Climate, Famine and the Black Death

Initiative: Freigeist-Fellowships

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The Covid-19 pandemic hit our world in a time of rapid climate change, altered land use and industrialized agriculture that might increase the frequency of zoonotic events. But there is no reliable, century-long chronology of epidemics that would allow us to see if rapid climate change accelerated the frequency of epidemics or even pandemics in the past. While we have an increasingly better understanding of past climate, we still lack reliable chronologies for a long-term history of epidemics. Existing catalogues are deeply flawed with regard to reliability and source-critique. The fourteenth century, most famous for the onslaught of the second plague pandemic, the so-called ?Black Death," provides an ideal testing ground to examine how rapid climate change coincided with and even fostered outbreaks of infectious diseases in animals and humans, potential zoonotic events, and deficient harvests that led to malnutrition. In fact, it is during a period of climate-induced famine that major epidemics and epizootics devastated European societies between 1300 and 1360. The Dantean Anomaly Freigeist Fellowship has been collecting and analyzing information on medieval climate change and its societal impact for the past years in Europe and the Middle East. There is, however, no extensive open-access database of historical information on epidemics and epizootics from written sources along the lines of those for historical climate data. The second phase of the Freigeist Fellowships aims to establish and elaborate a database infrastructure (EpiMedDat) to identify causal links between climate change, food shortages, and the outbreak of diseases, focusing on specific case studies from the 14th century.

Projektbeteiligte

Dr. Martin Bauch
Leibniz-Institut für Geschichte und
Kultur des östlichen Europa (GWZO) e.V.
Abteilung Mensch und Umwelt
Forschungsgruppe "Dantean Anomaly"
Leipzig