

How did People in the 14th Century understand the Black Death?

Sourcing and Contextualization

	Doc A: <i>Paris Medical Faculty</i>	Doc B: <i>Ibn al-Wardi</i>
1. Who wrote this document?		
2. When and where was this document written?		
3. Why was this document written?		
4. Do you think people in 1348 trusted and believed these authors?		

Close Reading and Corroboration Questions

	Doc A: <i>Paris Medical Faculty</i>	Doc B: <i>Ibn al-Wardi</i>
4. Where did the plague originate?		
5. What or who caused the plague?		

<p>7. Doc A: How <u>should</u> people try to prevent or cure the plague?</p> <p>7. Doc B: How <u>did</u> people try to prevent or cure the plague?</p>		
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Final Questions

- 1) How do these documents illustrate how people understood the "Black Death"?
- 2) List 2-3 questions you still have about the "Black Death" or how people understood it.
- 3) What types of documents might you examine to try and answer these questions?

Document A: University of Paris Medical Report (Modified)

The passage below is an excerpt from "The Report of the Paris Medical Faculty," issued in October 1348. In the report, medical faculty at the University of Paris describe what they believed were the origins of the bubonic plague and provide advice on how to avoid contracting the plague.

We, the Members of the College of Physicians of Paris, ... intend to make known the causes of this pestilence (plague).

We declare as follows: It is known that in India, and the Vicinity (area) of the Great Sea, the constellations which combated the rays of the sun ... exerted their power especially against the sea ... and the waters of the ocean arose in the form of vapor. The waters were in some parts so corrupted that the fish died. This vapor spread itself through the air in many places on earth...On all the islands and adjoining countries to which the corrupted sea-wind extends...if the inhabitants of those parts do not take the following advice we announce to them inevitable death—except if the grace of Christ preserve their lives.

Every one of you should protect himself from the air; wormwood (a fragrant plant) and chamomile should be burnt in great quantity in the market places, in other densely inhabited localities, and in the houses. ... The diet should be simple. ... Cold, moist, watery food is in general harmful. Going out at night, and even until three o'clock in the morning, is dangerous on account of the dew. Rainwater must not be employed in cooking, and everyone should guard against exposure to wet weather ... fasting is injurious and so is anxiety of mind, anger, and immoderate drinking and bathing. Men must preserve chastity (abstinence) as they value their lives. Everyone should remember this, but especially those who reside on the coast, or upon an island into which the noxious (poisonous) wind has penetrated.

Source: *The Report of the Paris Medical Faculty*, October, 1348.

Document B: Ibn al-Wardi (Modified)

The passage below is an excerpt from Ibn al-Wardi's "An Essay on the Report of the Pestilence." Ibn al-Wardi was an Arab writer, philosopher, and historian who was alive in the Middle East during the plague. Here, he describes the effects of the plague on the city of Aleppo in Syria. In 1349, al-Wardi died from the plague.

The plague frightened and killed. It began in the land of darkness. Oh, what a visitor! It has been current for fifteen years. China was not preserved from it. The plague infected the Indians in India. It weighed upon the Sind. It seized with its hand and effected even the Persians,...and gnawed away at the Crimea...The plague destroyed mankind in Cairo...It stilled all movement in Alexandria.

Then, the plague turned to Upper Egypt...The plague attacked Gaza...The plague trapped Sidon and descended unexpectedly upon Beirut. Next, it directed its shooting arrows to Damascus. There the plague sat like a lion on a throne and swayed with power, killing daily one thousand or more and destroying the population.

Oh God, it is acting by Your command. Lift this from us. It happens where You wish; keep the plague from us...

The plague caused the people of Aleppo the same disturbance. Oh, if you could see the nobles of Aleppo studying their incomprehensible books of medicine. They follow its remedies by eating dried and sour foods. The buboes which disturb men's healthy lives are smeared with Armenian clay. Each man treated their health to make life more comfortable. They perfumed their homes with ambergris (a fragrant rock) and camphor (fragrant wax), cyperus (a flower), and sandal. They wore ruby rings and put onions, vinegar, and sardines together with the daily meal.

We ask God's forgiveness for our bad souls; the plague is surely part of His punishment. We take refuge (shelter) from His wrath in His pleasure and from His chastisement (scolding) in His restoring. Some said: the air's corruption kills. I said: the love of corruption kills.

Source: Ibn al-Wardi, *As Essay on the Report of the Pestilence*, 1348.