

# Trade and the Plague

## The Perils of Interaction

*Interaction across the entire Eurasian landmass brought  
the plague to Europe. How did Europe respond?*



## *Debating* the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# Trade and the Plague

## The Perils of Interaction

---

The 2017 World History Course and Exam Description of the College Board Advanced Placement Program\* lists five themes that it urges teachers to use in organizing their teaching. Each World History *Debating the Documents* booklet focuses on one or two of these five themes.

### *The Five Themes*

- 1. Interaction between humans and the environment.** (demography and disease; migration; patterns of settlement; technology)
- 2. Development and interaction of cultures.** (religions; belief systems, philosophies, and ideologies; science and technology; the arts and architecture)
- 3. State-building, expansion, and conflict.** (political structures and forms of governance; empires; nations and nationalism; revolts and revolutions; regional, transregional, and global structures and organizations)
- 4. Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems.** (agricultural and pastoral production; trade and commerce; labor systems; industrialization; capitalism and socialism)
- 5. Development and transformation of social structures.** (gender roles and relations; family and kinship; racial and ethnic constructions; social and economic classes)

### *This Booklet's Main Theme:*

- 1** Interaction between humans and the environment.

\* AP and Advanced Placement Program are registered trademarks of the College Entrance Examination Board, which was not involved in the production of and does not endorse this booklet.

MindSparks®

CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA



© 2008, 2017 MindSparks, a division of Social Studies School Service  
All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

MindSparks  
10200 Jefferson Boulevard, P.O. Box 802  
Culver City, CA 90232-0802  
United States of America

(310) 839-2436  
(800) 421-4246

<http://mindsparks.com>  
[access@mindsparks.com](mailto:access@mindsparks.com)

Only those pages intended for student use as handouts may be reproduced by the teacher who has purchased this volume. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording—without prior written permission from the publisher.

ISBN: 978-1-57596-258-0  
Product Code: HS724 v2.0

# Contents

<b>Teacher Introduction</b> . . . . .	1
<b>Suggestions to the Student</b> . . . . .	5
<b>Introductory Essay</b> . . . . .	6
<b>Trade and the Plague Time Line</b> . . . . .	7
<b>First Group of Documents</b> . . . . .	8
Study the Documents . . . . .	10
Comparing the Documents . . . . .	12
Comparison Essay . . . . .	13
<b>Second Group of Documents</b> . . . . .	14
Study the Documents . . . . .	16
Comparing the Documents . . . . .	18
Comparison Essay . . . . .	19
<b>Document-Based Question</b> . . . . .	20
<b>Worksheet Answers and Guidelines</b> . . . . .	21
<b>Visual Primary Sources</b> . . . . .	23





# Teacher Introduction

## ★ Using Primary Sources

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it’s because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context. To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,  
conflicting  
perspectives are  
among the truths  
of history.  
No single  
objective or  
universal account  
could ever put an  
end to this endless  
creative dialogue  
within and  
between the past  
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards  
of Professional Conduct of the Council of  
the American Historical Association.

## ★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

### **Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes**

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **Two Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

## ★ *How to Use This Booklet*

### **1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.**

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

### **2. Have students do the worksheets.**

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

NOTE: If you are using these materials with an AP world history class, an honors class, or some other group of advanced and/or more knowledgeable students, you may want to make more written sources available to them on this topic. Do a basic Internet search for sources that provide additional perspectives and then add to the sources provided here.

### 3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

### 4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

**The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):**

Who did the Europeans blame for the plague, and why did they so badly misunderstand its causes?

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

## ★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

### **Excellent Essay**

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

### **Good Essay**

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

### **Fair Essay**

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

### **Poor Essay**

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in “laundry list” style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.



# Suggestions to the Student

## ★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

## ★ *How to Use This Booklet*

### 1. **Read the one-page introductory essay.**

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



### 2. **Study the primary source documents for this lesson.**

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

### 3. **Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.**

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

### 4. **As a class, debate the documents.**

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

### 5. **Do the final DBQ.**

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.

