

**COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA**

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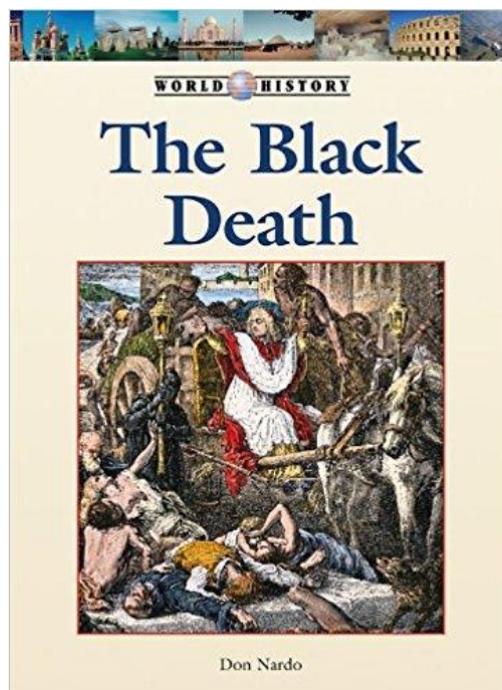
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Nardo, D. (2011). *The Black Death*.. Detroit : Lucent.



## Weird Public Displays

Some of the most devout Christians joined groups of flagellants, a name that comes from the word *flagellate*, meaning to punish by whipping. This name was well chosen. Groups of a few hundred and at times a few thousand flagellants travelled from town to town. When they reached the city centre, they stripped themselves to the waist and beat themselves with whips until they bled. Bleeding was inevitable because these were no ordinary whips. According to an eyewitness, such a whip, called a scourge, was

“a kind of stick from which three tails with large knots hung down. Through the knots were thrust iron spikes as sharp as needles, which penetrated about the length of a grain of wheat or a little more beyond the knots”



*Some devoted Christians became flagellants, meaning they would whip themselves in punishment as an appeal to God. They felt that their prayers for relief from the Black Death had been ignored.*

These beatings were supposed to dramatize the whippings Jesus received prior to his crucifixion. The intent was to sway God enough that he might forgive humanity's sins and halt the Black Death.

The first session of self-flogging was only the beginning of a typical flagellant ceremony. Next the worshippers sang dirges (mournful songs). Sometimes they marched in circles, continuing to beat themselves and sing.

After that, it was common for the flagellants to lie down on the ground. Two of their number, called “masters” then walked back and forth among them, thrashing them with scourges or rods. Finally, they knelt before a large cross and listened as one of the masters recited the so-called flagellants sermon, which warned society's sinners that god would sooner or later punish them.