

Societies in Crisis: Pandemics and Disasters in Pre-Modern Europe (Antiquity and the Middle Ages)



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Ever since Antiquity, pandemics and disasters of massive proportions have constituted a basic human condition. Two periods can be distinguished as particularly disease-ridden: the early Middle Ages (sixth to eighth centuries) and the Late Middle Ages. In both periods the higher mortality arose chiefly from new diseases, mainly plague (the precise nature of which remains unknown). The main goal of this course is to explore the changing disease patterns in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (500 BCE-1500 CE). At the same time, we will look at the social and political responses to epidemics. Overall, in broad historical terms, the ebb and flow of pandemics and catastrophes was a basic element in the demographic growth and decline in Europe and the Mediterranean. To this extent, epidemics also worked to shape social relations, cultural norms and values and political institutions and practices in the pre-modern world.