

Music, Pandemics, and History

Taught by Cynthia Cyrus, musicandpandemics@gmail.com
Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI)

Winter Term, 2022
Mondays, 10:00-11:15

January 24: MUSIC AS INTERCESSION

Remaining classes: Jan 31, February 7, 14, 21



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Today's themes

- Wrath, sin and the need for penitence
- Sidebar: radical revisions to the Black Death Story™
 - a. Spoiler: it was worse than we thought...
- The two arms of intervention
 - a. Burials with chants, not bells (Litany; PS 130)
 - b. Prayers to saints
 - c. Processions
 - CONTENT WARNING: SELF-HARM (6 min)
- Guilt and forgiveness



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Jocelyn Pook "Yellow Fever Psalm"

from her album *Untold Things*

You are going to have the fever
Yellow eyes!
In about ten days from now
Iron bands will clamp your brow;
Your tongue resemble curdled cream
A rusty streak the centre seam;
Your mouth will taste of untold things
With claws and horns and fins and wings;
Your head will weigh a ton or more
And forty gales within it roar!



Reversed (using James
Gilbert's lyrics)



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THE ANIMALS SICK OF THE PLAGUE [Jean de La Fontaine, (1621–1695), published 1678] (BOOK VII.—No. 1)



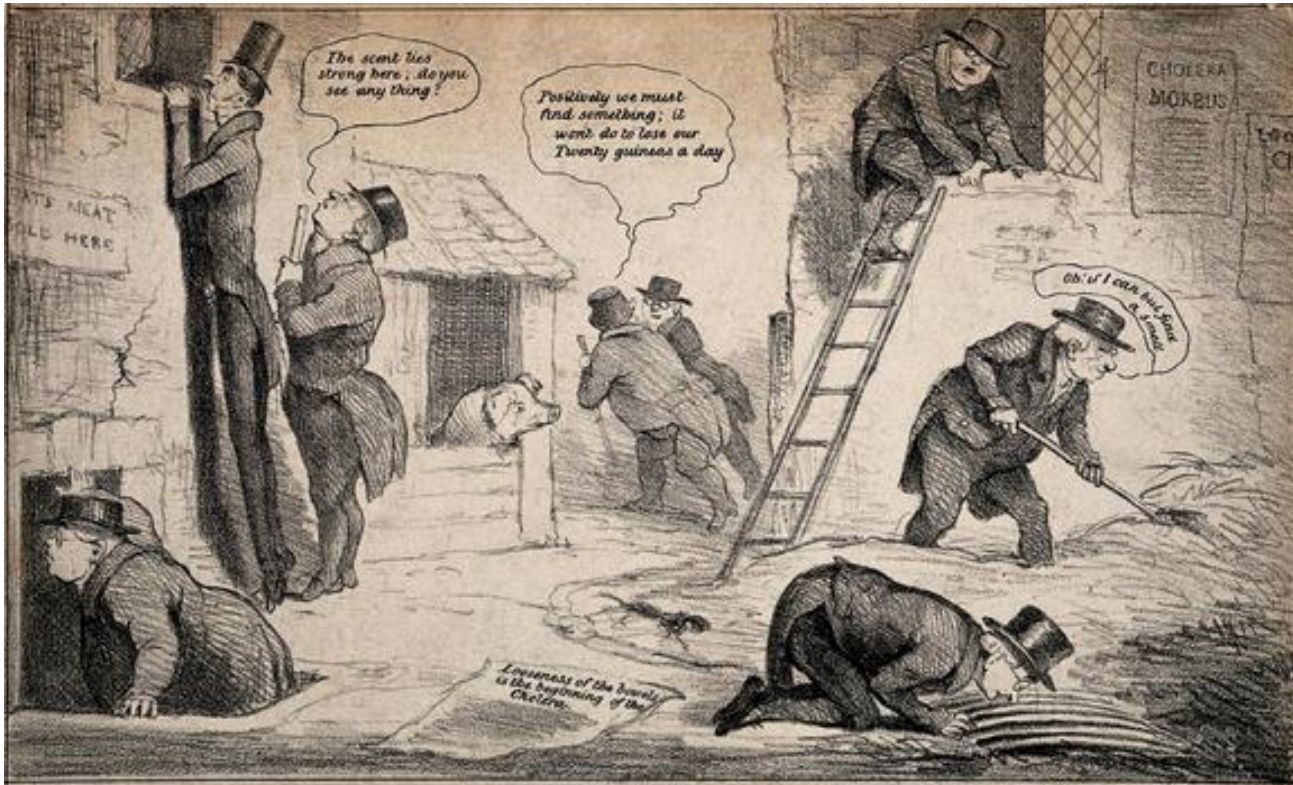
ONE of those **dread evils** which spread terror far and wide, and **which Heaven, in its anger, ordains for the punishment of wickedness upon earth**—a plague in fact; and so dire a one as to make rich in one day that grim ferryman who takes a coin from all who cross the river Acheron to the land of the dead—**such a plague was once waging war against the animals**. All were attacked, although all did not die. **So hopeless was the case that not one of them attempted to sustain their sinking lives**. Even the sight of food did not rouse them. Wolves and foxes no longer turned eager and calculating eyes upon their gentle and guileless prey. The turtle-doves went no more in cooing pairs, but were content to avoid each other. Love and the joy that comes of love were both at an end.

