

# the Black Death





- Following the Crusades, Europe had an increased interest in trade and Eastern goods like silk and spices.





- Islamic merchants brought goods from China and India into the Holy Land, where they could sell or traded with European merchants.



- Shortly after mass trade began, illness started to spread through Europe.

# From the *Toggenburg Bible*, 1411





# The Symptoms



**Bulbous**

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



# The sickness was Bubonic Plague (AKA “Black Death”)





It was called the  
“Black Death” ...

...because it  
killed  
**375 MILLION**  
Europeans!



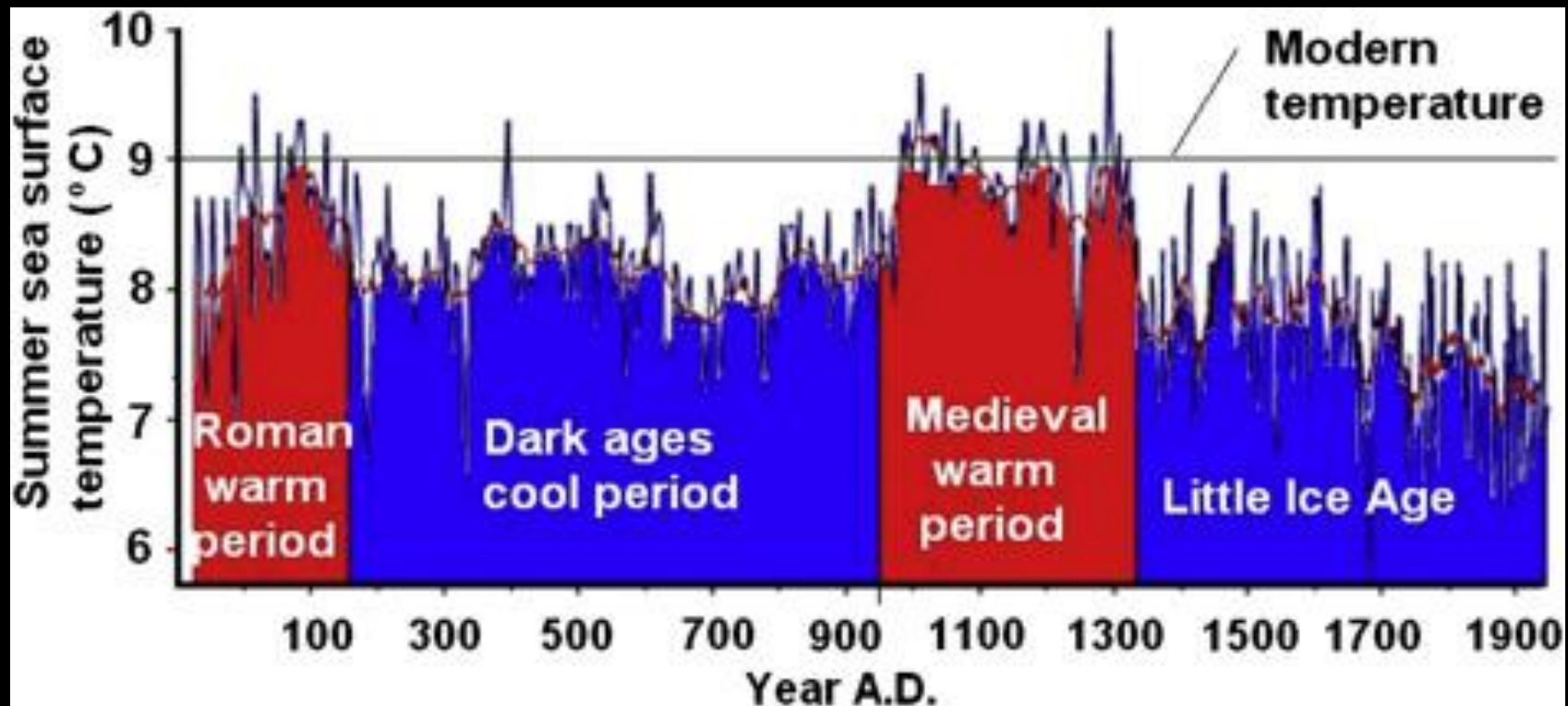


But why?

