que fisique apelle epydimie."

13 Coville, "Ecrits contemporains," 37:349.

14 Bazin-Tacchella, "Rupture et continuité," 153: "[J]e pri a touz ceulz et a toutes celles qui ce liront et qui l'orront, qu'i me vueillent pardonner ce que ce regimen est ordenez si rudement et que il n'est partiz par sommes, par chapitres ne par traitiez, mes je l'ai fet pour ce que il soit plus brief et que les lais le puissent miex entendre."

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Latin original or its faithful French translation to be able to miss the *summae*, the chapters, or the treatises. Thus, the group of these informed readers or listeners overlapped with the audience of the original *Compendium* or its other faithful translation. It is not impossible either that the anonymous translator–adaptor was referring to the commissioners of his work. What seems to be sure, however, is that the Latin text and its two French versions were part of an interrelated program of expert analysis and divulgation—even if the separate, or separable, impact of the French versions has not been confirmed so far. This program shows two quite different approaches to explaining and treating the plague.

The original *Compendium* does not explicitly mention God's wrath provoked by human sins as the ultimate explanation of pestilence. In the expert opinion of the medical faculty, the "remote and primary cause" of the Black Death was the conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars in the sign of Aquarius in 1345. In the general thrust of their explanation, the Paris masters followed the authority of Avicenna who made a distinction between "primary remote" and "near" causes of pestilence. The remote causes are certain "celestial figures" or "forms" (*figurae celestes* or *forma caeli*), which raise the bad vapors or fumes from the earth and disperse them in the atmosphere.[15] The bad vapors to be elevated are made available by causes independent of the celestial figures: stagnant waters, marshes, decaying corpses after a battle, or putrefactions taking place inside the earth.[16] Plagues—just like other diseases, epidemic or not—are subject to the regular and autonomous processes of the natural world. Without denying, of course, that the natural world was God's creation, the Paris masters discussed his role in its functioning only very briefly, at the very end of the first *summa*. Here, in a carefully balanced disclaimer, the endorsement of God's occasional intervention in the workings of nature is counterbalanced by the accentuation of the divine origin of human medicine:

> Finally, we do not want to overlook the fact, that in those cases when plague proceeds from divine will, there is no other advice than having humble recourse to God without, however, disregarding the advice of the doctors. For *the Lord created medicine from the earth* [Sir. 38:4, emphasis mine]; whence it is only God who cures the sick, he who in his generosity fashioned medicine from the feeble soil. Blessed be the glorious and most high God who, not ceasing to help us, revealed some of the principles of healing to those who fear him.[17]

15 Some version of this astrological explanation was included in many plague tracts, see Campbell, *The Black Death*, 37–44; Danielle Jacquart, "Theory, Everyday Practice, and Three Fifteenth-Century Physicians," *Osiris* 6 (1990): 140–60; Arrizabalaga, "Facing the Black Death," 252–4; and Weill-Parot, "La rationalité médicale."

16 Avicenna, *Canon medicinae* (Venice, ca. 1486; without foliation), 4.1.4.1 ("De febre pestilentiali").

17 Rébouis, *Étude historique*, 92: "Amplius pretermittere nolumus, quod quando epidimia a voluntate divina procedit, in quo casu non est aliud consilium nisi quod ad ipsum humiliter recurratur,

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Thus, even in those cases when plague is divine punishment for human sins—and when the main form of prevention and healing must be confession and repentance—the advice of the doctors should not be disregarded. The problem of how to know if a particular plague is divine punishment is left in the dark. The corresponding paragraph in the short French adaptation of the *Compendium* has quite different emphases, leaving out the doctors and implying that any outbreak of pestilence can be divine punishment:

> And since the epidemic [is] sometimes [caused] by our sins, according to what the wise masters of the holy scripture say, it is a certain and safe advice that one has to make confession and repent [one's sins] properly, and show contempt for all one's misdeeds to our Lord, because this is the best medicine that anyone can find.[18]

It is with a rejoinder to these lines that the short French adaptation ends—very much like a sermon. The readers or listeners are exhorted once more to do penance in order that the Lord Almighty "protect us from this pestilence and lead us to a good end according to his wish. Amen."[19]

The general movement we can observe here between the original Latin *Compendium* and its short French adaptation has a twofold direction: from the theoretical to the practical (or, in other words, from the more to the less learned) and from the private to the public. The transformation of the Latin original by the anonymous translator–adaptor involves not only the removal of explanatory content and references to authorities but also the inclusion of another framework of interpretation almost entirely missing from the original: that of religion. In a restricted university or courtly environment, medicine could be presented to the king as an autonomous discipline, and it was surely in the interest of the medical faculty to show that there was more one could do than penance. But outside this restricted environment, such a presentation was apparently deemed unacceptable. In the traditional religious view, sanctioned by the authority of the Bible, plague was regarded as God's punishment for human wickedness. For the majority of his subjects, King Philip VI was keen on showing his allegiance to

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consilium tamen medici non deserendo. *Altissimus* enim *de terra creavit medicinam* [Sir. 38:4, emphasis mine]; unde sanat solus langores Deus qui de fragilitatis solo producit in largitate sua medicinam. Benedictus Deus, gloriosus et excelsus qui auxiliari non desinens, certam curandi doctrinam timentibus explicavit." Note the repeated allusion to the earth or soil as the "material" of medicine created by God, which seems to underline the non-metaphorical meaning of *medicina* in this context: it is not some sort of "spiritual" medicine, but that of the doctors.

18 Bazin-Tacchella, "Rupture et continuité," 151: "Et pour ce que l'epydimie aucune fois [est causee] par nos pechez, selon que dient les sages mestres de la sainte escripture, est certain et seur conseil que on soit bien confés et bien repentans et que on s'an fie a son prochain et estre contemps a nostre seigneur de tous sés mesfés quar c'est la meilleur medecine de tous puisse trouver."

19 Ibid., 153: "[Q]u'i nous vueille garder de ceste pestilence et nous maint a bonne fin quant il li plera. Amen."

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the traditional view when in 1349, right after the plague, he found the punishment of blasphemers insufficient and reaffirmed the serious penalties prescribed by earlier legislation.[20] Quite similarly, Pope Clement VI was advocating the plague-as-punishment view publicly—in preaching and by composing a mass of intercession—while privately he ordered the autopsy of the bodies of plague victims in order to find out the causes of the epidemic.[21] If a more learned and restricted audience could be kept apart from a less learned and unrestricted one, then there was no need of talking about the religious understanding of pestilence in plague tracts. This may be one of the reasons why fourteenth-century plague tracts tended to leave the role of God and religion in epidemics largely or entirely unmentioned.[22] With the wider availability of plague tracts in the fifteenth century, among other things, this situation seems to change. This is the problem we will turn to in the next section.

Plague Tracts in Non-Medical Miscellanies

While it is safe to assume that doctors—just like most people in urban areas in the late Middle Ages—were listening to sermons regularly and thus were knowledgeable about the religious interpretations of pestilence, the reverse does not seem to hold for preachers: although some preachers were obviously well-versed in medicine, this hardly proves the case for all or even most of them.[23] Nevertheless, one possible indicator of some familiarity with plague medicine among clerics who were supposed to preach regularly is the presence of plague tracts in manuscript miscellanies of pastoral content, including sermons, manuals for confessors, *artes praedicandi*, *artes moriendi*, short treatises on moral subjects, and other similar texts useful in the everyday practice of parish priests.