At length the lion called a council of all the beasts and addressed them in these words: "My dear friends, **it seems to me that it is for our sins that Heaven has permitted this misfortune to fall upon us**. Would it not be well if the most blameworthy among us **allowed himself to be offered as a sacrifice to appease the celestial wrath?** By so doing he might secure our recovery.



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Miasma theory: it's in the air we breathe (?)



A LONDON BOARD OF HEALTH HUNTING AFTER CASES LIKE CHOLERA.



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Astral Causes?

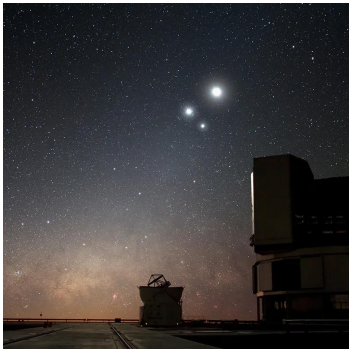
The great
conjunction of
2 March 1345



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BUT... AS SHAKESPEARE SAID...

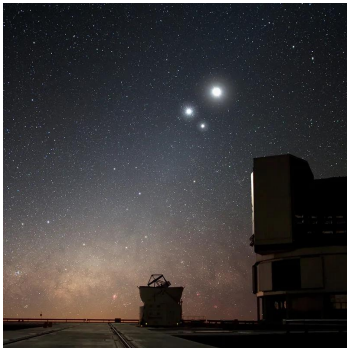
The fault, dear
Brutus, is not in
our stars / But in
ourselves.



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BUT... AS SHAKESPEARE SAID...

The fault, dear
Brutus, is not in
our stars / But in
ourselves.



We must have sinned.



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We must have sinned.

Evidence... case study, Vienna

- locusts
- an eclipse of the sun
- warm weather in December 1340 followed by an uncommonly cold spring the following year
- storms that uprooted trees
- fires
- a rainy summer that ruined some of the crops
- a severe earthquake that rocked the southern Alps
- 12 rainstorms that devastated vineyards and crops



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We must have sinned.

Oh, whoops...



1345: Visit of the King of Hungary leads to week-long party... in the graveyard.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QW22OENmX40>



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We must have sinned.

How 'bout those brothels?



Lucas Cranach the Elder, Old Man Beguiled by Courtesans, c 1537

We must have sinned.

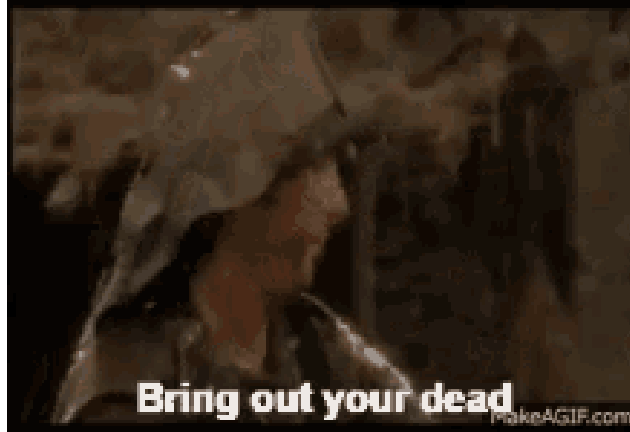
How 'bout those brothels?



Lucas Cranach the Elder, Old Man Beguiled by Courtesans, c 1537

How bad is it? It's bad.

Report to Pope Clement VI:
42 million European dead
(of 80 to 100 million people)



Or, maybe “only” 25 million dead.