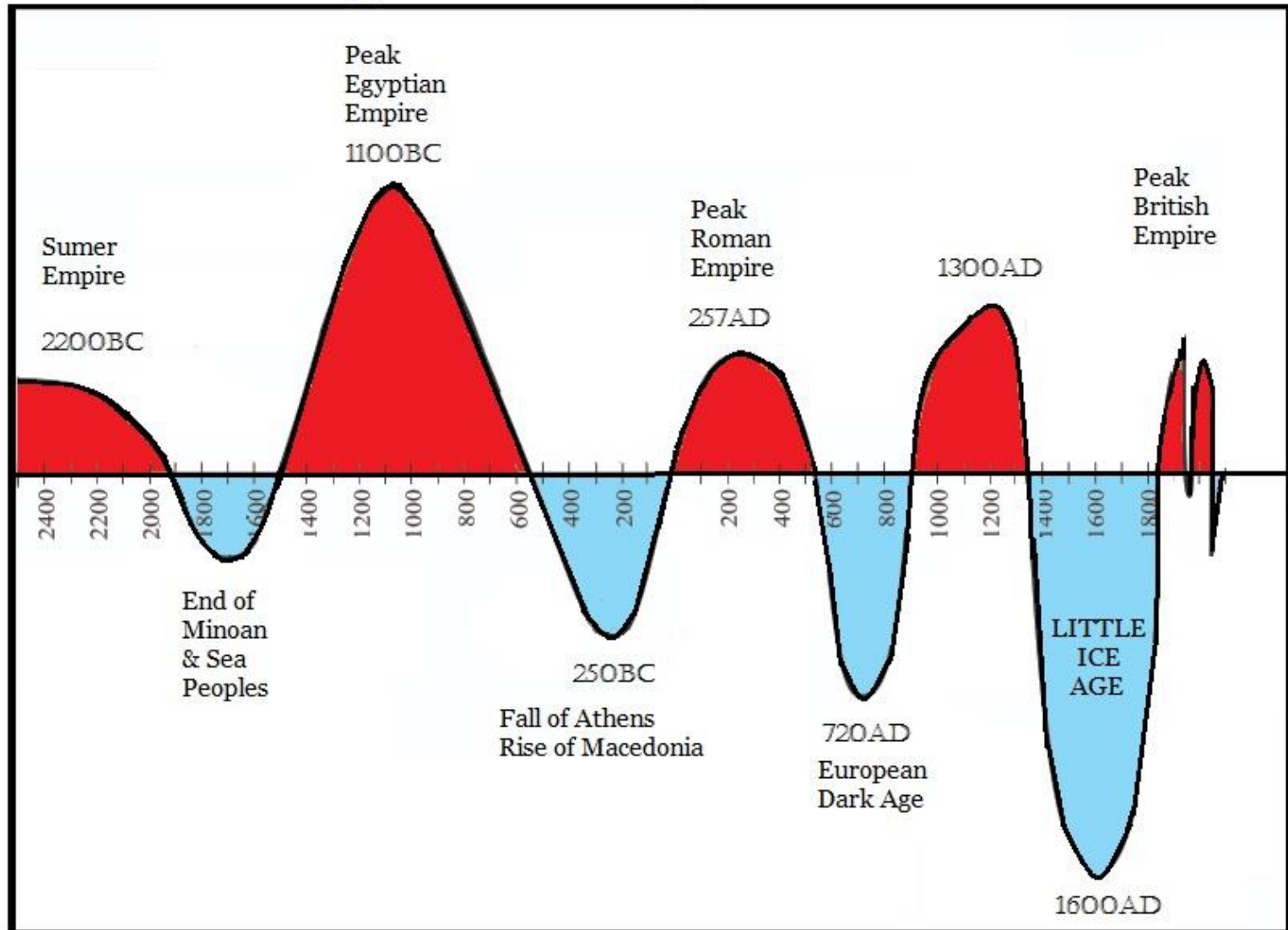
# The Famine of 1315-1317

- ☠ By 1300 Europeans were farming almost all the land they could cultivate.
- ☠ Climate changes in Europe produced three years of crop failures between 1315-17 because of excessive rain.
- ☠ One consequence of starvation & poverty was susceptibility to disease.