## *Trade and the Plague*

In 1347, European merchants in ports on the northern shore of the Black Sea were gripped with terror. In fear, they took to the sea and fled. Ashore, large numbers of people suddenly began to swell up, with darkly colored blotches covering their bodies. Most died within days, perishing by the thousands. The dark swellings were called “buboes,” hence the term for this epidemic—bubonic plague, or as it came to be called, the “Black Death.” Some researchers think the Black Death may also have included pneumonic plague, which affects the lungs.

The merchants and sailors had no real idea of what caused this horror. As they fled back to ports in southern France and Italy, they carried the disease with them. Bubonic plague is a bacillus found in rodents and is transmitted by fleas. The escaping ships—with rodents and fleas aboard—carried the deadly plague into the heart of Europe. As the disease spread north from Mediterranean ports, it devastated one region after another. In many places, 50 percent or more died within months. In some cases, whole villages were wiped out. Within just four years, Europe’s population declined by at least a third. Three centuries of steady growth and economic advancement were halted. Europe would not recover for a century or more.

The irony of the Black Death is that it was a result of a great step forward in human history. From around 1000 to 1300 CE, the major civilizations in Eurasia were increasingly linked together by several major trading networks. China under the Song Dynasty had become an economic powerhouse. Its trade by sea with Southeast Asia, India, Persia, and East Africa was extensive. By land, caravans linked China with Central Asia, Persia and Syria, the Caspian and Black Seas, the Mediterranean and Europe. They used a network of routes known as the “Silk Road,” named after the key luxury good carried over these routes. Meanwhile another trading system across the Sahara reached into many parts of

Africa. Trade along the Silk Road in particular had become much safer and easier after the Mongol conquests united much of the Eurasian landmass in the thirteenth century.

Due in part to these growing trade networks, Europe’s towns and cities revived, population and wealth grew, and imaginations stirred. After all, more than goods for sale traveled these routes. Ideas and cultural practices did as well. Ancient Greek writings and new ideas about science, tools, and techniques from many lands all passed along the trade routes, influencing many cultures in many ways. For Europe, all of these things contributed to a great awakening of culture and a time of rapid economic growth.

Unfortunately, along with these benefits came the Black Death. This massive outbreak of plague probably began in China in the 1330s. It was carried by rats and fleas riding along in caravans and ships heading west. That’s why Europeans trading in the Black Sea region were the first to encounter it. The Black Death arrived in Europe at a time when the climate was cooling. Bad weather had led to several years of poor crops and famine. People may have been weaker and less able to fight off diseases. In other words, a number of factors together helped to make the Black Death so massively destructive.

However, no one in the 1340s understood these actual causes of the epidemic. No one knew how germs on fleas could cause the horrifying death of millions. Instead, many just looked for someone or something to blame. After all, the Black Death seemed like a punishment or a blind act of hatred against all of humanity.

The growing interactions of Eurasian societies were complex and confusing. These sources focus on Europe and show how hard it was for people to cope with huge, life-altering changes, especially when they brought about a crisis no one could imagine or fully understand.

# Trade and the Plague Time Line

1206–1279

• • •  
Temüjin unites Mongolian clans and tribes, receiving the title “Chinggis Khan” (or Ghengis Khan). The unified Mongols soon begin a wave of conquests throughout Asia. They take Persia by 1221, northern China by 1234, and Russia by 1241. In 1258, the Mongols seize Baghdad. By 1279, they complete the conquest of southern China. The Mongol Empire comes to control all of the Silk Road trading routes across Central Asia linking China with the Mediterranean. The term “Pax Mongolica” is sometimes used to describe the easier trade and communication this makes possible throughout Eurasia.

1260–1292

• • •  
The greater ease of travel across Eurasia is illustrated by the adventures of the Polos. Between 1260 and 1269, Niccolo and his brother Maffeo travel to Mongolia. Then between 1271 and 1292, with Niccolo’s son Marco, they travel to China. Marco serves for many years in the government of the Great Khan who ruled China.

1279–1314

• • •  
Nevertheless, the widespread Mongol destruction in China disrupts life and reduces farm output. This results in famines that kill millions and weaken the population as a whole. By the 1300s, meanwhile, three or four centuries of the Medieval Warm Period are ending. In Europe and elsewhere, the weather turns much harsher.

1315

• • •  
Several years of harsh wet winters drastically reduce harvests and cause a terrible famine lasting from 1315–1317. As in China, this not only kills millions immediately, it leaves many others weakened with less ability to resist new diseases.

