THE BLACK DEATH
1346–1353
The Complete History

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THE BOYDELL PRESS
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a typical way by late summer: riding in the gut of rat fleas hidden in the goods or clothing of merchants, tradesmen or refugees who acted as passive porters, it sent a metastasis to an important urban centre with a wide commercial network. In the autumn, plague had gained a bridgehead around Trebizond.

From the important points of introduction in Constantinople and Trebizond the Black Death continued its slow but relentless spread through Asia Minor. It covered a band of roughly 100 km inland on the western coast in the course of 1347; the following year it covered roughly the same distance, but now moving in from all sides; and, finally, in 1349, it conquered the upper mountain region, the Anatolian Plateau, where Turkish Muslim people now reigned.

From Constantinople to Alexandria

Areas that at the time were dominated by Muslim religion and culture played an important part in the history of plague transmission. Muslim culture and historiography has its own historical chronology. Nonetheless, for several practical reasons it has been decided to use consistently European chronology, including the term medieval, throughout this book, including when referring to Muslim countries in the Middle East, North Africa and elsewhere: (1) because the great majority of the readers of this book will only be familiar with European chronology; (2) because the Black Death's history in Europe is far more comprehensively represented by sources and discussed in scholarly works; (3) because the study of this epidemic is far more developed in European historiography. The term medieval refers to the first phase of the new European civilization following the breakdown of the Western Roman Empire, the period from c. A.D. 500 to about 1520. This historical period is subdivided here into the Early Middle Ages spanning the years A.D. 500-1000, the High Middle Ages A.D. 1000-1350 and the Late Middle Ages A.D. 1350-1520. When the start of the Late Middle Ages is set at 1350, this is an expression of the notion that the Black Death and ensuing plague epidemics moulded the last phase of the Middle Ages in a decisive way, an indication of the importance of the subject of this book. An in-depth discussion of this perspective is undertaken in Part 5 below.

The study of the Black Death's transmission from its original homeland in the land of the Golden Horde produces strong evidence for the importance of ship transport in its dissemination. The commercial sea lanes that began in the Italian settlements in the Crimea also saw quite a comprehensive trade between the land of the Golden Horde and the Mamluk Empire in Egypt. This was a trade route spanning three continents: it started in the south-easternmost corner of Europe, led across the Black Sea to Constantinople in Asia Minor for rest and fresh supplies of food and drink, then followed sea lanes through the straits, along the western and southern coasts of Asia Minor and the Middle East, eventually to end in the great city of Alexandria in Africa. The establishment of such a demanding trade route testifies to the rapid progress in European shipbuilding and trade organizations that made such voyages possible on a regular basis and to the aggressive and adventurous entrepreneurial mentality of

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**Notes:**

10 For the presentation of the spread of the Black Death in the Middle East and North Africa I am much indebted to Dols 1977: 45-69.


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