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End of Summer Report 2022

For my FURSCA project in the summer of 2022, I was a part of a larger project to create and expand a database of research documents on natural disasters of pre modern people. My part in this project was to pick a natural disaster, find documents on that, transcribe those documents, and then TEI encode them for the database. At first, I picked the 1725 Influenza epidemic in London (some sources declared it was the first known documented case of the epidemic) but due to a lack of sources, I had to abruptly switch topics. I switched my topic to the 1652 year of the black death, and it was much easier to find viable sources for this topic, especially in the succeeding years as they were reacting to the epidemic.

I really wanted to do something on a disease or epidemic personally in order to look back on our own pandemic with an introspective outlook. I wanted to see how pre modern people would cope in a pre modern world (without all the technology to aid in bouncing back) with losing their entire lives. I spent most of my time on EBO, finding various sources that spoke of the disaster, how many lives it took, and the financial impact it had on people.

Although I had trouble with my research in the beginning, I'm glad I moved on to a different pandemic and was able to glean exactly what I wanted from that. Although I wasn't able to get to TEI encoding the documents, I was able to put together a comprehensive list of available documents about the disaster. The future avenues that could be taken would possibly include another student (or even myself, in the future) further working with the list of sources I have not gotten to. I myself have managed to transcribe two documents of my choosing off the list. As pre modern english is terribly difficult to work with, one can assume how this was rather difficult in the time I had left after switching topics.

This experience of understanding what a pandemic was like in the pre modern times has left me in awe at the fortitude of early people. I can't imagine having to rebuild my life in the wake of the large amounts of loss (in both physical life and financial). They had little to no support systems in place like we have today (examples include the Red Cross, and aid from other countries).

I would like to give a shoutout to my advisor Ian MacInnes for being incredible to work with and understanding. I can't wait to see what the database will look like when it is compiled. (Another small thanks to Kenna for being a wonderful peer to work with!) More thanks to Renee Kreger and Elizabeth Palmer for their work in the FURSCA program. And finally, thanks to the Bethune Fellows Student Research Endowment for making this all possible!