1334

• • •  
Plague strikes the Chinese province of Hubei.

1338–1339

• • •  
Excavations have indicated high death rates around Lake Issyk-Kul in Central Asia along the Silk Road trading routes.

1347

• • •  
Plague is reported in Constantinople and Trebizond. An already plague-infected Mongol army besieges Caffa, a Genoese trading center on the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea. The disease spreads to those in the besieged city. Genoese merchants flee, carrying the disease to Sicily and Italy.

1348

• • •  
The Black Death reaches France and Germany. It also shows up in London.

1349

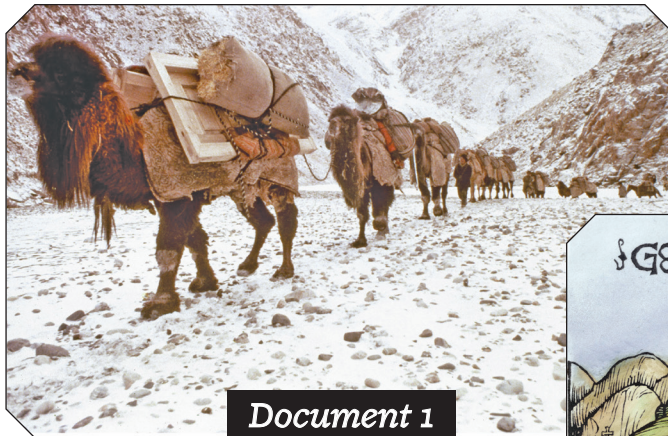
• • •  
The Black Death reaches Norway, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

1350–1351

• • •  
Plague reaches Eastern Europe and Russia. It affects Poland little.



## Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



**Document 1**

The Granger Collection, New York

**Document 2**



The Granger Collection, New York

### Information on Documents 1 & 2

**Document 1.** A camel caravan makes its way through the Pamir Mountains in Afghanistan. The Silk Road routes date back to the Han Dynasty. With the Mongol conquests, however, they became much safer to use. The Mongols depended on goods from more-settled civilizations. They could tax merchant caravans as well. Hence, it became possible to travel the entire length of the routes in safety. As even this modern-day caravan suggests, however, it was also easy for rats and disease-carrying fleas to travel in safety as well.

**Document 2.** A 1493 German woodcut showing the harbor of Genoa, Italy. After 1000 CE, trade began to revive in Europe. Port cities in Italy (such as Genoa) thrived in part because they were in contact with Muslim merchants and others taking part in the trading networks of Eurasia. Smaller towns grew with little planning, spreading out from a castle or a cathedral, or in this case, from a seaport area. Sanitation was non-existent. Disease spread from ship to shore rapidly, without anyone really understanding how.

## Visual Primary Source Documents 3 & 4

Document 3



The Granger Collection, New York

Document 4



The Granger Collection, New York

### Information on Documents 3 & 4

**Document 3.** The Black Death struck at a time of upheaval, famine, and disorder. Fear of plague was perfectly understandable—its suddenness and rapid spread were terrifying. This is a detail from a Trinity Chapel window in Canterbury Cathedral, England, created in the fourteenth century. It is one scene of several in which Sir Jordan Fitzesulf's household is afflicted by plague. Family members and servants fall ill until Sir Jordan makes an offering of gold and silver coins at the shrine of St. Thomas.

**Document 4.** European Jews were one key group that served as scapegoats blamed for spreading the plague on purpose. In this 1493 woodcut from the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, Jews are being burned alive as the Black Death nears. The most destructive of several plagues in Europe lasted from 1347–1352. However, plagues continued to return at times over the next several centuries. People accused of witchcraft were also accused of spreading the Black Death.



## Study the Documents: Visual Sources 1 & 2

*Instructions:* Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

### **1 Main Idea—Doc. 1** \_\_\_\_\_

Write a caption for this photo focusing on the health hazards of taking part in a caravan across Central Asia on the Silk Road.

### **2 Background Information** \_\_\_\_\_

The Mongols were terrifying warriors. Yet merchants leading caravans like this welcomed their conquest of Central Asia and China. Why?

### **3 Drawing Conclusions** \_\_\_\_\_

Explain why the Black Death could spread so quickly through Medieval port cities like the one shown as Visual Source Document 2.