- In Vienna, mass graves “of 40,000 corpses”
- “There were many houses in Vienna where 70 people or more died, so that many houses were empty because all the people were dead. . . .” – Leobiensis Chronicon, 1725
- Daily losses of 480 and 720 people, with a peak of 1200 dead



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Radical revisions to Pandemic History: **Monica Green** and a global perspective



new paradigm for the Black Death (AKA 2nd Plague Pandemic)

- WAS: historians and historical evidence (chronicles, tax records, wills, medical treatises, sermons, etc.)
- ANSWERS FOUND BY: microbiology —
paleogenetics

1. *Yersinia pestis* as causative
2. We can study it
3. There's an evolutionary history for *Y. pestis*. It matters!



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Green's Five Truths

Truth #1: Unified Evolutionary History

Truth #2: Even More Devastating

- a. Numbers
- b. Geography
- c. Timeline

Truth #3: Silence is Evidence

Truth #4: Black Death Never Ended

Truth #5: Telling Pandemic Stories in the Age of COVID



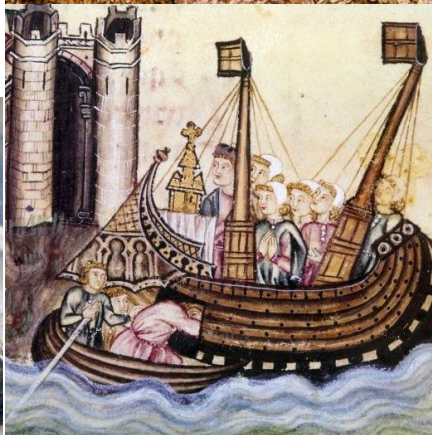
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grains and goods:
shipping routes



Marmots of the
Central Tian Shan
mountain range



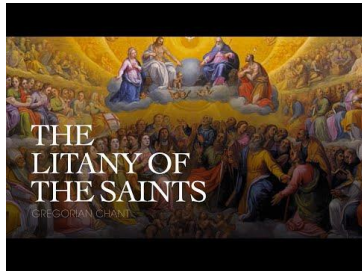
...and the route of
Mongol armies



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What to do, what to do?

“When the public couldn’t go to church during a 17th century epidemic in Milan they all sang the litanies from doorways and windows.”

