

The Black Death and the Silk Road

Enquiry: How far did the Black Death change the Medieval World?

KS3 History - Lesson 1 of 4

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The Silk Road

In 1345, people in China and India began dying of a strange new disease. This strange disease caused large lumps to swell all over their bodies.

At this time the **Silk Road** had set up trade links between China, India and Europe. This meant that **traders** would travel to Europe to sell items such as silk, spices and precious stones. However, unknown to the traders, fleas were living inside their products and the fleas carried with them the disease of the Black Death. As the traders sold their items at each port, the Black Death began to appear in all places along the Silk Road. This is how roughly 60% of Europe's population died, because of a disease that started out in the East.



Warfare

The **Kingdom of Genoa**, (in Italy) controlled a seaport that had become very rich through trade from the Silk Road. The port was called **Caffa**. However, the Mongols felt uneasy that the **Genoese** were growing in wealth and power. In 1347, the Mongols attacked the port of **Caffa** with the aim to control its trade.

Surprisingly, the battle soon stopped as many Mongol soldiers began dying of the Black Death. The Genoese were overjoyed, thinking that the disease had saved them. But the celebrations ended when the Mongols began **catapulting** the dead bodies of plague victims over the walls of the city to spread the disease onto their enemies. Having been exposed to the disease, the Genoese returned to Italy, bringing the disease to Western Europe.



Spread of disease in local areas

Medieval people did not know about germs. Medieval people did not understand how diseases spread. In the 14th century, bathing was considered a luxury. Houses had no indoor plumbing. In towns, bath houses were built for multiple people to bathe together. Bathing together continued during the time of the Black Death which caused the disease to spread further. Medieval people did not realise that the clean water they used was often taken from rivers and streams. These rivers and streams were already contaminated.



Glossary

Silk Road – Network of trade routes between China, India and Europe.

Trader – A person who buys and sells goods.

Kingdom of Genoa – Independent state on the North West Italian coast that ruled from 1005 - 1797.

Caffa – A busy and wealthy trading post that was owned by the Kingdom of Genoa.

Genoese – Citizens of the Kingdom of Genoa.

Catapult – A military device that could launch heavy rocks (or people) at the enemy.

Contaminated – Had become polluted by the Black Death.