# Global Temperatures (2500BC - 2015AD)

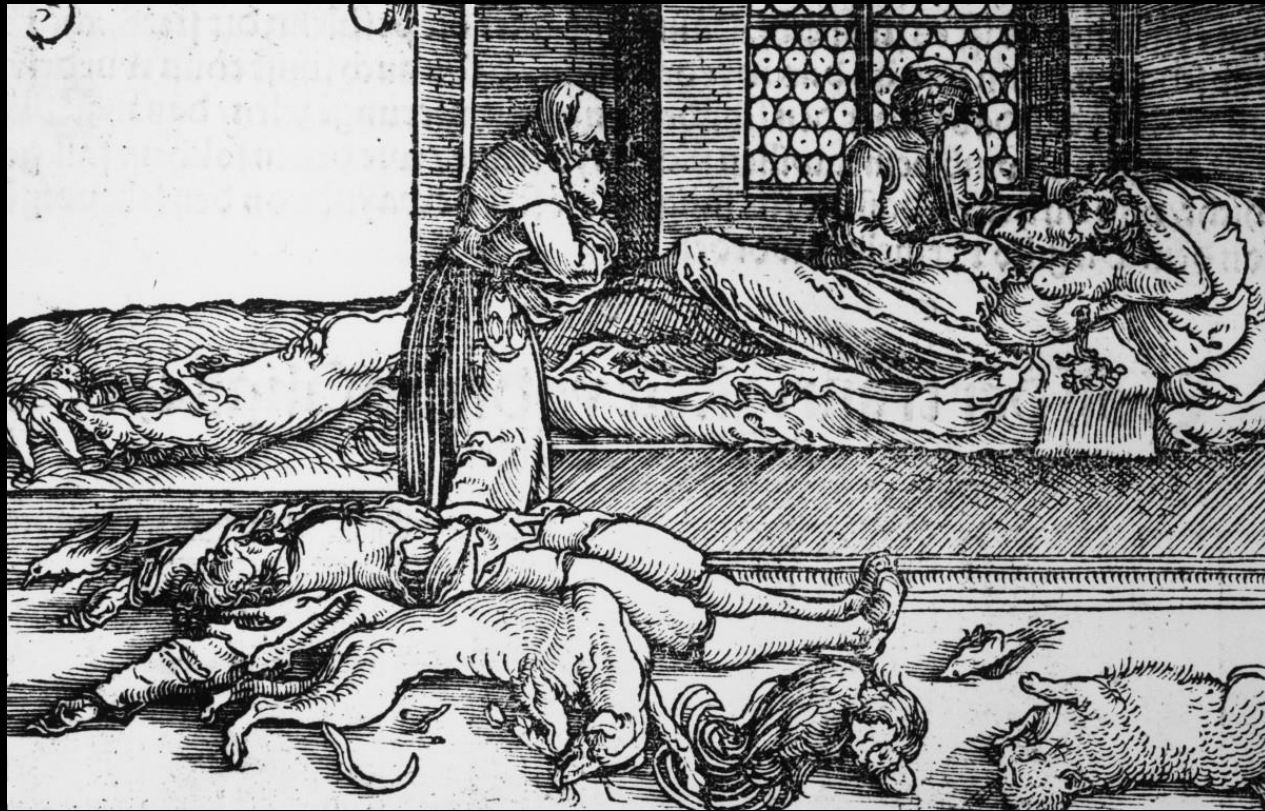






- So, malnourished people had weakened immune systems, and were more likely to get sick... ..but sick from what?

- It was first thought that the Plague was caused by the smell of dead bodies.







So, doctors would wear a “mask” stuffed with spices and flowers to protect themselves from the disease.