## Study the Documents: Visual Sources 3 & 4

*Instructions:* Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

### **1 Visual Features—Doc. 3**

---

Write a caption for this scene explaining how its visual features help convey the fear the Black Death caused people in Europe to feel.

### **2 What Else Can You Infer?**

---

What does the source suggest or imply? For example, what does Document 3 suggest about attitudes toward the Black Death, in that one family's fate was a topic for several stained-glass scenes in a major cathedral?

### **3 Interpret Visual Meanings**

---

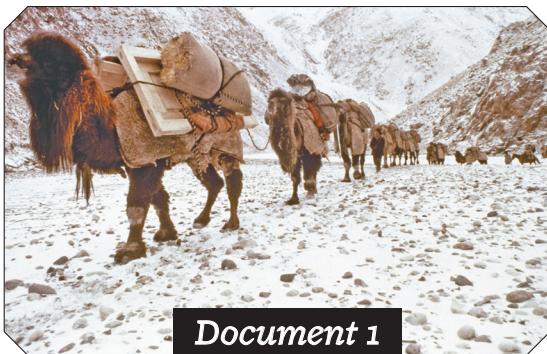
Judging from Visual Source Document 4, do you think the *Nuremberg Chronicle* was hostile to the Jews? Why or why not

# Comparing the Documents

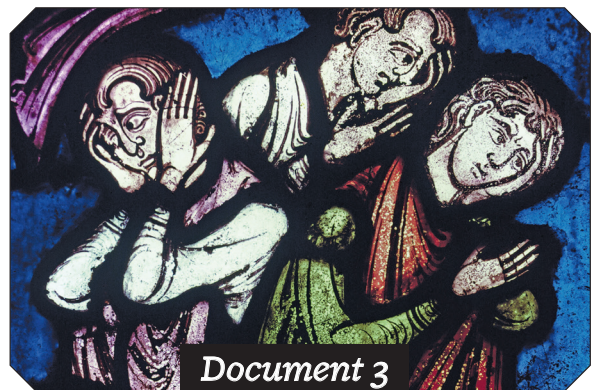
## ★ *The Visual Sources*

Answer the question by checking one box below. Then complete the statements on the Comparison Essay worksheet. Use all your notes to help you take part in an all-class debate about these documents—and to answer the final DBQ for the lesson.

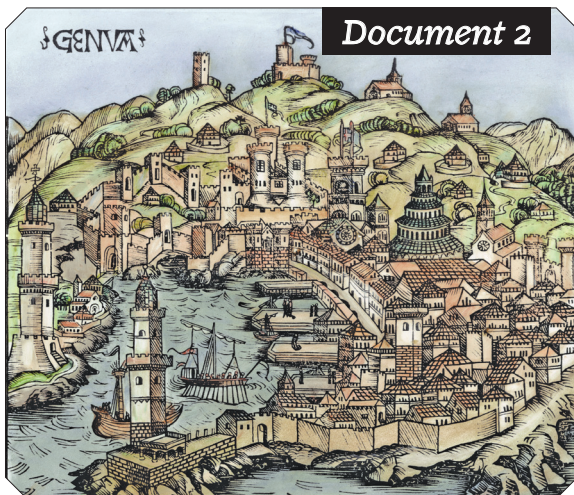
**Which of these primary source documents would be most useful to a historian trying to understand the Eurasian trading system and reactions to the plague?**



The Granger Collection, New York



The Granger Collection, New York



The Granger Collection, New York



The Granger Collection, New York

Documents 1 & 2 ☐

Documents 3 & 4 ☐

## Comparison Essay

*I chose Documents \_\_\_\_\_ because:*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*I did **not** choose Documents \_\_\_\_\_.*

*However, a historian still might use the documents in the following way:*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Keep this in mind:** Some sources are very biased. A biased source is one that shows you only one side of an issue. That is, it takes a clear stand or expresses a very strong opinion about something. A biased source may be one-sided, but it can still help you to understand its time period. For example, a biased editorial cartoon may show how people felt about an issue at the time. The usefulness of a source depends most of all on what questions you ask about that time in the past.