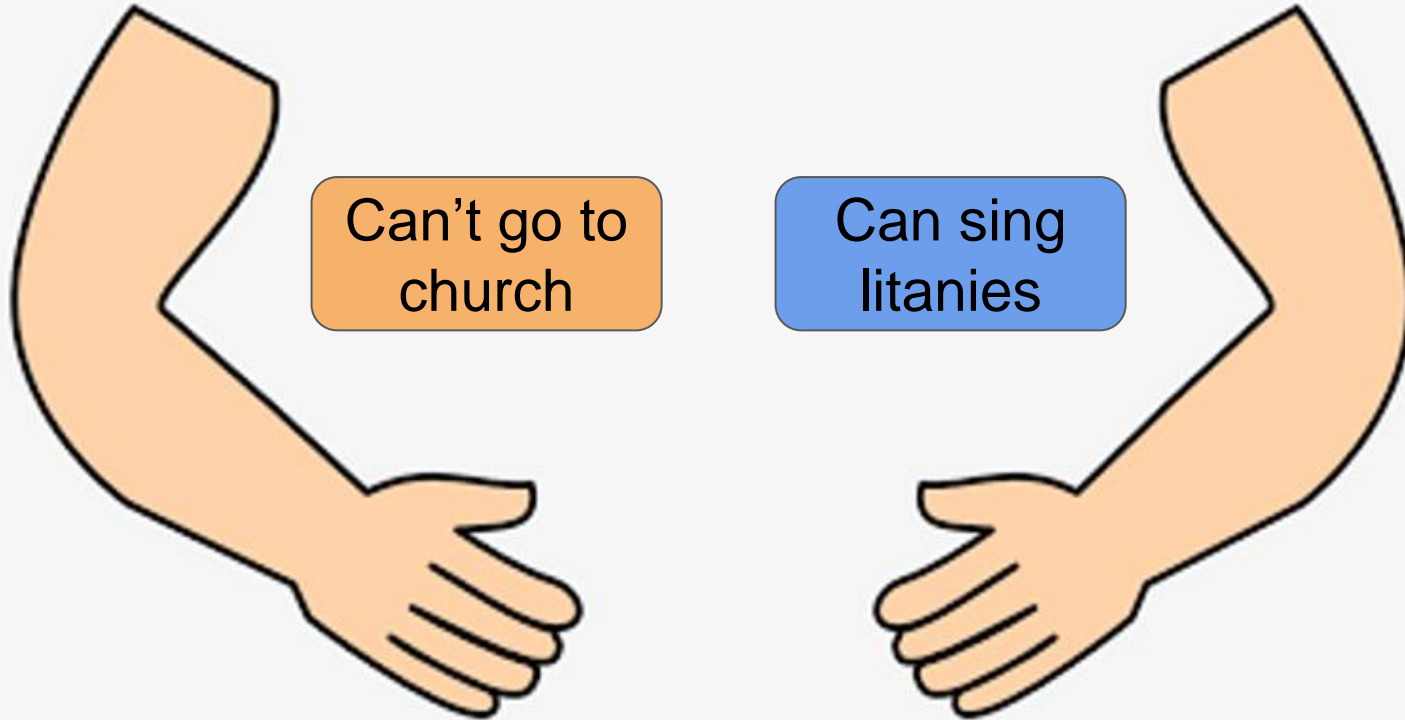


Bamberg: Coronavirus: Germans sing Bella Ciao from rooftops in solidarity with Italy as case-counts continue to rise.,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5CrScIHAuE>



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Two arms of intervention



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The Black Death: Burying the dead



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Multiple burials from Black Death – Toulouse



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Psalmody & burial customs

*Out of the depths I
cry to You, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice.
Let Your ears be
attentive to the
voice of my
pleading.*

OFFICE OF THE
DEAD

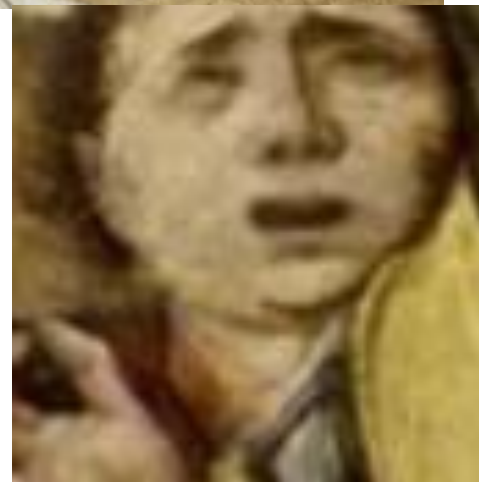
Evening Prayer



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Grave-
diggers



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Orange: the grief-stricken
 Yellow: the clerics
 Above: Sebastian petitions
 God the father

Josse Lieferinxe, end of the
 15th century, St. Sebastian



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By 1377, quarantine



Venice, Lazzaretto Vecchio, 1423



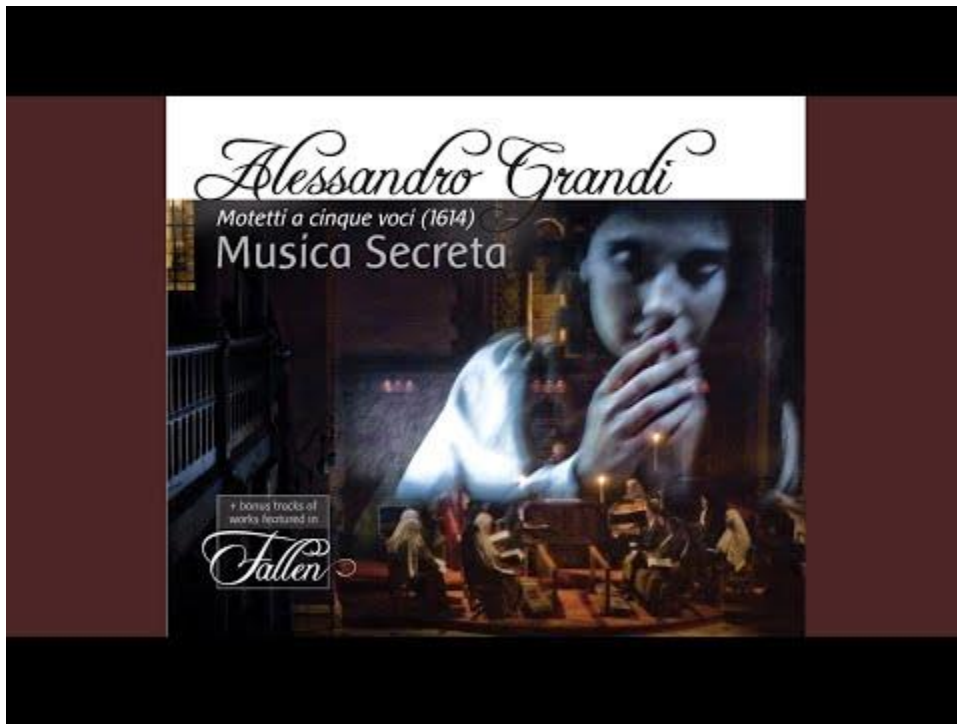
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Prayers to saints – Sebastian (or Roche, or Eleutherius of Constantinople, or the 14 Nothelfer, or the Blessed Virgin Mary, or Jesus, or God the Father, or...)