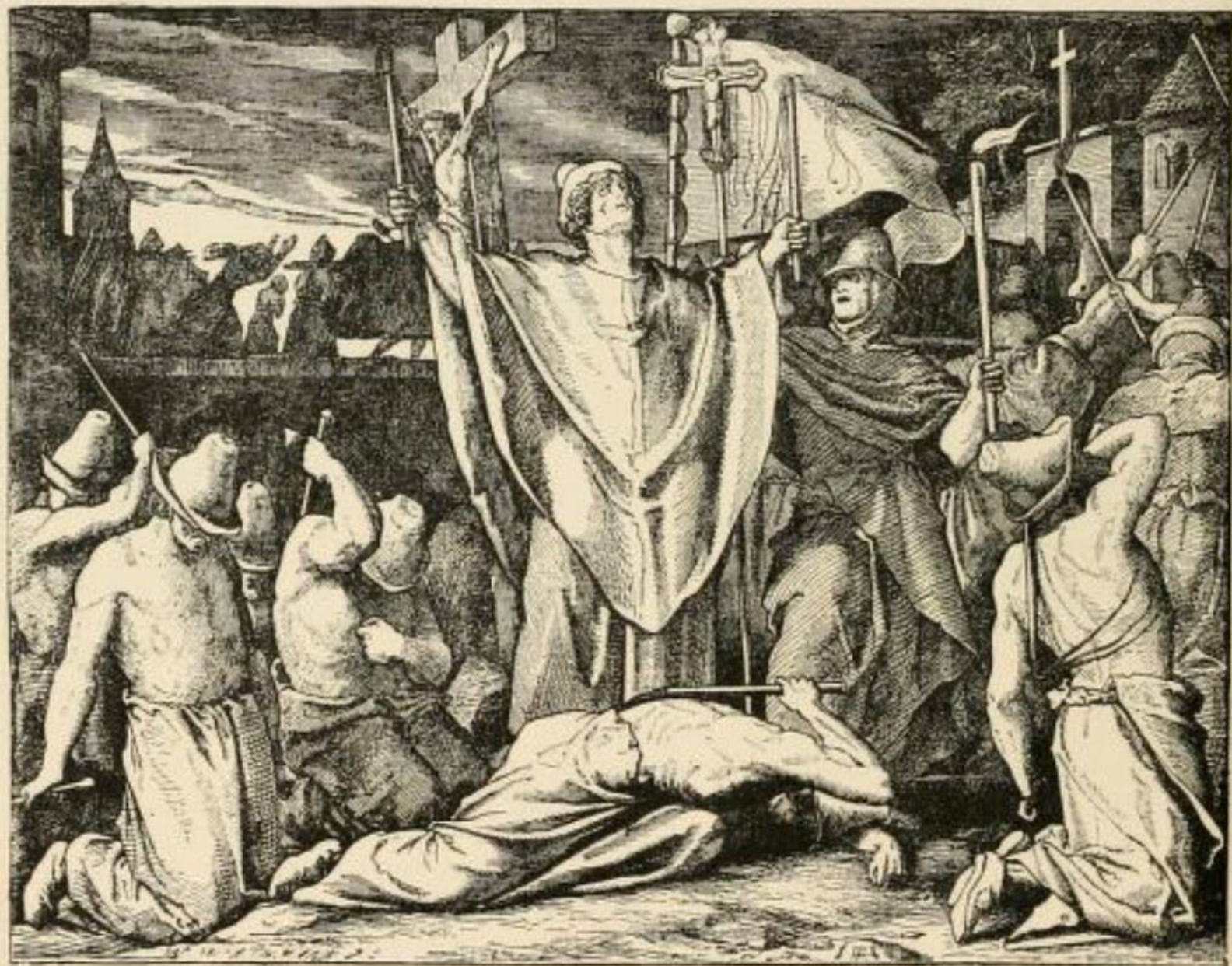
- Many people believed that the plague was a punishment from God...





- Flagellants would whip themselves as punishment for their sins, in hope that God would forgive them and take back the Plague...





MEDIAEVAL SUPERSTITION—THE FLAGELLANTS.



- Others believed that the Plague was caused by the alignment of the planets...



