

TRADITIONS AND BELIEFS

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THE IMPACT OF EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS ON THE CHRISTIAN VISUAL CULTURE: ST. CHRISTOPHER AND THE FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS

This article examines the impact of epidemics and pandemics, particularly the bubonic plague (“Black Death”) pandemic of the 14th century, on the visual culture of Western Christianity. Using the example of two interrelated cults — St. Christopher and the group of Fourteen Holy Helpers — the author demonstrates how threats to health and life transformed religious consciousness and its material embodiment. An analysis of the evolution of the image of St. Christopher demonstrates the acquisition of new functions: from the protection from sudden death to patronage of travelers and protection from the plague. The saint’s growing popularity led to the creation of monumental frescoes on church facades along pilgrimage routes, especially in the Alps, so that every traveler could see him daily and find salvation. The example of the Fourteen Holy Helpers illustrates the formation of a new group cult as a direct response to the demand for protection from disease. Originating in Germany, this association of holy martyrs became widespread during the Black Death and was later strengthened by the emergence of a major pilgrimage center Vierzehnheiligen. Thus, both examples illustrate how demographic catastrophes stimulated the development of new forms of veneration, iconography, and sacred geography.

Keywords: *epidemics and pandemics, Christian visual culture, medieval Europe, Saint Christopher, cult of saints, Fourteen Holy Helpers*

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