Grandi's
Sancte
Sebastiane
(1614)

—praise and
supplication

Each voice in
turn calls out
“Sebastiane”



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Dufay – dividing up the request (duo)

O Saint Sebastian

Always, at evening and morning,

In all hours and moments

While I remain of sound mind,

Protect me and save me

And take out of me, o martyr,

The harmful weakness

Called epidemic.



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Dufay – dividing up the request (everybody)

From this kind of illness

Defend and guard me

And all my friends,

We who confess ourselves sinners

Before God and holy Mary

And you, o faithful martyr....



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Dufay: everybody means everybody: polytextual motet

31

Me pro-te-ge et con-ser-va Et a me, mar-tyr, e-ner-va in-fir-mi-ta-tem no-xi-

O mar-tyr, Se-ba-sti-a-ne;

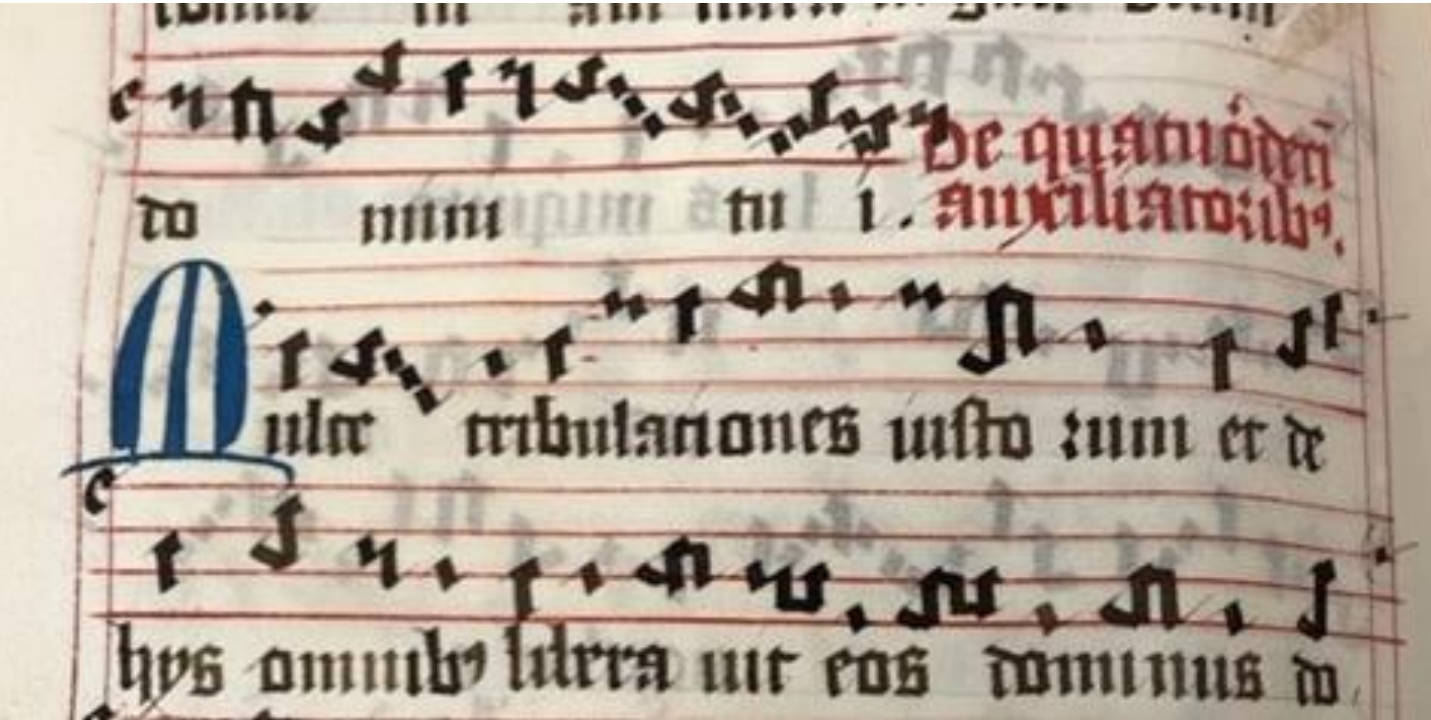
O quam mi-ra re-ful-

1, 1

1. From this kind of illness / Defend and guard me
2. Heal and rule us / And from plague protect us
3. O how he shone with wondrous grace, Sebastian the famous martyr
4. [*textless*]



The 14 “emergency helpers”



Or, prayers to the Virgin: Stella caeli

The Star of Heaven Who nourished the Lord **has driven out the plague of death** which the first parents of men planted. This very Star is now worthy to restrain the tempest whose wars kill the people with the sore of dreaded death.

O glorious Star of the Sea, **save us from this pestilence.** Hear us, for Thy Son honors Thee and refuses Thee nothing.



Save us, Jesus, on whose behalf the Virgin Mother beseeches Thee!



Stella caeli – many settings, many periods



Baroque, Jacob Rittler (1637–1690)

motet... for an outbreak of plague in Vienna



Modern, Alessandro Marangoni (b. 1979)

improvisation... from Italy, for “coronavirus time”



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Processions – well documented



Royal 16 G VI f. 32v Procession at Saragossa, 1420-1450,
<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&I1ID=43606>