## Written Primary Source Document 1

### Information on Document 1

This is a passage from Johann S. Schilter's 1698 edition of the German chronicle of the Strasbourg historian, Jacob von Königshofen (1346–1420). Königshöfen was a scholar who lived close to the events he describes. Apparently, he also included information from another Strasbourg writer, the historian F. Closener. Closener may well have been an eyewitness of the events described here.

### Document 1

*In the matter of this plague the Jews throughout the world were reviled and accused in all lands of having caused it through the poison which they are said to have put into the water and the wells—that is what they were accused of—and for this reason the Jews were burnt all the way from the Mediterranean into Germany, but not in Avignon, for the Pope protected them there.*

*Nevertheless, they tortured a number of Jews in Bern and Zofingen [Switzerland] who then admitted that they had put poison into many wells, and they also found the poison in the wells. Thereupon they burnt the Jews in many towns and wrote of this affair to Strasbourg, Freiburg, and Basel in order that they too should burn their Jews. But the leaders in these three cities in whose*

*hands the government lay did not believe that anything ought to be done to the Jews. However in Basel the citizens marched to the city-hall and compelled the council to take an oath that they would burn the Jews, and that they would allow no Jew to enter the city for the next two hundred years. . . .*

*The deputies of the city of Strasbourg were asked what they were going to do with their Jews. They answered and said that they knew no evil of them. Then they asked the Strasbourgers why they had closed the wells and put away the buckets, and there was a great indignation and clamor against the deputies from Strasbourg. So finally the Bishop and the lords and the Imperial Cities agreed to do away with the Jews.*



## Written Primary Source Document 2

### Information on Document 2

This passage is from the *Latin Chronicle* of Jean de Venette, translated by Jean Birdsall, edited by Richard A. Newhall (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953). Jean de Venette was the prior of a Carmelite convent in Paris and became a provincial superior (a major official of a religious order) from 1341 to 1366. His *Latin Chronicle* covers the years 1340 to 1368.

### Document 2

A.

Some said that this pestilence was caused by infection of the air and waters, since there was at this time no famine nor lack of food supplies, but on the contrary great abundance. As a result of this theory of infected water and air as the source of the plague, the Jews were suddenly and violently charged with infecting wells and water and corrupting the air. The whole world rose up against them cruelly on this account. In Germany and other parts of the world where Jews lived, they were massacred and slaughtered by Christians, and many thousands were burned everywhere, indiscriminately. . . . It is said that many bad Christians were found who in a like manner put poison into wells. But in truth, such poisonings, granted that they actually were perpetrated, could not have caused so great a plague nor have infected so many people. There were other causes; for example, the will of God and the corrupt humors and evil inherent in air and earth.

B.

In the year 1349, while the plague was still active and spreading from town to town, men in Germany, Flanders, Hainaut, and Lorraine uprose and began a new sect on their own authority. Stripped to the waist, they gathered in large groups and bands and marched in procession through the crossroads and squares of cities and good towns. There they formed circles and beat upon their backs with weighted scourges, rejoicing as they did so in loud voices and singing hymns suitable to their rite and newly composed for it. Thus for thirty-three days they marched through many towns doing their penance and affording a great spectacle to the wondering people. They flogged their shoulders and arms with scourges tipped with iron points so zealously as to draw blood.

## Study the Document: Written Source 1

*Instructions:* Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

### **1 Main Idea or Topic** \_\_\_\_\_

Sum up what the Jews were accused of, according to this passage, and why the nature of the Black Death might have led people to believe such an accusation.

### **2 Background Knowledge** \_\_\_\_\_

For centuries before the Black Death, many Christians in Europe falsely accused Jews of what is often called a “blood libel.” Can you explain what this is and why it might have led people then to believe that the Jews could spread the Black Death?

### **3 What Else Can You Infer?** \_\_\_\_\_

The source seems to suggest that certain people supported the accusations against the Jews while other people were more skeptical. Who do these two groups of people seem to be? What is suggested or implied by the fact that the skeptical ones seemed to give in to those out to punish the Jews?

## Study the Document: Written Source 2

*Instructions:* Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

### 1 Main Idea or Topic

---

In a sentence or two, sum up the key point Jean de Venette is making in each passage.

A.

B.

### 2 Interpreting Meanings

---

In Passage A, do you think Jean de Venette reasoned as a scientist might as he thought about the possible causes of the Black Death? Why or why not?