The students of plague tracts from Karl Sudhoff onwards usually—and logically—looked for such texts in manuscripts labeled as "medical" in manuscript catalogues. As a consequence, their commentaries and editions can map the diffusion of plague tracts in the milieus of medical practitioners alone. Finding non-medical miscellanies with plague tracts requires very detailed manuscript catalogues, which have become available only in recent decades. I compiled a sample of 38 non-medical miscellanies containing Latin plague tracts from catalogues of mainly German and Austrian manuscript collections, where the process

20 Michael Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1150–1350* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 57–8.

21 Diana Wood, *Clement VI: The Pontificate and Ideas of an Avignon Pope* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 66–7.

22 For the place of God in explaining pestilence in plague tracts, see Arrizabalaga, "Facing the Black Death," 250–51, and Nockels Fabbri, *Continuity and Change in Late Medieval Plague Medicine*, 182–96.

23 Compare to Joseph Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion c.1300: The Case of Arnau de Vilanova* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 176–213, and Ziegler, "Medical Similes in Religious Discourse: The Case of Giovanni da San Gimignano OP. (ca. 1260–ca. 1333)," *Science in Context* 8 (1995): 103–31.

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of detailed cataloguing seems to be in the most advanced stage.[24] The various texts in all these miscellanies were at least *bound together* during the Middle Ages (even if they were frequently not written by the same person or at the same time), so they reflect a medieval selection and purpose. The sample is by no means representative as the number of extant non-scientific manuscripts containing (Latin) plague tracts is unknown—to me, at least—and the selection is distorted by the uneven availability of detailed manuscript catalogues. Nevertheless, it can suggest interesting hypotheses.

Out of the 38 non-medical manuscripts, 35 contain pastoral and only 3 contain legal texts. The majority of the whole sample (28 items) was completed in the fifteenth century; five in the fourteenth century, two at the turn of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, two in the early sixteenth century, and one was undated in the catalogue. Out of the 35 pastoral miscellanies with plague tracts, only 3 contain other medical texts as well, which implies that broader studies of medical issues were not on the agenda of those who compiled these manuscripts. These data suggest a growing interest in plague tracts among clerics involved in the *cura animarum* between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, who were apparently not intending to lead a medical practice parallel to their clerical one.[25] This suggestion is corroborated if we observe the changes that the *text* of a plague tract could undergo in presumable connection with its transition from a medical to a clerical milieu—changes that are quite similar to those observed in the short French translation–adaptation of the Paris *Compendium* above.

One of the best-known medieval plague tracts, that written in 1373 by the Montpellier physician, Johannes Jacobi, was considerably revised and augmented sometime in the first half of the fifteenth century.[26] The resulting text was either transmitted anonymously, or it was attributed to a certain *Canutus* (or *Kanutus*, or *Kamintus*) *episcopus Arusiensis civitatis regni Dacie*, whose identity has long

24 Ansbach, Schlossbibliothek, MS Lat. 51; Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek (henceforth UB), cod. II. 1. 2° 38; Bamberg, UB, MS 225 (Q. VI. 25.) and Msc. Theol. 95 (Q. II. 15.); Berlin, Staatsbibliothek—Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Theol. Lat. Qu., MSS 286 and 337; Budapest, Egyetemi Könyvtár, cod. 73; Eichstätt, UB, cod. st. 199; Frankfurt a. M., UB, MSS Barth. 71 and 90, MS Leonh. 9, MS Praed. 127; Fritzlar, Dombibliothek, MS 122; Giessen, UB, MS 718; Graz, UB, MSS 631 and 889; Halle (Saale) UB/Landesbibliothek, Qu. cod. 96; Hildesheim Dombibliothek, MS 764; Kraków, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, codd. 333 and 470; Kremsmünster, Stiftsbibliothek (henceforth StB), MS 225; Lüneburg, Ratsbibliothek, Theol. 2° 68; Melk, StB, MSS 1916 (552. K. 24) and 959 (3. A 4); München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 303, Clm 6018, and Clm 19642; Neuruppin, Kirchenbibliothek, MS 39; Olomouc, Vědecká knihovna, MSS M I 290 and M I 406; Trier, Bistumsarchiv, MS 38; Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, codd. Lat. 4459 and 4688, Pal. Lat. 5137; Wien, Schottenkloster, MSS 111 (122) and 206 (209); Wilhering, StB, MS IX 101; Würzburg, UB, M. ch. q. 160.

25 It is, of course, difficult to exclude the possibility that such clerics, or some of them, had more than one book and that these holdings included manuscripts of purely medical content as well.

26 Original version: Sudhoff, "Pestschriften," *Archiv* 17 (1925/26): 16–32; revised version: *Regimen contra pestilentiam* (Antwerp, 1486/91). For the textual tradition of the latter (with references to the earlier literature on Jacobi), see Manfred Franz Maitz and Gundolf Keil, "Der Pest-'Brief an die Frau von Plauen' im 'Tractatus de pestilentia' des Bischofs Kamintus (Kanu[n]tus) aus Ar(r)ubium in Dakien bzw. des Kanzlers Johannes Jakobi," *Bibliothek und Wissenschaft* 35 (2002): 1–24. I am currently preparing a critical edition of the revised version transmitted in non-medical manuscripts.

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been debated among historians—largely in vain.[27] In accordance with this attribution, a large part of the additions were of a religious nature, while in the original version, the only reference to God or other transcendent beings was in the invocation at the beginning. On the signs of a coming epidemic, for example, the compiler of the extended version makes the following comment: "When these signs appear, a great pestilence is to be feared, save when the Lord Almighty wants to banish it."[28] Later he introduces the chapter about the remedies with a quotation from Jeremiah 18:8—"If that nation against which I have spoken, shall repent of their evil, I also will repent of the evil that I have thought to do to them"—and adds that "therefore in times of pestilence the prime remedy is penitence and confession."[29]

Jacobi's work was the most popular in our sample of 38 non-medical manuscript miscellanies with plague tracts: it figures in 15 manuscripts, while the second most popular, that of Sigismundus Albicus,[30] only in 2. And out of the 15 manuscripts containing Jacobi's work, 11 contain it in the revised and augmented version. In other words, in the clerical milieus to which Jacobi's plague tract was sometimes transplanted, preference was given to its revised and augmented version, made more compatible with religious interpretations of the disease.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from George R. Keiser's study of the adaptation of John of Burgundy's plague tract by the English Dominican, Thomas Moulton, around 1475.[31] Whereas in the original Latin text God is only mentioned in formulaic expressions and the problem of divine punishment does not appear at all, Moulton's English version begins with a description of plague as divine retribution, and then goes on to discuss the astrological causes of pestilence as instruments of God's will. Moulton had apparently perceived a gap between John of Burgundy's attitude and the exigencies of the new social environment for which his adaptation was destined.

In a relatively recent survey of plague tracts, Thilo Esser has argued that they "fully adhere to the interpretation of plague as God's punishment."[32] Nevertheless,

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27 In the *Swedish* town of Wästerås (called *Westrosia* or *Arosia* in Latin, easy to confuse with Ar[h]usia or Aar[h]usium meaning the *Danish* town of Aarhus), there lived a certain Benedictus Canuti who was elected bishop by the cathedral chapter in 1461, but unfortunately, he died the next year before his consecration. For an overview of the related historiography, see Maitz and Keil, "Der Pest-'Brief an die Frau von Plauen.'"

28 *Regimen contra pestilentiam* (without foliation): "Et quando ista signa apparent timendum est de pestilencia nisi Dominus omnipotens ammovere voluerit."

29 Ibid.: "Ergo summum remedium est tempore pestilencie penitencia et confessio." If not indicated otherwise, translated quotations from the Bible follow the Douay-Rheims version.

30 Sudhoff, "Pestschriften," *Archiv* 7 (1914): 89–96; Rainer Rudolf, s.v. "Albich, Sigismund," in *Verfasserlexikon*, 1:cols 154–5.

