

Name: _____

Beard World History

Date: _____

Agnolo di Tura on the Black Death, 1348

Background: In 1348 the Plague, or the Black Death, came to Europe through trading ships in the Mediterranean Sea. The disease quickly spread all over the continent of Europe, killing off about one-third of the population. Agnolo di Tura, an Italian, wrote a firsthand account of his experience living amongst the Plague in Siena, Italy.

Source: World History Patterns of Interaction Primary Sources

The mortality began in Siena in May [1348]. It was a cruel and horrible thing; and I do not know where to begin to tell the cruelty and the pitiless ways. It seemed to almost everyone that one became [stunned] by seeing the pain...Indeed [those] who did not see such horribleness can be called blessed. And the victims died almost immediately. They would swell beneath their armpits and in their groins, and fall over dead while talking. Father abandoned child, wife abandoned husband, one brother abandoned another...And none could be found to bury the dead for money or for friendship. [Family] members... brought their dead to a ditch as best they could, without priests, without [prayers]. Nor did the death bell sound. And in many places in Siena great pits were dug and piled deep with the multitude of dead.

And I, Agnolo di Tura... buried my five children with my own hands. And there were also those who were so sparsely covered with earth that dogs dragged them forth and devoured many bodies throughout the city.

There was no one who wept [in the face of] death, for all awaited death. And so many died that all believed that it was the end of the world.

Questions:

1. How did people react when the plague infected Siena, Italy? Give examples from the text.

2. How did people in Siena feel about death? Give examples from the text.