The Black Death

1347 - 1351
The Culprits
The Famine of 1315-1317

- By 1300 Europeans were farming almost all the land they could cultivate.
- A population crisis developed.
- Climate changes in Europe produced three years of crop failures between 1315-17 because of excessive rain.
- As many as 15% of the peasants in some English villages died.
- One consequence of starvation & poverty was susceptibility to disease.
1347: Plague Reaches Constantinople!
The Symptoms

- **Bulbous Septicemic Form:** almost 100% mortality rate.

**Septicemic Form:** almost 100% mortality rate.
From the Toggenburg Bible, 1411
Lancing a Buboe
The Disease Cycle

Flea drinks *rat* blood that carries the bacteria.

Bacteria multiply in flea’s gut.

Flea bites human and regurgitates blood into human wound.

Flea’s gut clogged with bacteria.

Human is infected!
Medieval Art & the Plague
Medieval Art & the Plague

Bring out your dead!
Medieval Art & the Plague

An obsession with death
The victims ate lunch with their friends and dinner with their ancestors.
The Danse Macabre
Attempts to Stop the Plague

A Doctor’s Robe

“Leeching”
Attempts to Stop the Plague

Flagellanti: Self-inflicted “penance” for our sins!
Attempts to Stop the Plague

**Pogroms** against the Jews

- "Jew" hat
- "Golden Circle" obligatory badge
Death Triumphant!:
A Major Artistic Theme
“A sickly season,” the merchant said,  
“The town I left was filled with dead,  
and everywhere these queer red flies  
crawled upon the corpses’ eyes,  
eating them away.”

“Fair make you sick,” the merchant said,  
“They crawled upon the wine and bread.  
Pale priests with oil and books,  
bulging eyes and crazy looks,  
dropping like the flies.”
“I had to laugh,” the merchant said,  
“The doctors purged, and dosed, and bled;  
“And proved through solemn disputation  
“The cause lay in some constellation.  
“Then they began to die.”

“First they sneezed,” the merchant said,  
“And then they turned the brightest red,  
Begged for water, then fell back.  
With bulging eyes and face turned black,  
they waited for the flies.”
A Little Macabre Ditty (3)

“I came away,” the merchant said,
“You can’t do business with the dead.
“So I’ve come here to ply my trade.
“You’ll find this to be a fine brocade...”

And then he sneezed..........!
The Mortality Rate

35% - 70%

25,000,000 dead !!!
What were the political, economic, and social effects of the Black Death??