

THE BLACK DEATH DBQ

Analyze the spread of the Black Death and its impact on Medieval society.

Document 1



Document 2

Quarantines

Because no one was quite sure how the Black Death was spreading, many simply chose to avoid anyone with symptoms. Some towns built pestilence houses, where the sick could be taken to die. Others boarded up entire houses as soon as someone inside took ill. Those who could afford to do so fled to the countryside.

Venice began the practice of isolating ships until it could be determined that no one on board was sick. Holding periods started at 30 days, but when it was determined that wasn't long enough, the wait lengthened to 40 days, or "quaranti giorni" in Italian. While unofficial isolation measures had been used in the past, the Venetian guidelines provided us with the word "quarantine."

Document 3



Document 4



Flagellants would whip themselves to ask forgiveness from their sins and avoid the plague

Document 5

When it took hold in a house it often happened that no one remained who had not died. And it was not just that men and women died, but even sentient animals died. Dogs, cats, chickens, oxen, donkeys, sheep showed the same symptoms and died of the same disease. And almost none, or very few, who showed these symptoms, were cured. The symptoms were the following: a bubo in the groin, where the thigh meets the trunk; or a small swelling under the armpit; sudden fever; spitting blood and saliva (and no one who spit blood survived it). It was such a frightful thing that when it got into a house, as was said, no one remained. Frightened people abandoned the house and fled to another."

Marchione di Coppo Stefani was born in Florence in 1336. He wrote his Florentine Chronicle in the late 1370s and early 1380s.

Document 6

So that no contaminated matter which presently persists in the areas surrounding the city of Pistoia can enter into the bodies of the citizens of Pistoia, these wise men provided and ordered that no citizen of Pistoia or dweller in the district or the county of Pistoia . . . shall in any way dare or presume to go to Pisa or Lucca or to the county or district of either. And that no one can or ought to come from either of them or their districts . . . to the said city of Pistoia or its district or county on penalty of £ 50 . . .

Pistoia was a provincial city of about 11,000 in the early fourteenth century located in the region of Tuscany, less than thirty kilometers northwest of Florence. Its government was in the hands of a small executive council made up of the Anziani or Elders of the People and the Standardbearer of Justice

Document 7



Burning of the Jews from Illuminated Manuscript

Document 8



Danse macabre art: Townspeople flee under the watchful gaze of skeleton

Document 10

“After this cessation of the epidemic, pestilence, or plague, the men and women who survived married each other. There was no sterility among the women, but on the contrary fertility beyond the ordinary. Pregnant women were seen on every side. . . . But woe is me! the world was not changed for the better but for the worse by this renewal of population. For men were more avaricious and grasping than before, even though they had far greater possessions. They were more covetous and disturbed each other more frequently with suits, brawls, disputes, and pleas. Nor by the mortality resulting from this terrible plague inflicted by God was peace between kings and lords established. On the contrary, the enemies of the king of France and of the Church or stronger and wickeder than before and stirred up wars on sea and on land. Greater evils than before [swarmed] everywhere in the world. And this fact was very remarkable. “

The *Chronicle of Jean de Venette* is a narrative of several historical events spanning the years of 1340 and 1368, written by the Carmelite friar [Jean de Venette](#)

Document 9



Triumphing Death by Alfred Rethel

Document 11



Mass Burial, Plague, Belgium
1349. Unknown artist.

Document 12

A Medieval Song about the Plague

"A sickly season," the merchant said,
"The town I left was filled with dead,
and everywhere these queer red flies
crawled upon the corpses' eyes,
eating them away."

"Fair make you sick," the merchant said,
"They crawled upon the wine and bread.
Pale priests with oil and books,
bulging eyes and crazy looks,
dropping like the flies."

"I had to laugh," the merchant said,
"The doctors purged, and dosed, and bled;
"And proved through solemn disputation
"The cause lay in some constellation.
"Then they began to die."

"First they sneezed," the merchant said,
"And then they turned the brightest red,
Begged for water, then fell back.
With bulging eyes and face turned black,
they waited for the flies."

"I came away," the merchant said,
"You can't do business with the dead.
"So I've come here to ply my trade.
"You'll find this to be a fine brocade..."

And then he sneezed.

Document 13

Soon the corpses were lying forsaken in the houses. No ecclesiastic, no son, no father and no relation dared to enter, but they hired servants with high wages to bury the dead. The houses of the deceased remained open with all their valuables, gold and jewels. . . . When the catastrophe had reached its climax the Messinians resolved to emigrate. . . . The disease clung to the fugitives and accompanied them everywhere where they turned in search of help. Many of the fleeing fell down by the roadside and dragged themselves into the fields and bushes to expire.

Thus the people of Messina dispersed over the whole island of Sicily and with them the disease, so that innumerable people died. The town of Catania lost all its inhabitants, and ultimately sank into complete oblivion.

This account is from Michael Platiensis (1357), quoted in Johannes Nohl, *The Black Death*, trans. C.H. Clarke (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1926), pp. 18-20.

Document 14



Pieter Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death* (c.1562)