

A Note on the Black Death

By NATHANIEL WEYL

Subsequent to publication of my article on the class and regional impact of the Black Death,¹ new data have come to my attention which cast interesting additional light on the subject.

Writing in the Authoritative French journal, *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, Michèle Bordeaux asserts that, while smallpox morbidity is greater among those with A-type blood, bubonic plague more frequently attacks those with O-type. It is also presumably more lethal among O-type populations. The conjectured reason for this difference is "the existence of heterologous antigens on plague bacilli or smallpox viruses. . . ."²

The inference is that bubonic plague epidemics, and the Black Death in particular, tended to wipe out such paleolithic peoples as the dolichocephalic primitive Basque element to a greater extent than it did their neighbors. The survival rate of Alpines would presumably have been lower than that of either Nordics or Mediterraneans. This last conclusion, however, must be qualified by the consideration that mountain barriers often protected Alpine peoples from plague infection.*

It is also of some interest that the plague-carrying flea is attracted to the color *white* (and therefore might be drawn to the sheets and bedding of the well-to-do). The insect has an inexplicable aversion to the smell of horses, goats, sheep, cows and camels.³ This might have provided some protection to those peasants and villagers who slept with their livestock. The plague-flea also has a distaste for the odor of cooking oils made from olives, peanuts, etc., a circumstance possibly favorable to Mediterranean populations. It is interesting that the people of the Middle Ages had an empirical awareness of these facts, but were as ignorant of their cause as we are.

¹ Nathaniel Weyl, "The Black Death and the Intellect of Europe," *THE MANKIND QUARTERLY*, Vol. XV, No. 4, April-June 1975, pp. 243-254.

² Michèle Bordeaux, "Blazing a Trail to a History of Customary Law by Means of Geographic Hematology," in Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (Editors), *Biology of Man in History: Selections from Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1975, 198-199.

* The Atlantic racial strain is strong on the western and northern seaboard of Europe, and this is largely O-blood group. Consequently the selection would be against this population also.—EDITOR.

³ J.-N. Biraben and Jacques Le Goff, "The Plague in the Early Middle Ages," in Robert Forster and Orest Ranum, *op. cit.*, 53.

Book Reviews

PYGMY KITABU

By Jean-Pierre Hallet with Alex Pelle. Souvenir Press, London, 1974. Pp. 435, numerous diagrams, 45 illustrations. Price £4.00.

In this book Jean-Pierre Hallet, who has lived with the Ituri pygmies for ten years, holds that they are not black, but have skins comparable with the dark Caucasoids, and, occasionally, blue and grey eyes, and foreheads of European cast.

He rightly refers to Hooton's original idea that the Bushmen were related to the Mongoloids (and so, in part the Hottentots, with some Hamitic also) and that the Watusi and Masai are partly Caucasoid—that is Hamitic—through a filter of Somali and Ethiopians.

In other words, as I see it, and as I have theorised in the past, this fits in with my ideas that all these stocks evolved outside Africa at a remote period and drifted into Africa before the coming of the Negroes. He cites the view that the Negro is a later comer to Africa, having come from Melanesia—which was Leakey's idea, as he told me that Haddon had held this view, and when he had time, he intended to do research on it. Haddon having actually held that patterns and designs used by the Negroes of Africa were identical with others used by the Negroes of Melanesia. Alas! Leakey did not live long enough to carry out this research.

As to the Australopithecines, I do not believe they were ancestral to man, or rather men, as there are many men of origins distinct from each other, but merely a line of ascent which died out.

The Caucasoid-like bones of Olduvai Gorge, as the writer correctly states (p. 8) make a mockery of the Australopithecine ancestry of the modern Bushmen and Negroes. "The white man's lips are thin and apishly unverted. He has simian-style eyebrow ridges. Far from being a 'naked' ape, he has so much beard and body hair that the smooth-skinned African Negroes very widely call Caucasians by a disparaging nickname meaning 'the hairy ones' or 'the hairy people.' These traits, in combination with the genes for light skin, hair and eyes, are shared by Caucasoids with the African Pygmies and with *nobody else*."

Also Schebesta has mentioned the Ituri Forest Pygmies have the tradition that their ancestors were white. Trilles reports that the Gabon Pygmies were once white. The Efé Pygmies describe the Deity as tall with a long wavy beard.

The author takes issue (p. 9) with Robert Ardrey's influential book *African Genesis* which portrays Pygmy-sized Australopithecines of savage propensities. There is no evidence that the Australopithecines were anything of the sort. Far from being aggressive, the Pygmies are not; and as compared with the Negroes, who have often enslaved them, are docile. They are a people who are monogamistic, are highly moral and practice a monotheistic religion. Their legends have striking parallels with Old Testament equivalency (p. 13) but these have not been borrowed from Jewish, Christian or Mohammedan sources.

Bes, the Egyptian god, is represented as a Pygmy. They are mentioned by the Egyptians. Nut, the goddess of the Egyptians, mother of Osiris, has been compared with Athena, the virgin mother of Heaven, the Virgin Mary. The Pygmies have a similar person called Matu, Mother of God. (Actually Nut and Matu may be from the same root.)

The Ituri Pygmies are the most primitive living members of our species, but are far from animistic. They pooh-pooh the local Negro's fears of evil spirits. They will have nothing to do with their fetishes (p. 15).