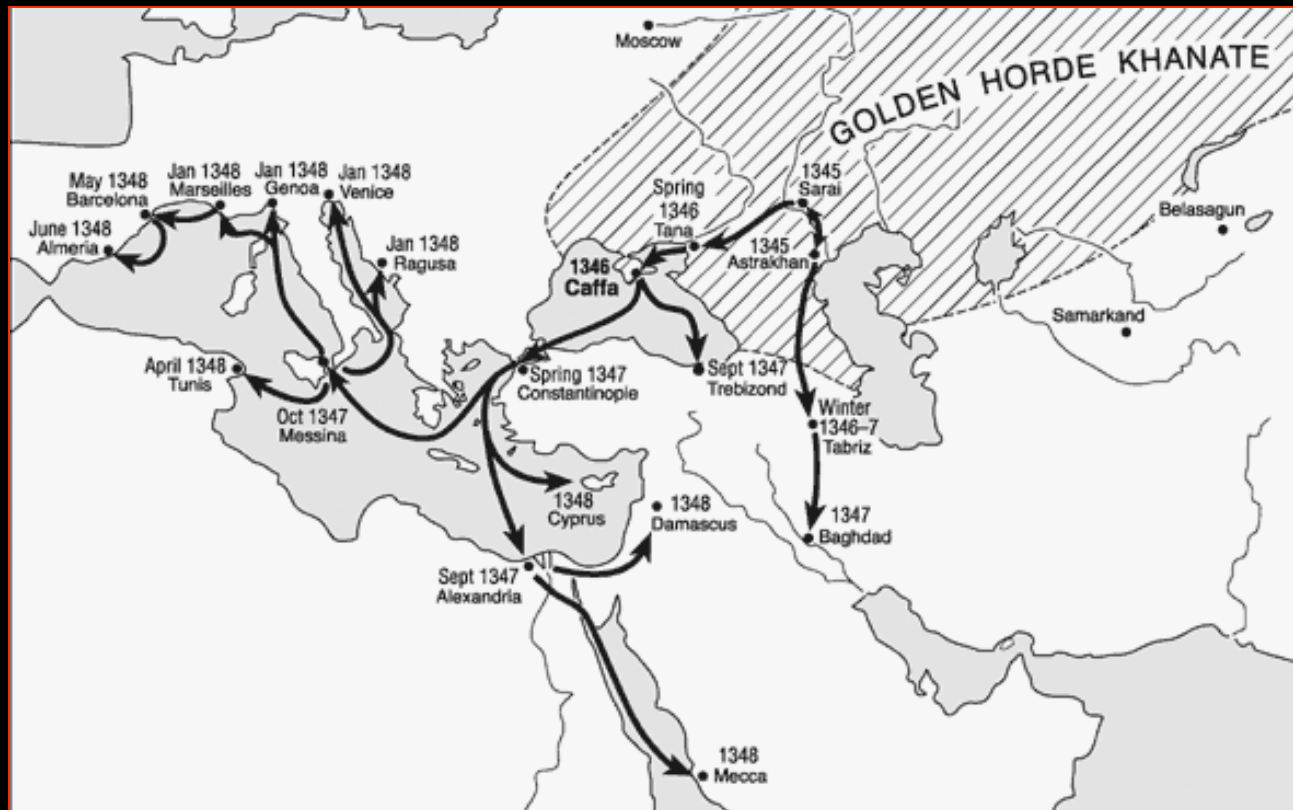
So, what really did  
cause the Plague?

Rats... sort of.





New trade routes brought ships from the east into Europe... and those ships brought rats from Asia.