In Passage B, we are told the flagellants *“formed circles and beat upon their backs with weighted scourges, rejoicing as they did so in loud voices . . .”* Why do you think they rejoiced?

### 3 What Else Can You Infer?

---

For example, from Written Source Documents 1 & 2, what can you infer about Europe’s awareness of the rest of the societies spread across the Eurasian landmass? What can you infer about the state of their medical knowledge?

# Comparing the Documents

## ★ *The Written Sources*

Answer the question by checking one box below. Then complete the statements on the Comparison Essay worksheet. Use all your notes to help you take part in an all-class debate about these documents—and to answer the final DBQ for the lesson.

**Which of these primary source documents would be most useful to a historian trying to understand the Eurasian trading system and reactions to the plague?**

*A passage from  
Strasbourg historian  
Jacob von Königshofen  
(1346–1420) on attacks  
against Jews during the  
Black Death.*

*Document 1* ☐

*A passage is from the  
Latin Chronicle of  
Jean de Venette on the  
attacks on the Jews and  
on the flagellants.*

*Document 2* ☐

## Comparison Essay

*I chose Documents \_\_\_\_\_ because:*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

*I did **not** choose Documents \_\_\_\_\_.*

*However, a historian still might use the documents in the following way:*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Keep this in mind:** Some sources are very biased. A biased source is one that shows you only one side of an issue. That is, it takes a clear stand or expresses a very strong opinion about something. A biased source may be one-sided, but it can still help you to understand its time period. For example, a biased editorial cartoon may show how people felt about an issue at the time. The usefulness of a source depends most of all on what questions you ask about that time in the past.



# Document-Based Question

Your task is to answer a document-based question (DBQ) on the Eurasian trading system and the plague. In a DBQ, you use your analysis of primary source documents and your knowledge of history to write a brief essay answering the question. Using all four sets of documents, answer this question. Below are two DBQs. The first is somewhat less demanding than the second. Use whichever DBQ your teacher assigns.

## Document-Based Question

**1**

**Who did the Europeans blame for the plague, and why did they so badly misunderstand its causes?**

**OR**

**2**

**By 1347 AD, cultural interaction was increasing throughout the Eurasian landmass. What do the “Black Death” and the reactions to it reveal about the strengths and the weaknesses of this system of cultural interaction?**

Below is a checklist of key suggestions for writing a DBQ essay. Next to each item, jot down a few notes to guide you in writing the DBQ. Use extra sheets to write a four- or five-paragraph essay.

- *Introductory Paragraph*  
Does the paragraph clarify the DBQ itself? Does it present a clear thesis, or overall answer, to that DBQ?
- *The Internal Paragraphs—1*  
Are these paragraphs organized around main points with details supporting those main ideas? Do all these main ideas support the thesis in the introductory paragraph?
- *The Internal Paragraphs—2*  
Are all of your main ideas and key points linked in a logical way? That is, does each idea follow clearly from those that went before? Does it add something new and helpful in clarifying your thesis?
- *Use of Primary Source Documents*  
Are they simply mentioned in a “laundry list” fashion? Or are they used thoughtfully to support main ideas and the thesis?
- *Concluding Paragraph*  
Does it restate the DBQ and thesis in a way that sums up the main ideas without repeating old information or going into new details?

# Worksheet Answers and Guidelines

Some worksheet questions call for specific answers to factual questions. In these cases, correct answers are provided here. Most worksheet questions are open-ended and call on students to offer their own interpretations and personal reactions. In those cases, we offer suggestions based on the purpose of the question and the sort of interpretive activity it calls for.

## Worksheet 1

### *Visual Sources 1 & 2*

1. Students could stress such things as the problem of keeping animals and humans clean, the hardships of the journey, the likelihood of people on it becoming weak or susceptible to disease, etc.
2. The Mongols needed trade goods from more-settled societies and saw the value of taxing caravans, not raiding them. Hence, they protected the long routes that once passed through unstable violent territories.
3. The cramped spaces and lack of sanitation made such cities “death traps,” in which life expectancy was low even in healthy times.