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CONTENT WARNING – SELF HARM: Jump ~6 min

But also Flagellants: Geisslerlieder



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Sant'Eleuterio, 1483, by the Master of Staffolo

NB: image adjusted for
brightness and contrast



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Flagellants, detail from Sant'Eleuterio, 1483,
by the Master of Staffolo (active 15th century),
tempera on panel, 55x37 cm.



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Flagellant monks of
Saint Mary of Charity,
1365, miniature from a
Gradual



Venice, Biblioteca
Nazionale Marciana



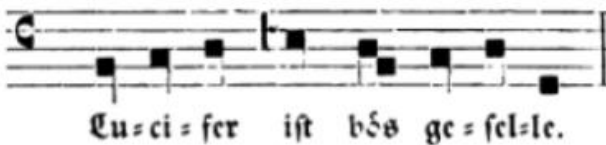
Woodcut of flagellants – From the Nuremberg Chronicle, 1493



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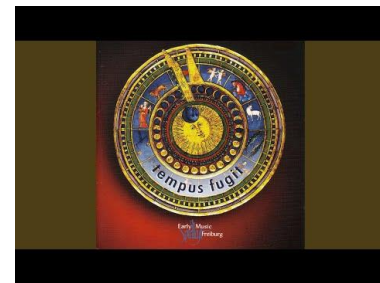
Geisslerlieder

- Vernacular
- Sung, not played
- Simple
- monophonic
- call-and-response



“Nu tret herzuo der bössen welle”

“Now approaches the deluge of evil. Let us flee from burning Hell. Lucifer is an evil companion. Whomever he seizes, he besmears with pitch. Therefore, we want to shun him.”



Flagellants – Bergman's Seventh Seal (1957)



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That sense of guilt spills over...

(CHORUS:)

Well it was God's almighty plan,

He was judging this old land,

North and south, east and west,

It can be seen,

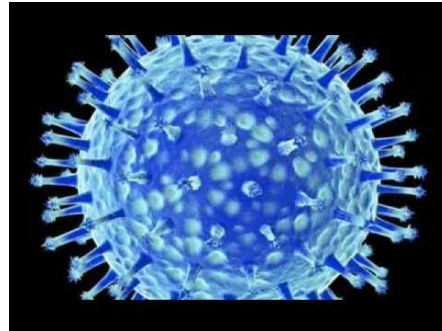
It killed the rich, killed the poor,

It's gonna kill just a little more,

If you don't turn away from the shame.

The 1919 Influenza Blues - Essie Jenkins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCuqQmukOcE>



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But where there is guilt, there
is hope for forgiveness



BL Royal MS 6 E VII Part 2, f. 479



King Henry IV

John Cooke,
“Stella celi,”
1405-07?



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Questions,
Observations,
Discussion?



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