31 George R. Keiser, "Two Medieval Plague Treatises and their Afterlife in Early Modern England," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 58 (2003): 292–324. The Latin original of John of Burgundy's plague tract was edited in Sudhoff, "Pestschriften," *Archiv* 5 (1912/13): 62–9; for a modern English translation, see Rosemary Horrox, trans. and ed., *The Black Death*, Manchester Medieval Sources 1 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 184–93.

32 Esser, "Die Pest—Strafe Gottes oder Naturphänomen?" 33: "die medizinischen Pestschriften an der Interpretation der Pest als Gottesstrafe durchaus festhalten."

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the texts he refers to as proofs for this statement are all from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In addition, all of them are written in German and thus, probably, intended for a wider, non-specialist readership. Whereas readers of fourteenth-century Latin plague tracts were part of a more restricted medical discourse where topics not immediately relevant for the medical understanding of pestilence could be ignored—as we have seen in the case of the Paris *Compendium* above—these German texts had to provide a full picture of the disease, including its religious aspects. Thus, the evidence marshaled by Esser can be used to strengthen the case for the growing presence of a religious approach to pestilence in fifteenth-century plague tracts as a consequence of, among other things, the diversification of their readership.

Such a diversification of readership, however, also implies the increasing diffusion of medical ideas: plague tracts written in the vernacular and copied or printed in growing numbers made the lore of the doctors accessible to a relatively broad circle of readers. And the accessibility of medical ideas may well have exercised a pressure on clerics in the capacity of preachers to learn what their audience could possibly know about plague medicine and, thus, to read or adapt plague tracts themselves, as did Thomas Moulton and the copyists of pastoral miscellanies discussed above. But if there was such a trend, then it must have been manifest in preaching related to the plague as well, and now we turn to this topic.

Plague Sermons and Their Diffusion

One possible way of explaining the apparent lack of scholarly interest—mentioned at the beginning of this chapter—in sermons delivered in the course of or in relation to plague epidemics in the Middle Ages is to suppose that preaching in times of pestilence was unusual. If we consider that contemporary physicians regarded pestilence as a contagious disease right from the first opinions formulated in 1348,[33] and their primary advice was *cito, longe, tarde*, then such a supposition may sound reasonable. But in spite of medical opinion and advice, organizing similarly dangerous processions and collective prayers were among the most common reactions of church leaders, and Pope Clement VI himself is believed to have instituted a special mass against the plague.[34] Moreover, the problem of flight and contagion are entirely ruled out if the sermon is delivered before the arrival of the epidemic, or in memory of having survived one.

A more probable hypothesis would hold that those narrative sources that give us most of our information about processions, prayers, and masses against the

33 Arrizabalaga, "Facing the Black Death," 259–64; Samuel K. Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in the Early Renaissance* (London: Edward Arnold, 2002), 114–18.

34 Jean-Noël Biraben, *Les hommes et la peste en France et dans les pays européens et méditerranéens*, Civilisations et sociétés 36 (Paris: Mouton, 1976), 2:62–9; Wood, *Clement VI*, 66.

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plague, were not so much interested in sermons—perhaps because sermons were usually not as spectacular as processions. As it was pointed out by Augustine Thompson,

> chroniclers, like modern journalists, have an eye for the extravagant, the exceptional, and the unexpected. Narrators love the dramatic and exceptional gesture—such as Robert of Lecce ripping off his Franciscan habit to reveal a suit of armor during a crusade sermon. Narrative sources work best for exceptional revivalists and preaching "super-stars."[35]

The narrative accounts of fifteenth-century plague preaching known to me fit this description of authorial interests in chronicles. The activity of the just mentioned—initially Observant, later Conventual Franciscan—Roberto Caracciolo (also known as Robert of Lecce) in Perugia and Rome during the plague of 1448 is a characteristic example. Roberto arrived in Perugia well before Lent, on January 7, and started to preach in the church of San Francesco. Already on this day, not very important in the calendar, there was great interest in his preaching in all strata of the populace: "quite a number of people went there, that is burghers of a higher standing and others"—writes a local chronicle, the *Diario del Graziani*.[36] It was probably due to the weather that he first preached *in piazza* only on the third Sunday in Lent. But then, his full oratorical machinery was mobilized. According to the *Diario*,

> There were roughly fifteen thousand persons there with burghers and peasants among them; and the men and women occupied their places [already] at 5 and 6 at night; and the sermon lasted for roughly 4 hours. And Roberto preached about the holy peace, and then showed a crucifix to the people in such a way that made everybody cry wholeheartedly; and the crying and shouting "Iesu misericordia" lasted for roughly half an hour.[37]

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35 Augustine Thompson OP., "From Texts to Preaching: Retrieving the Medieval Sermon as an Event," in *Preacher, Sermon, and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig, A New History of the Sermon 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 13–37, at 25.

36 Ariodante Fabretti, ed., "Cronaca della città di Perugia dal 1309 al 1491 nota col nome di Diario del Graziani," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 16 (1850–51): 69–750 (henceforth *Diario del Graziani*), at 598: "andavace assai gente, cioè cittadini de maggiore qualità e delli altri." On Roberto's activity in Perugia in relation to the plague, see also Mara Nerbano, *Il teatro della devozione: Confraternite e spettacolo nell'Umbria medievale* (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2006), 307–8.

37 *Diario del Graziani*, 598: "ce fuoro circa quindece milia persone fra citadini e contadini: et li homini e le donne pigliavano el luoco alle 5 e alle 6 ore de notte; et teneva la predica circa 4 ore. Et fece la predica della santa pace, et poi mostrò alle gente uno crucifisso, de modo che fece piangere ogni persona cordialissimamente, et durò circa meza ora el piangere e 'l gridare Iesu misericordia."

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Somewhat more than three weeks later, on Holy Wednesday, Roberto tried to enhance the effects of his preaching through a large-scale procession in the city:

> After the sermon, he organized a procession with all the religious of Perugia, where present were the Monsignore and the priors, and all the noblemen and noblewomen and generally all persons of higher rank, continuously singing litanies, and some lauds and prayers; and some women were dressed in white. And [the procession] went to the church of St. Peter praying God that the plague come to an end.[38]

It is a striking feature of this account that all the elite of the city was present at the sermon and the ensuing procession: apparently no one followed the advice of *cito, longe, tarde*, not even those who could have easily done so.[39] After leaving Perugia, Roberto went to Rome, where the plague was also raging. In the words of Stefano Infessura, secretary to the senate, he "preached on the Capitolium square and many [people] made peace in Rome prompted by him; and everybody was shouting 'misericordia' because of the great mortality that was in Rome."[40]

Given the belief in the contagious nature of the disease, a spectacular delivery that did not lead to an immediate and perceptible increase in the number of the sick could strengthen the preacher's charisma. According to his sixteenth-century biographer, when Bernardino of Feltre preached 32 sermons between Advent and Epiphany in Padua in 1477–78, nobody was infected despite the rampant epidemic. And when the preacher was criticized by some—ecclesiastics and laymen alike—for risking the life of his audience, he is reported to have answered that "the words of God are not sources of death but of life; moreover, the remedy against the plague is listening to sermons."[41]

Another Observant Franciscan, Marco da Montegallo (1425–96), furnishes additional proof of the latter statement. According to Lucas Wadding, when the plague was decimating the town of Camerino in 1458, Marco "went there out of compassion for the deceased and induced everybody in crying and mourning

38 Ibid., 600: "ditta che fu la predica, se fece la processione con tutti li religiosi de Peroscia, dove ce andò Monsignore e li Priori e tutti li gentilomini e le donne, e generalmente ogni persona fina alle rede, sempre cantando letanye et alcune laude et orazione; et alcune donne ce andaro vestite de bianco: et andarono a S. Pietro pregando Dio che cessi la peste."