Map of Plague cases from 1346 - 1348



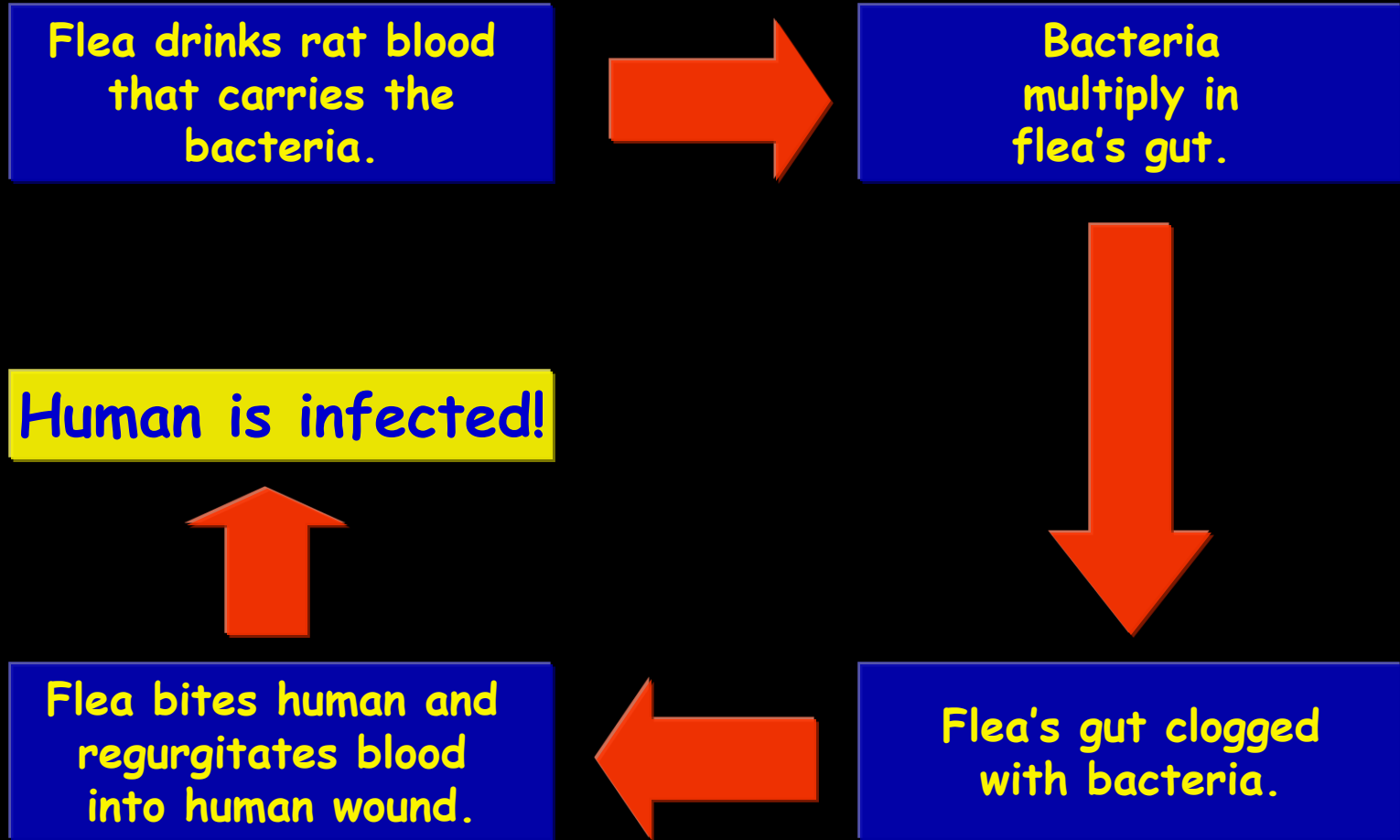
- While the rats did carry the Plague bacteria, they didn't give it to humans.