## Worksheet 2

### *Visual Sources 3 & 4*

1. Students could point out that for medieval art, the expressions here are particularly intense and personal. Bewilderment as well as fear are conveyed.
2. The stained-glass windows in a church suggest that the Black Death was seen as having a spiritual aspect and was not merely seen as a health matter. So also with efforts to assign blame, as in the other visual here.
3. In fact, the *Nuremberg Chronicle* did express anti-Semitic sentiments. Students should not be told this, however, but should focus on the visual aspects of the scene to see what they can detect that way.

## Worksheet 3

### *Written Source 1*

1. They were accused of poisoning wells and other water, which indicates some sense that drinking water was passing the disease from person to person.
2. The blood libel in this case was the accusation that Jews kidnapped Christian children, sacrificed them, and used their blood in various secret rituals.
3. The Pope and local authorities seem hesitant to blame the Jews or punish them. The fact that they defer to the general population suggests a certain amount of power in the hands of ordinary citizens of cities and towns—even though it is power used in a horrible and pointless manner.

## Worksheet 4

### *Written Source 2*

1. A. The plague was too widespread to be explained by local poisoning of wells, etc. B. Some men blamed the plague on their own sinfulness and did penance by publically beating themselves.
2. In passage A, Jean de Venette could be said to reason scientifically in that he observes the “data” of the overall pattern of the epidemic and bases his theory about its causes on that. However, he does not have the scientific understanding of the disease needed to explain it. In passage B, the flagellants probably rejoice because they feel they are paying for their sins and will suffer less in the next life.
3. They appear to have little medical knowledge about this disease or about how it made its way to them from other parts of the world—or of conditions in general in those other parts of the world.



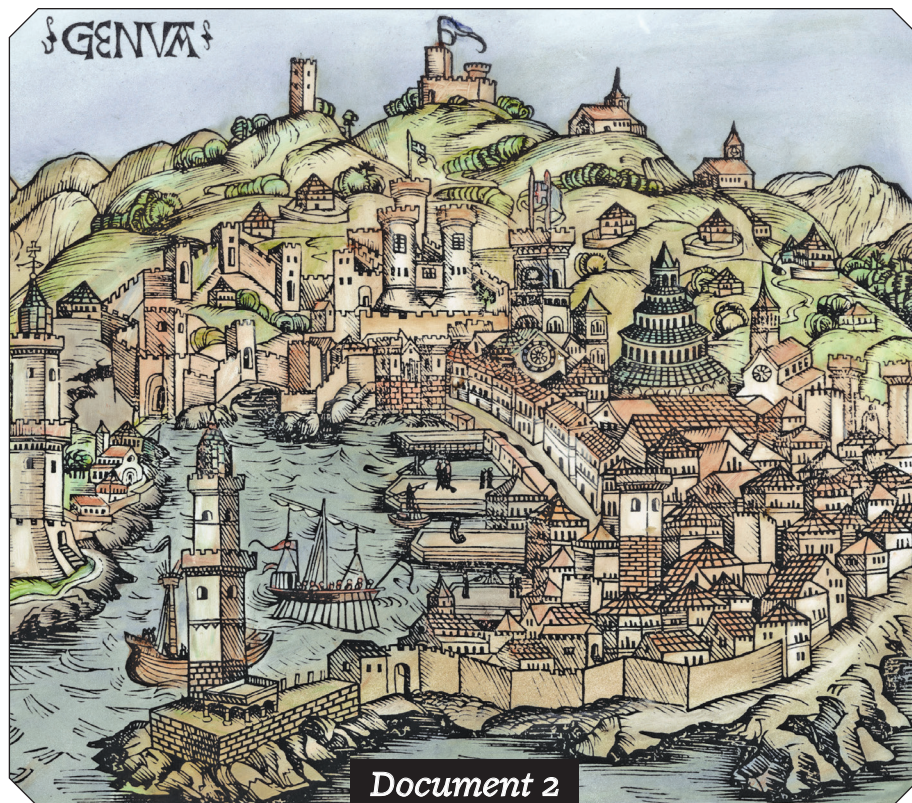
# **Visual Primary Sources**



## First Group—Documents 1 & 2



The Granger Collection, New York



The Granger Collection, New York



## First Group—Documents 3 & 4

Document 3



The Granger Collection, New York

Document 4



The Granger Collection, New York