39 There may have been an alternating rhythm of fleeing the city and remaining there to implore God's help communally. During the next plague in Perugia, in 1464, the city became almost empty because of the flights, but 12 years later, in 1476, there were big processions again. See Nerbano, *Il teatro della devozione*, 309–10.

40 Oreste Tommasini, ed., *Diario della città di Roma di Stefano Infessura scribasenato* (Rome: Forzani, 1890), 48: "predicao nella piazza di Campituoglio, et fece fare de molte paci in Roma, et tutti strillavano misericordia per la grande morìa ch'era in Roma."

41 Bernardino Guslino, *Vita del beato Bernardino da Feltre*, VIII, 3 as quoted by Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, *Pescatori di uomini: Predicatori e piazze alla fine del Medioevo* (Bologna: Mulino, 2005), 219: "la parola di Dio non è cagion di morte, ma di vita, anzi il rimedio contro la peste è andar alle prediche."

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to wipe their sins away, guaranteeing the termination of pestilence in case they do penance immediately; and, indeed, it turned out to have happened as he had foretold it."[42]

But even if we can find some references to preaching in connection with the plague, it seems that—compared to sermons about saints, or about topics like marriage, virginity, confession, communion, or even wealth and poverty—ermons largely or entirely devoted to the theme of the plague, which I will call "plague sermons," have not come down to us in great numbers. Jussi Hanska has recently reflected on this problem concerning the broader category of catastrophe sermons that respond to epidemics, earthquakes, fires, and so on. He argues that such occasional sermons were seldom retained, because it was difficult to insert them in the liturgical order of sermon collections. And, in addition, sermons for the Rogation Days normally included in sermonaries could be easily transformed into catastrophe sermons since they tended to recount the origins of the minor and major litany, the first of which was traditionally connected to an earthquake and other calamities in the times of St Mamertus, Bishop of Vienne in the second half of the fifth century, while the second was related to a plague in Rome in 590 miraculously fought against by Gregory the Great.[43]

As a consequence of this difficulty (and redundancy) in the process of transmission, samples of sermons about the plague can only be constituted in a rather unsystematic fashion. At the heart of the 16 "plague sermons" considered in this chapter[44] lie those which are marked in manuscript rubrics (or in early printed editions) either specifically as *de peste*, *contra pestem*, *de plestilentia*, and so on,

42 Lucas Wadding, *Annales Minorum seu trium ordinum a S. Francisco institutorum* (Rome, 1736), ad an. 1496, 15:124: "pereunti populo compassus, illuc profectus, universum ad planctum et luctum abstergendis peccatis excitavit, fidejubens cessaturam luem, modo poeniterent; atque ita revera compertum est, uti praedixit, evenisse." The story also figures in the nineteenth-century acts of Marco da Montegallo's canonization process, where it is said to have been taken from the Franciscan chronicler, Mark of Lisbon (d. 1591). Wadding may have known it from the same source. See Elide Mercatili Indelicato, "Marco da Montegallo: Aspetti e problemi della vita e delle opere," in *Marco da Montegallo (1425–1496): Il tempo, la vita, le opere; Atti del Convegno di studio, Ascoli Piceno 12 ottobre 1996 e Montegallo 23 agosto 1997*, ed. Silvano Bracci (Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani, 1999), 71–229, at 89.

43 Hanska, *Strategies of Sanity and Survival*, 67–81. In early modern Germany, sermons about the plague, the Turks, famine, and other topics not associated firmly to specific days or pericopes were frequently appended to the end of printed sermons cycles; see Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils*, index, s.v. "plague."

44 Anonymous, "De peste," in Assisi, Biblioteca Comunale, MS 562 (dated to 1454/86), ff. 36r–40v; Gabriel Barletta OP. (flor. 1453–81), "In sermone de flagellis Dei," in *Sermones* (Haguenau, 1514), ff. 196r–198r (sermon 30); Bernardino da Feltre OFM. (d. 1494), "Feria quinta post secundam Dominicam post Pasca in die S. Marci: De Peste," in *Sermoni del beato Bernardino Tomitano da Feltre nella redazione di fra Bernardino Bulgarino da Brescia*, ed. Carlo Varischi da Milano (Milan: Renon, 1964), 2:265–73 (sermon 63); Gabriel Biel (d. 1495), "Dominica 22: Contra pestilentiam sermo medicinalis," "Dominica 23: Contra pestilentiam sermo medicinalis," and "Dominica 24: Contra pestilentiam sermo medicinalis" with two appendices: "De non timendo mortem in tempore pestis" and "Questio de fuga pestis," in *Sermones dominicales Gabrielis Biel Spirensis hyemales, estivales de tempore, Sermones medicinales contra pestem epidimie* . . . (Haguenau, 1510), ff. 144r–152v;

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or more broadly as *de plagis*, *de flagellis*, and so on. These are the easiest to find by checking the rubrics as reproduced in manuscript catalogues and by searching through Johannes Baptist Schneyer's repertory of medieval Latin sermons.[45] The identification of plague sermons on the basis of the manuscript rubrics has the additional advantage that these texts were perceived by contemporaries (by their copyists or printers, at least) as written explicitly about the plague (or—in the case of the *de plagis*, *de flagellis*, and similar rubrics—about disasters, including the plague), and thus one can expect them to provide a broader treatment of the subject comparable to the plague tracts. Of course, given the traditional interpretation of plague as divine punishment and the underlying association between disease and sin, a substantial digression about the plague was possible in sermons for practically any occasion. But without appropriate indices in the manuscripts, it could hardly be found even by a contemporary preacher browsing a library for *predicabilia*—not to mention a modern reader who looks for plague sermons.

Apart from the specifically plague-related rubrics, another—apparently self-evident—criterion for identifying sermons about pestilence would be the feasts of plague saints. Unfortunately, my survey of post-1348 sermons for the feast of St Sebastian has found that—according to a sample of surviving texts, at least—the growth of his veneration during and after the Black Death did not affect considerably the way his memory was kept alive on the pulpit, and many

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Thomas Brinton (d. 1389), "Dominica [unspecified]," in *The Sermons of Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester (1373–1389)*, ed. Mary Aquinas Devlin, Camden Third Series 86 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1954), 2:322–6 (sermon 70), partly translated in Horrox, *The Black Death*, 143–8; Bernardino de' Busti OFM. (d. 1513), "Sabbato post quartam dominicam in quadragesima de pestilentie signis, causis, et remediis," in *Rosarium sermonum predicabilium ad faciliorem predicantium commoditatem novissime compilatum* (Venice, 1498), ff. 256r–261v (sermon 40); Gottschalk Hollen OESA. (d. 1481), "Dominica 7. post Pentecosten: De pestilentia," in *Sermonum opus exquisitissimum: Pars hyemalis et aestivalis* (Haguenau, 1517), no pagination (sermon 61); Roberto Caracciolo OFM. (d. 1495), "Sermo de iudicio pestilentie," in *Sermones prestantissimi viri Roberti de Litio ordinis minorum, sacre theologie professoris, pontificis Aquinatis* (Lyons, 1500), no pagination ([sermones alii], sermon 12); Martin Plantsch (d. 1533), "Dominica 14. De peste," in Tübingen, UB, Mc 193 (dated to 1502/06), ff. 31v–32v; Sancho Porta OP. (d. 1429), "Dominica 9. post Trinitatem vel in mortalitate," in *Sermones estivales de tempore venerabilis Santii Porta sacri Ordinis Predicatorum cum gemina eorundem admodum vtili tabula seu indice* (Augsburg, 1514), ff. 89r–90v; Porta, "In festo b. Matthie apostoli," "In festo martyrum Cesaraugustanorum et contra pestem mortalitatis," and "Pro mortalitate," in *Sanctorale vel Sermones de sanctis venerabilis Santii Porta sacri ordinis predicatorum cum gemina eorundem admodum vtili tabula, seu indice* (Augsburg, 1514), ff. 11r–12v, ff. 48v–49v, and ff. 73r–74r; Wendelin Steinbach (d. 1519), "Sermo medicinalis contra pestilentiam," in Tübingen, UB, Mc 188 (dated to ca. 1479), f. 234v. Unfortunately, I could not consider the sermon by Pope Clement VI in Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, MS 240, mentioned in Wood, *Clement VI*, 66.

