Medieval Medicine and the Black Death

“These things before-written are the causes of pestilence; but about these things two questions are asked. The first is why, within one town, one man dies and another does not.”1

This quotation from Bengt Knutsson’s *A Little Book for the Pestilence* (which itself is largely a translation of a plague treatise of Jean Jacmé of Montpellier) summarizes one of the thorniest problems facing fourteenth-century medical practitioners of all kinds. In approximately 5 well-organized and well-written pages, please describe the principal ways in which medical practitioners of the medieval plague period resolved, or might have resolved, this problem. Why did some individuals die from the plague, and others didn’t? (you may consider the cases of the person who got the plague but did not die from it, and/or the person who did not catch it at all. Just be sure to distinguish!) You will need to consider both the medieval understandings of what caused the plague, and more general ideas of medieval medical theory and practice. Your evidence should be taken both from the theoretical constructs and practical realities of medieval medicine provided by Siraisi in *Medieval and Renaissance Medicine*, and the plague treatises on Segue. Since the plague bacillus *Yersinia pestis* was not discovered until 1894, and the rat/flea plague vector not discovered until 1897, you should not consider these in your paper.

As always, when you write a paper, a thesis statement is essential, and specific evidence is vital. Remember, your goal in any paper is to PROVE your point, and not merely to illustrate it.

Should you so desire, you may organize your paper as a medieval plague treatise instead...

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