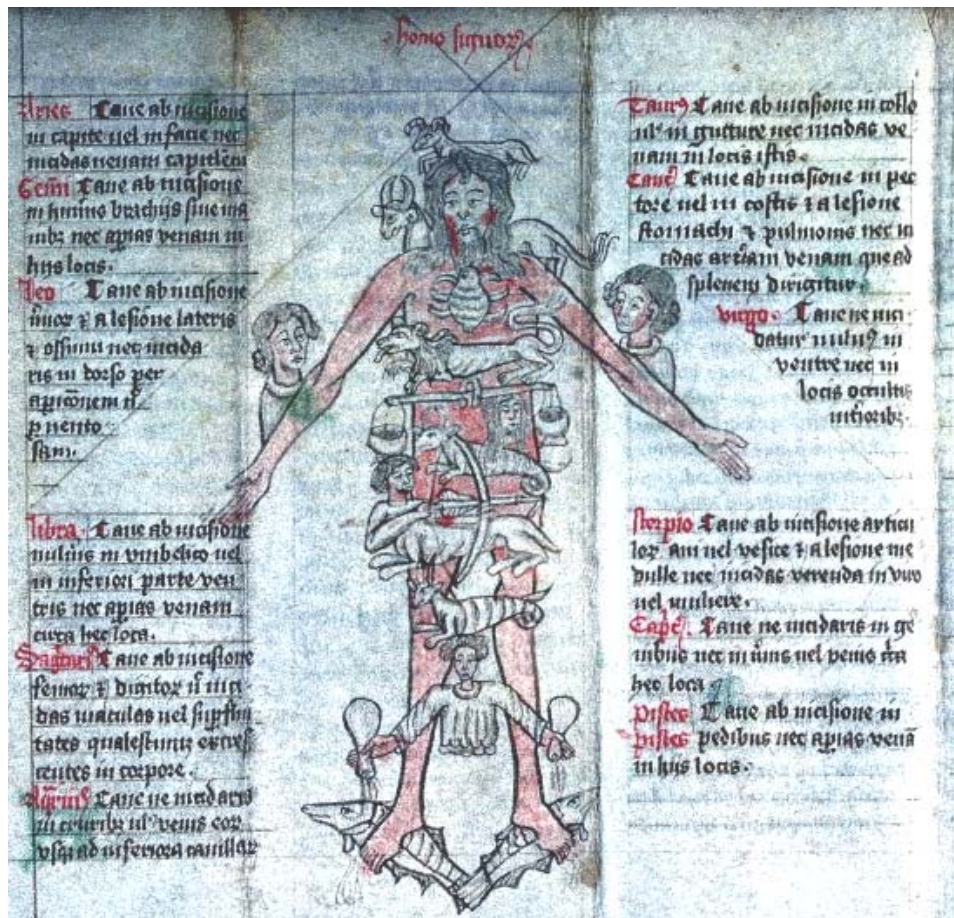


## What did medieval people believe caused disease?

Below is a selection of sources. Your task is to use each source to work out what medieval people believed caused disease. You should complete the table with information about each source.

### Source A



Credit: Wellcome Library, London

A picture of 'astrological man' showing which zodiac signs rule which body parts. From a *Medical Practitioner's Handbook*, 1463.

### Source B

God is terrible towards the sons of men. He often allows plagues, miserable famines, conflicts, wars and other forms of suffering to arise, and uses them to terrify and torment people and so drive out their sins. And so the people of England are to be oppressed by the plague.

*From a monk's letter to the Bishop of London, 1348.*

### Source C

Medieval doctors thought that the body was made up of four humours – earth, fire, water and air. If these humours should get out of balance, you fell ill. In summer, the dry heat would increase the fire so you would sweat and get very hot – you might even become bad tempered. In winter, the damp climate would increase the water in your body. This would make you produce more phlegm and suffer from coughs and colds.

*From a textbook published in 1991*

**Source D**



**Credit:** Wellcome Library, London

Picture from 1675 of a man letting blood into a bowl. Two other bowls already filled with blood sit nearby. People believed that if the humours were out of balance, an illness could be cured by 'letting' blood to restore the balance.

**Source E**

The general cause of the plague was the close position of the three great planets, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars. This had taken place in 1345 on 24 March. Such a coming together of planets is always a sign of wonderful, terrible or violent things to come.

*Guy de Chauliac, a famous doctor writing in the 1300s.*

**Source F**

In the Middle Ages, people thought that worms were connected to illness. When doctors examined the faeces of sick people they often saw worms. It seemed obvious to link these to whatever illness the person was suffering from.

*From a textbook published in 1996.*

What did medieval people believe caused disease?

	What does the source suggest about what people believed caused disease?	Do people still believe this today?
Source A		
Source B		
Source C		
Source D		
Source E		
Source F		

1. What are the differences between what people believed caused disease in medieval times and what people think today?

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.....

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2. Are there any similarities?

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Teaching notes

This resource is accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation (for subscribers only) which allows you to project the sources for whole class discussion/analysis. There is also an interactive True/False quiz (for subscribers only) which would work well as a plenary. To find these go to [www.teachithistory.co.uk](http://www.teachithistory.co.uk) and enter '20476' in the 'quick search' box on the top right of the screen.

Starter idea

Source A is a complex picture which would benefit from analysis together as a class. It therefore works well as a starter image. You could discuss: what can we learn from this picture about medieval understanding of disease?

You could use the following background information to help identify the symbols and body parts:

- Ancient astrologers believed that each astrological sign influenced a specific part of the body. The first sign of the zodiac – Aries – was attributed to the head, with the rest of the signs moving down the body, ending with Pisces at the feet.

Zodiac sign	Symbol	Body part influenced
Aries	The Ram	Head
Taurus	The Bull	Neck
Gemini	The Twins	Arms
Cancer	The Crab	Chest
Leo	The Lion	Heart
Virgo	The Maiden	Stomach
Libra	The Scales	Kidneys
Scorpio	The Scorpion	Genitals/Bowels
Sagittarius	The Archer	Thighs
Capricorn	The Goat	Knees
Aquarius	The Water-bearer	Legs
Pisces	The Fish	Feet

The rest of the sources are more straightforward. The class could use them to complete the table individually, in pairs or as a carousel activity.

What did medieval people believe caused disease?



### Source A

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Credit: Wellcome Library, London

What does the source suggest about what people believed caused disease?

Do people still believe this today?

Source A		
Source B		
Source C		
Source D		
Source E		
Source F		

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### Source F

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### Questions

1. What are the differences between what people believed caused disease in medieval times, and what people think today?
2. Are there any similarities?

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