45 Johannes Baptist Schneyer, *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1150–1350*, 11 vols, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters 43 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1969–95); its continuation was published, after the death of Schneyer, as *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters 1350 bis 1500*, ed. Ludwig Hödl and Wendelin Knoch, CD-ROM (Münster: Aschendorff, 2001).

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preachers touched on the theme of pestilence only in passing.[46] The situation is further complicated by the vagueness of the category of plague saints, since a great number of holy men and women could assume the role of protector against or liberator from pestilence depending, first of all, on local traditions.[47] Among the plague sermons considered in this article, for example, there is one written for the feast day of the Martyrs of Saragossa, who were hardly ever implored for help in other parts of Europe. Therefore, the feasts of saints offer no easy access to plague sermons, even if some of them—rather stumbled upon than found in a systematic search—contain ample treatments of the subject.

Of the 16 plague sermons that I have found, 3 were written for feasts of saints: the already mentioned Martyrs of Saragossa (April 16), St Mark (April 25), and St Matthew (September 21). One sermon was to be delivered on the Saturday following the fourth Sunday in Lent (between mid-March and mid-April), while six were on regular Sundays: the seventh after Pentecost (between the end of June and the beginning of August) as well as the ninth (in July or early August), the fourteenth (in September or early October), and the twenty-second, twenty-third, and twenty-fourth (between late October and early December) after Trinity. Finally, six sermons have no assigned liturgical place in the manuscripts or early printed editions I used.[48]

The almost even distribution of these sermons in the calendar confirms the above proposition that preaching about pestilence had no firm place in the liturgy. And it also suggests that their actual place was possibly connected either to the incoming news of a current outbreak menacing the city, or to that Sunday or feast day when an earlier epidemic ceased to decimate the populace; otherwise, it would not have made sense to write plague sermons for an occasion like the seventh Sunday after Pentecost, when ordinary preachers in ordinary years would have liked to talk about something else. Thomas Brinton, for example, most probably preached his sermon right after and in response to the Archbishop of Canterbury's letter of July 15, 1375, about prayers and processions against the already ravaging plague; Gottschalk Hollen composed his sermon after the 1465 plague of Osnabrück, of which he was a survivor.[49]

If the plague sermon has no stable place in the church calendar and, as a consequence, in regular sermon collections based on the latter, and if it is taken for

46 Ottó Gecser, "Sermons on St. Sebastian after the Black Death (1348–ca. 1500)," in *Promoting the Saints: Cults and Their Contexts from Late Antiquity until the Early Modern Period; Essays in Honor of Gábor Klaniczay for his 60th Birthday*, ed. Ottó Gecser et al. (Budapest: CEU Press, 2011[2010]), 261–72.

47 For a classification of plague saints, see Heinrich Dormeier, "Laienfrömmigkeit in den Pestzeiten des 15./16. Jahrhunderts," in *Maladies et société (XIIe–XVIIIe siècles)*, ed. Neithard Bulst and Robert Delort (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1989), 269–306, at 284–98.

48 See note 44 above.

49 Horrox, *The Black Death*, 120 (the Archbishop's letter) and 144 (Brinton's reference to it). Hollen, "De pestilentia" (no pagination), §. C: "Vidi ego in civitate Osnaburgensi anno Domini MCCCCLXV, quando fuit ibi pestilential . . ."; see also Willigis Eckermann, s.v. "Hollen, Gottschalk," in *Verfasserlexikon*, 4:cols 109–16, at 110.

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granted that the cause of the plague is sin and its remedy is repentance, then writing such sermons is a pointless effort: one can easily assemble them, if needed, from other sermons. After all, exhortation to penance is one of the most essential topics in medieval preaching. A separate plague sermon becomes necessary if it can say something more and, especially, if it is supposed to do so. This something more can, for instance, be the defense of the view that plague is caused by sin and cured by repentance against other explanations put forward by doctors and popularized by a growing number of Latin and vernacular plague tracts increasingly available—as we have seen—in pastoral miscellanies too. Even if, obviously, a sample of merely 16 texts can well be biased, the chronological distribution of the sermons fits this hypothesis: the majority of them stems from the second half of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century, that is, from a period when plague tracts and the medical understanding of pestilence could be better known in the lower ranks of the clergy.

Plague Sermons and Plague Medicine

The attitudes of preachers to plague medicine in the sermons I consulted fall into two main categories which can be called responsive and antagonistic. Those having a responsive attitude acknowledged the partial validity of naturalistic etiology and tried to reduce it to God's will by showing that these are merely the intermediary (secondary) causes of the epidemic. The Austin friar, Gottschalk Hollen, for example, lists four natural causes—the corruption of the air, the constellation of the stars, the earthquakes, and the disposition of the human body—and points out that they are ultimately dependent on God. Nevertheless, he takes these causes seriously and comes back to them throughout the sermon. For instance, having raised the question "whether it is allowed to flee from plague as many people do and [whether] it is without sin," he opens his answer by saying that "the doctors reply that every man must flee quickly from a place when the air begins to be pestilential,"[50] and goes on to discuss in detail the dangers of selecting, involuntarily, a destination where the remnants (*reliquia*) of a past plague can infect us, as well as the possibility of spreading the disease further through person-to-person transmission. It is only after the medical opinion that he cites the scriptural authorities for and against flight, and the moral issues at stake when those responsible for the spiritual and corporeal well-being of others leave the plague-stricken community.[51]

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50 Hollen, "De pestilentia" (no pagination), §. H: "utrum licitum sit fugere pestilentiam sicut multi faciunt, et hoc sine peccato. Respondent medici quod omnino [*recte*: omnis] homo debet fugere a loco cito quando aer incipit pestilentiari."

51 For the religious and moral issues involved in fleeing the plague, see Dormeier, "Die Flucht vor der Pest als religiöses Problem." For the problem of infectious remnants of past epidemics, see Vivian Nutton, "The Seeds of Disease: An Explanation of Contagion and Infection from the Greeks to the Renaissance," *Medical History* 27 (1983): 1–27.