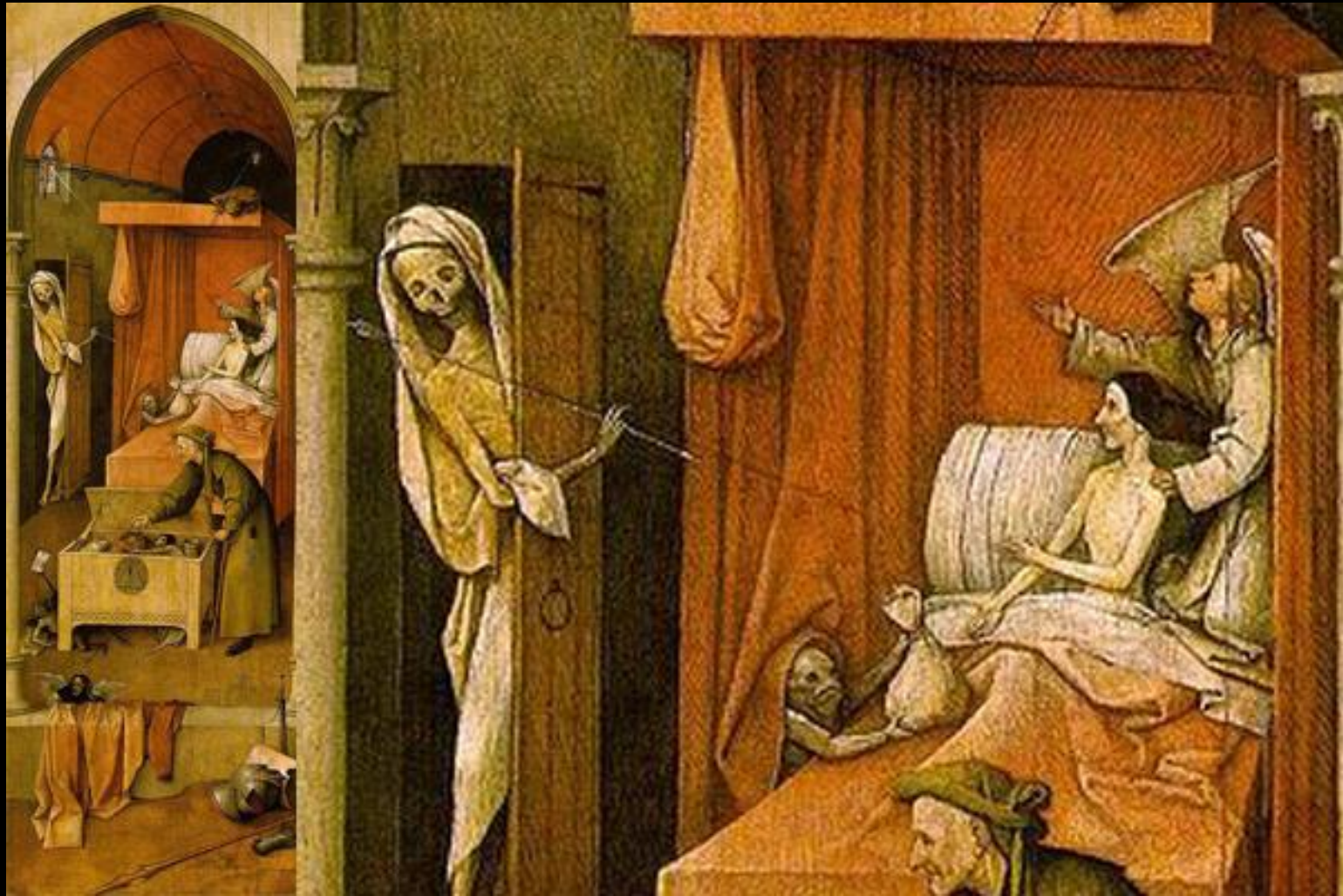
- The rats were infested with fleas, and the fleas carried the Plague to humans...



# The Disease Cycle



# Medieval Art & the Plague



Medieval artists developed an obsession with death.

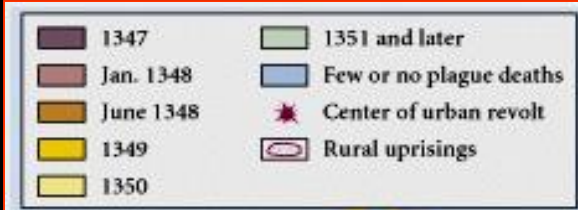






# Boccaccio in *The Decameron*

*“The victims ate lunch with  
their friends and dinner with  
their ancestors.”*



0 200 400 miles  
 0 200 400 kilometers

# How did the Plague end?

## 1. Natural acquired immunity.

Eventually the plague simply couldn't affect as many people. Most everyone was immune after it ran its course through Europe. The ones who got it and didn't get an immunity were dead. All that were left to infect were the ones that had managed to not catch it at all.

## 2. Communities got better at dealing with it – isolation measures.

## 3. Population of fleas and rats reduced so that it was no longer supported widely, and ceased to be epidemic.