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The Observant Franciscan preacher of the late fifteenth century, Bernardino de' Busti, asserts that all natural causes are in the power of God, but does not hesitate to underline their importance as well:

> *Epidemia* or *pestilentia* is the universal transformation of the air into a putrid or the worst quality which is very much pestiferous. When this has to happen is not possible to know for sure, because this is in the disposition of God, and he can send it immediately, *ad libitum*, without any previous signal. Nevertheless, when it follows from natural causes, especially from celestial bodies and the air, we can recognize from certain signs that it has to come. . . . [And it is of] great importance to know future calamities beforehand, since thus we can be prepared.[52]

In discussing the natural causes of pestilence, Busti calls attention not only to physical but to social mechanisms as well by making the observation that in great hunger and poverty, people moved by necessity "eat many corrupt, harmful things which are contrary and abominable to [human] nature. . . . And the consumption of such things generates putrid and venomous diseases. . . . And, consequently, the pestilence of the poor is also caused by the rich who has not wanted to provide for them."[53]

The theologian and preacher of the Cathedral of Mainz, Gabriel Biel (ca. 1410/15–95), in the first of his three *sermones medicinales conta pestilentiam* accepts a limited efficacy for bodily medicine but stresses the superiority of the spiritual one, that is, of penitence:

> We use various medications, that is potions, pills, powders, phlebotomy, fumigations and perfumes. . . . And these are good for many; but not for everybody. Sometimes those who are the most afraid and the most interested in applying such cures, die among the first ones. And it is not possible either to prepare a universal medicine for everybody because of

52 Bernardino de' Busti, "De pestilentie signis, causis, et remediis," f. 256va: "Epidemia sive pestilentia est mutatio aeris in putredinem vel pessimam qualitatem universaliter et multis pestiferam. Que quando debeat evenire nullus licet scire possit pro certo quia hoc stat in dispositione Dei, et ipse potest eam mittere in instanti ad suum libitum nullis indiciis precedentibus. Tamen quando venit ex causis naturalibus, maxime corporum celestium et aeris, possumus per aliqua signa cognoscere quando debeat evenire. . . . Est igitur magna utilitas prescire futura mala ratione preparationis."

53 Ibid., f. 257rb: "comedunt multa corrupta, nociva et nature contraria ac abhominabilia. . . . Ex talium enim comestione generantur febres putride et venenose. . . . Et consequenter pestilentiatis pauperibus etiam [per] divites qui eis providere noluerunt de necessariis pestilentia pene causatur." In a Lent sermon about sodomy, the Observant Franciscan preacher, James of the Marches, posits a *physical* connection between the sin of the sodomites and the corruption of the air, and draws the conclusion that "ideo in Ytalia sepe est pestis propter istud vitium." Iacobus de Marchia, *Sermones dominicales*, ed. Renato Lioi (Falconara Marittima: Biblioteca Francescana, 1978), 1:458, quoted in Sensi, "Santuari politici 'contra pestem,'" 1:335–6.

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> the different complexions. There are also those suffering from poverty who cannot afford to buy these medications. But lest this pestiferous contagion does you harm, I offer you some universal medications stemming from the best supplied pharmacy of the most experienced physician; if you decide to use them, I assure you that this plague cannot do you any harm.[54]

Despite his emphasis on spiritual remedies, Biel's extensive application of medical similes and metaphors throughout his plague sermons not only reveals the breadth of his medical learning but presupposes some familiarity with and appreciation of bodily medicine on behalf of his intended audience as well.

The second typical attitude of preachers vis-à-vis plague medicine, the antagonistic one, implies the rejection of naturalistic explanations and remedies. The most radical example of this attitude in my sermon sample is Bernardino of Feltre, who asserts that "the teachings of medicine are opposed to the divine order, as they advise you against fasting, do not allow you to be awake at night, and deter you from meditation." "Whom do you want to follow?" asks Bernardino of his audience, "Christ and the Apostles or Galen and the physicians? Christ teaches us, that in this world we must lose our souls, that is, our bodily lives; Galen teaches us that we have to save them. But those who want to save them in this world lose them in the future one."[55] In addition to these arguments for the contradiction between Christianity and medicine, Bernardino portrays medicine as unable to explain even its own methods of healing. With reference to Peter of Abano, he says the following: "I remember this from the Conciliator, when he talks about theriac. What does it mean that so many poisonous substances go into it, and it is

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54 Biel, "Dominica 22," f. 144v: "Variis medicinalis decoccionibus utimur, scilicet potionibus, pillulis, pulveribus, phlebotomia, suffumigationibus et odoriferis. . . . Et quidem multis hec corporaliter prosunt. Sed non omnibus. Nonnunquam qui magis huiusmodi cure intendunt plurimumque timent moriuntur primi. Neque enim potest universalis aliqua medicina corporalis preparari omnibus equa propter complexionum differencias valitura. Sunt quoque gravati paupertate qui dictas medicinas comparare non valent. . . . Sed ne contagio hec pestifera vos noceat, afferam vobis medicinas quasdam universales, efficacissimas, de opulentissima medici expertissimi apotheca quibus si uti volueritis, certos vos omnes facio, pestem istam vobis nocere omnino non posse."

55 Bernardino da Feltre, "De Peste," 2:267: "Contraria divine conditioni precepta medicine sunt, que a ieiunio revocant, lucubrare non sinunt, ab intentione meditationis [*in ed.* medicationis] abducunt. . . . Cuius vis esse imitator: Christi et Apostolorum, aut Galieni et medicorum? Christus in hoc mundo docet perdere animam, idest vitam corporalem; et Galienus salvare etc. Sed, qui in hoc mundo volunt salvam facere, in futuro perdet eam." In the first of his three sermons *Ad leprosos et abiectos* (ca. 1261), Gilbert of Tournai argues that "the devil becomes a physician disputing the complexions" when he tries to dissuade us from penitential life: "Minatur ut terreat cum uolenti transire ad frugem melioris uite ostendit propositi difficultatem, complexionis fragilitatem, uestium asperitatem, lectorum austeritatem, ciborum uilitatem, uigilias, ieiunia et labores et omnia carni contraria suggerendo: 'Ex hiis turbantur complexiones, nascuntur egritudines.' Et factus est dyabolus phisicus disputans de complexionibus, et si perseueremus in bono proposito minatur mortem imminentem." See Nicole Bériou and François-Olivier Touati, *Voluntate Dei leprosus: Les lépreux entre conversion et exclusion aux XIIème et XIIIème siècles*, Testi, studi, strumenti 4 (Spoleto: CISAM, 1991), 130.

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still so good, if not that there are some properties of herbs which are hidden and unknown to us. Everything comes from God."[56]

Bernardino's rejection of medical remedies for the plague has a twofold foundation. On the one hand, he seems to regard medicine as futile against the will of God—a view that plague tracts (beginning with the opinion of the Paris masters seen above) tended to oppose by saying that medicine had been created by God for the purpose of curing diseases. The fifteenth-century German doctor, Hans Folz, went so far as arguing that those who fail to use drugs shorten their own lives intentionally.[57]

The other basis of Bernardino's rejection of medical remedies is connected to acknowledging the (potential) contradictions between the need for penance, ordered by the Church, and the temperance vis-à-vis the six non-naturals (air, food and drink, sleep and watch, motion and rest, evacuation and repletion, and the passions of the mind) recommended in the plague tracts. It was already pointed out in the Paris *Compendium*, for example, that

> since sometimes illness of the body is due to accidents of the soul, excessive anger, sadness, and anxiety are to be avoided; [the ill] should be full of hope and able to control their imagination; they should make peace with God, because in that way they will fear death less; they should live in joy and happiness as much as they can.[58]

This advice may have fit a contemporary view of good death but only for those who did not have—or did not believe to have—grave sins to confess and repent. If, however, plague is a divine punishment for human sins, then endorsing the idea that sadness is a source of illness runs contrary to the advice preachers tended to give to the plague-stricken population, namely mourning and lamenting the past offenses that led to God's anger. The same applies to fasting: strongly discouraged by the doctors but a centerpiece of the weaponry against sin for the preachers.[59]

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56 Bernardino da Feltre, "De Peste," 2:267: "Recordor de Conciliatore, quando loquitur de tyriaca. Quid vult dicere, quod intrant tot res venenose, et tamen est sic bona, nisi propter quasdam proprietates in herbis ignotas et que nos latent? Tuto è da Dio."

57 Esser, "Die Pest—Strafe Gottes oder Naturphänomen?" 51–3.

58 Rébouis, *Étude historique*, 114: "quia nonnumquam ex accidentibus anime infirmitas corporis contingere potest, iram caveant et tristiciam nimiam, sollicitudinem; sint bone spei et fortis ymaginationis, cum Deo faciant pacem, quia inde mortem minus timebunt; in gaudio vero et leticia, quantum plus poterunt, vivant." For similar recommendations and their interpretation, see Arrizabalaga, "Facing the Black Death," 279–80; Francisco Javier Santa Eugenia, "Contre la mort, l'exercise hédoniste des sens: Le *Consiglio contro a pistolenza* de Maestro Tommaso del Garbo," *Micrologus* 10 (2002): 353–63; Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed*, 240–43; and Teodoro Katinis, *Medicina e filosofia in Marsilio Ficino: Il Consilio contro la pestilenza* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 2007), 34–40 and 143–50.

59 See also note 42 and the related discussion in the main text above. Of course, *tristitia* was included in the various schemes of the seven (or eight) capital vices since the fourth century—alongside *acedia*, subordinated to it, (partly) comprising it, or merging with it. More precisely, *tristitia* was

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Another example of the antagonistic attitude is presented by Thomas Brinton, who concentrates his attack not on the remedies but on the supposed celestial causes of "pestilence and other misfortunes":

> Let those who ascribe such things to planets and constellations rather than to sin say what sort of planet reigned at the time of Noah, when God drowned the whole world except for eight souls, unless the planet of malice and sin. . . . Or what sort of planet, unless that of sin, reigned at the burning of the Sodomites? . . . Or what sort of planet reigned at the time of David, when thousands of men were killed by plague, unless the planet of sin . . . Today the corruption of lechery and the imagining of evil are greater than in the days of Noah, for a thousand ways of sinning which were unknown then have been discovered now, and the sin of the Sodomites prevails beyond measure, and today the cruelty of lords is greater than in the time of David. And therefore, let us not blame the flails of God on the planets or the elements but rather on our sins, saying, as in Genesis [42:21], "We deserve to suffer these things, because we have sinned."[60]

Although neither the doctors themselves, nor their specific suggestions for cure are explicitly mentioned in Brinton's text, by implication he must have been critical of them. To the question "Given that sin is the primary cause of the pestilence, what remedies are available to stay the divine hand?" he answers that "the best remedy is the confession of sins," and then goes on to explain how repentance should be done properly.[61]

A further strategy related to the antagonistic attitude is that of Gabriele Barletta who examines three opinions about the question "whether calamities that happen in this life—hunger, plagues, famine and the like—come from God." The first opinion that "the demon is the cause of all these calamities" he connects to Manichean heresy and by implication rejects it; the second opinion "of some philosophers who thought that all these come from the influence of celestial bodies" is left unanswered; but it is the third that is brought to prevail, namely that "God is the cause of all wrongs that happen in this life" with the qualification that "wrong" (*malum*) means here not "sin" (*culpa*) but "punishment" (*pena*).[62]

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an ambiguous concept that could be construed both as a virtue and as a vice, "[f]or the sorrow that is according to God worketh penance, steadfast unto salvation; but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10). Nevertheless, even "sorrow that is according to God" is an accident of the soul that endangers health. On *tristitia*, see Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), and Susan Snyder, "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition," *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965): 18–59.

60 Horrox, *The Black Death*, 145–6; *The Sermons of Thomas Brinton*, 2:323.

61 Horrox, *The Black Death*, 147; *The Sermons of Thomas Brinton*, 2:324.

62 Barletta, "In sermone de flagellis Dei," f. 196v: "Utrum mala que veniunt in presenti vita—fames, pestis, caristia, infirmitates et huiusmodi—sint a Deo? . . . Una dicit quod demon est horum malorum causa." . . . Secunda opinio quorundam philosophorum qui credebant omnia ista venire ab influentia corporum celestium . . . Deus est causa omnium malorum qui fiunt in presenti vita."

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To be sure, preachers did not feel it obligatory to take an explicit stance vis-à-vis the naturalistic etiology of pestilence. Roberto Caracciolo in his *Sermo de iudicio pestilentie*, simply disregards the natural causes and provides an exhaustive discussion of those sins, altogether 30, which were—and by implication can be—punished by pestilence according to scriptural or patristic authorities.[63] In a strict logical sense it does not follow from this elaboration on the plague-as-punishment view that plague can only be caused by divine judgment intending to castigate the sinners; but Roberto's comprehensive catalogue makes it possible for any preacher building on his model to argue for the plague-as-punishment view since a subset of the 30 sins was surely committed anywhere and anytime in sufficient numbers. Having a biblical word-concordance, which had been available since the thirteenth century,[64] and a Bible with extensive glosses, the compilation of such a catalogue was also the easiest way of putting together a plague sermon. Probably for both of these reasons, some list of plague-provoking sins—even if shorter—is included in the majority of plague sermons I know.

Nevertheless, whether they were responsive or antagonistic to plague medicine, or they simply paid no attention to it, many of the preachers considered here realized the problem that God's punishment is (apparently) unjust: in the first place, it punishes the innocent, including children, and its geographic distribution is also uneven despite the uniformly sinful conduct of Christians everywhere. The (seeming) injustice of God in sending plague to the earth constitutes the greatest challenge to the plague-as-punishment view. It has been suggested in modern scholarship that—due to this challenge—by the late fifteenth century, even the most stubborn supporters of the plague-as-punishment view had to make concessions to naturalistic explanations and allow that plague is sometimes not caused by God's anger.[65] Whether or not this argument holds, most plague sermons tried to give some account of the (apparent) caprices of divine wrath.

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63 Roberto Caracciolo, "Sermo de iudicio pestilentie" (no pagination): "*Iudicia* Dei [in Vulg. *tua*] *abyssus multa*. Psal. XXXV. [Ps. 35:7] Ezech. XIIII. capitulo dicit Dominus: *Si immisero pestilentiam super terram* . . . [quotes Ezek. 14:19–20]. Hec ibi. In quibus verbis notabimus triginta peccata, propter que Deus gloriosus pestilentiam mandat. Primum est peccatum originale . . ." The remaining 29 sins are the following: peccatum luxurie, sacrilegium, transgressio festivitatum, simonia, idolatria, inhonoratio parentum, fraudatio decimarum, obstinatio, homicidium, gula, diffamatio, incredulitas, superbia, avaritia, usura, usurpatio, fraus emptionis et venditionis, oppressio ex acceptione personarum, perversitas iudiciorum, negociatio dolosa, periurium, blasphemia, consensus in malum, negligentia correctionis, inordinata dilectio, rapina, vanagloria, infidelitas, ingratitudo. These sins do not fit into any single medieval system of classifying morally reproachable behavior, nor do they look like a coherent combination of a given number of such systems; compare to Carla Casagrande, "La moltiplicazione dei peccati: I cataloghi dei peccati nella letteratura pastorale dei secoli XIII–XV," in *La peste nera*, 253–84.

64 Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, "Verbal Concordance to the Scripture," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 44 (1974): 5–30.

65 Esser, "Die Pest—Strafe Gottes oder Naturphänomen?" 55; see also Ann G. Carmichael, "Universal and Particular: The Language of Plague, 1348–1500," in *Pestilential Complexities: Understanding Medieval Plague*, ed. Vivian Nutton, *Medical History*, Supplement 27 (London: Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine, 2008), 17–52, at 25–6.

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The Spanish Dominican, Sancho Porta, who composed his three plague sermons around 1418 in Zaragoza, tries to show that it is in the nature of God's anger that "it is stirred up at many by the viciousness of a single one."[66] Sancho quotes the example of Abimelech from the book of Genesis whose entire family was punished for his own error and the example of Achan from the book of Joshua whose sin led to the collective punishment of the Israelites. "For God sometimes punishes man for the sin of somebody else temporally, but not eternally."[67]

In a similar vein, Bernardino de' Busti tries to show that it is considered normal not only in the Bible but in Roman law as well, that sons die for the sins of their fathers; these punishments, however, are valid only in this world, not in the next. He also suggests that God kills the innocent in order to hide the real meaning of his judgments from the sinful. "For sinners," writes Bernardino, "do not merit to know that the plague comes because of their arrogance and crimes."[68]

Gottschalk Hollen raises the question: "why does the plague always start with the children and the very young?"—which converges with the observation of contemporary chronicles and modern statistics based on surviving burial records—and gives no fewer than seven answers, indicating the extent of the trouble this problem caused for the plague-as-punishment view.[69]

Hollen also observes that there are more plagues in his region, the northwestern part of modern Germany, than elsewhere, and offers a remarkable explanation. Assuming that the punishment resembles, or follows from the sin that provoked it, he writes that

> each region has its own [way of] cursing. Italians wish [each other] the issue of their blood, hence people there frequently die of the issue of blood. Thuringians wish [each other] fevers, hence people there frequently die of fevers. We, on the other hand, wish each other swellings and aposthemes, and hence die of the same.[70]

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66 Porta, "In festo martyrum Cesaraugustanorum," f. 75r: "quod in plures excitatur unius pravitate."

67 Ibid.: "Deus enim aliquando punit hominem pro peccato alterius temporaliter, sed eternaliter non."

68 Bernardino de' Busti, "De pestilentie signis, causis, et remediis," f. 159r: "peccatores enim non merentur intelligere quod ea pestis veniat propter eorum superbiam et delicta."

69 Hollen, "De pestilentia" (no pagination), §. G: "quare pestilentia semper incipit a parvulis et pueris." For another discussion—in an English treatise on the Ten Commandments—of why "God is slaying children by pestilence," see Horrox, *The Black Death*, 134–5. For narrative and statistical evidence of infantile mortality, see Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed*, 216–19, and Ann G. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1986), 11–13.

70 Hollen, "De pestilentia" (no pagination), §. C: "Quelibet regio habet propriam maledictionem. Italici optant fluxum sanguinis, ergo ibi comuniter homines moriuntur in fluxu sanguinis. Thuringi sibi mutuo optant febres, ergo ibi homines communiter moriuntur in febribus. Nos autem optemus nobis mutuo vesicas et apostemata, ergo in eisdem morimur."

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Taken at face value, this theory implies a combination of social and physical causes—similar to the one quoted from Bernardino de' Busti above—which seems to be independent of both God and the stars.

The regional frequency of epidemic outbreaks also implies what had become common coin by the end of the fourteenth century, namely that plague was a recurrent phenomenon. The recurrence of the plague could reinforce the astrological explanations frequently put forward in plague tracts, and it could also raise doubts about its apocalyptic interpretation based on authorities like Luke 21:10–11: "nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there shall be great earthquakes in diverse places, and pestilences, and famines, and terrors from heaven; and there shall be great signs."[71] If plague terminates and resumes years later, and then terminates and resumes again, what sort of apocalyptic sign might it be? Can it still have the same apocalyptic significance it had during the Black Death? Such a problem may have formed the background of Gottschalk Hollen's view that it is the increasing frequency of plagues that has an apocalyptic meaning: "the more we get closer to the end," he says, "the more numerous [plagues] will be."[72] But this is not a good solution because it gives too much space to human foreknowledge and restricts God's autonomy. This is why Sancho Porta does not hesitate to present a genuine historical criticism of apocalyptic interpretations:

> If it is believed that such dangers will be more abundant in the end, it is impossible to determine what is that quantity of dangers that immediately precedes the Day of Judgement or the coming of the Antichrist. Since even in the times of the primitive church there were such heavy persecutions and the corruption of errors proliferated to such an extent that some could think that the coming of the Antichrist was close or imminent, as it is told in the *Ecclesiastica historia* and in the first book of *De viris illustribus*. Hence, the end of the world is not possible to know either from natural reason or from revelation.[73]

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71 On apocalyptic interpretations of the plague, see Robert E. Lerner, "The Black Death and Western European Eschatological Mentalities," *The American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 533–52; and Laura A. Smoller, "Of Earthquakes, Hail, Frogs, and Geography: Plague and the Investigation of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages," in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 156–87.

72 Hollen, "De pestilentia" (no pagination), §. B: "quanto magis appropinquamus ad finem, tanto magis multiplicantur." For the impact of plague's recurrence on its apocalyptic interpretations, see Carmichael, "Universal and Particular," 31–3.

73 Porta, "In festo b. Matthie apostoli," f. 18r: "Et si credatur in fine huius pericula magis abundare, non tamen potest determinari, que sit illa quantitas periculorum que immediate die iudicii precedent, vel Antichristi adventum; cum etiam tempore primitive ecclesie fuerunt persecutiones alique adeo graves, et corruptiones errorum adeo abundarent, quod ab aliquibus tunc vicinus putaretur vel imminens Antichristi adventus, sicut dicitur in ecclesiastica historia et in libro primo de viris illustribus. Item etiam tempus finis mundi non potest sciri nec per naturalem rationem, nec per revelationem."

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Conclusion

Neither of the two samples of sources examined in this article—that of plague tracts in non-medical (pastoral) miscellanies and that of plague sermons—can be regarded as representative of the respective groups of surviving texts, not to mention the lost ones. Nevertheless, their chronological distribution suggests that these groups of texts became relatively frequent only in the fifteenth century, a long time after the Black Death. As to their contents, both of them point to an increased interest in plague medicine among those groups of the clergy who were charged with the *cura animarum*.

The amount of religious content in plague tracts considered broadly seems to correlate with the size and character of their intended audience. Latin plague tracts in medical miscellanies were addressed to a more specialized readership, whereas those in non-medical miscellanies as well as those in the vernacular could reach a wider audience. Purely medical explanations of pestilence, typical of fourteenth-century Latin plague tracts, were apparently not regarded as appropriate for the instruction of the general public. Nevertheless, the fact that more and more plague tracts were available in the vernacular must have contributed to a greater awareness of plague medicine outside the circles of medical practitioners as well.

This greater awareness could be one of the reasons why preachers and parish priests became more interested in the doctors' view of the plague—as this survey suggests—in the fifteenth century: they may have wanted to take their stand on it and, especially, on its relation to the traditional plague-as-punishment view. Their opinions, as far as reflected by the sample of plague sermons examined here, were far from being homogenous, however. I could differentiate two main clusters, those of the responsive and the antagonistic attitudes to plague medicine. Preachers in the first tried to reconcile the naturalistic explanations with the religious one, while those in the second accentuated the potential contradictions between the teachings of the Church and the theories and therapies of the doctors.

Apart from the challenge to the plague-as-punishment view that the greater availability of plague tracts may have raised, another reason for the apparently increased interest in plague medicine on the part of the pastorally oriented groups of the clergy lies in the recurrence of plague epidemics. By the fifteenth century, keen observers of pestilential outbreaks could clearly realize that interpreting them as apocalyptic portents was thwarted by their recurrence, and that their temporal, spatial, and social distribution raised serious problems of divine justice if the plague-as-punishment view was taken for granted in its pure form. The combination of medical theories with the plague-as-punishment view—by allowing that some outbreaks were divine punishments for general human wickedness, while others were either by-products of natural processes or natural (if unintended) consequences of specific sins—could be regarded as a possible solution to these problems.