Maurits van den Boogert, Russell kardeşlerin *Natural History of Aleppo* hakkında, dönemindeki çeşitli dergilerde tanıtım ve eleştirisinin yapıldığını, ancak gerek dönemindeki veya gerek daha sonraki bilim insanları ve eleştirmenlerin bu kitapta geçen toplumsal olayların veya bilimsel olguların güvenilirliğini sarsacak bir yorumuna şimdiye kadar rastlanmadığını ifade etmektedir. Gerek bağlam analizi, gerekse içerik analizi açısından başarılı bir kitap çalışması ortaya koyan yazar, hem bilim ve kent tarihi ve hem karşılaştırmalı entelektüel tarih konularında araştırma yapanlar açısından ellerinde keyifle okuyacakları ve inceleyecekleri bir eser ortaya koymuştur. Russell kardeşler nasıl ki seyahat ettikleri ülke ve şehirlerin veya bölgelerin insanlarının yaşamları ve kültürlerinin yanı sıra doğasını, bitki örtüsünü, nehirlerinde veya göllerinde barındırdıkları balık çeşitlerine varıncaya kadar pek çok unsuru itinayla ve dikkatle sistematik bir şekilde gözlemlemiş ve incelemişlerse, *Aleppo Observed*'un yazarı da onların hayatlarını, notlarını ve çalışmalarını aynı titizlikle ve özenle incelemiş ve bizi, karşısında saygıyla eğilmeye mecbur bırakan bir eser ortaya koymuştur.

Seyfi Kenan
Marmara Üniversitesi

Nükhet Varlık,
Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World: the Ottoman Experience, 1347-1600,
New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 336 pp.,
ISBN 978-110-7013-38-4.

Most visitors will be struck by the multitude of cats that seem to dominate the cityscape of modern Istanbul. Despite whatever municipal attempts to control the feline population have been carried out in the past and present, one senses that Istanbulites regard cats not as nuisances but rather as benign and welcome components of the urban fabric. The ubiquity of street cats is often anecdotally-linked to the observation that in comparison with comparable world cities such as New York, Istanbul is relatively rodent-free. This mundane aspect of life in Istanbul today attains new meaning alongside a reading of Nükhet Varlık's groundbreaking *Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World*. In her discussion of

disease in the early Ottoman Empire, Varlık documents the city's long and intricate relationship with plague and the rats that facilitated its spread, leading this reviewer to ask whether Istanbul's love affair with cats is just as much a question of epidemiology as it is of emotion.

Plague and Empire is a book that tackles and raises major questions about Ottoman history and the hitherto under-studied subject of disease. Much as the subject of plague has been ascribed great importance within the historiography of medieval and early modern Europe, Varlık demonstrates that plague in the Eastern Mediterranean merits consideration as the focal point in the study of the Ottoman Empire and its capital in Istanbul. The Ottoman domains have long been evoked in historiography of the plague, but primarily as an external, eastern source of the pestilence that periodically swept across Europe. By contrast, Varlık places the Ottoman experience of plague at center-stage, drawing on an impressively diverse array of Ottoman and European sources to make sense of this historiography and the latest scientific developments in the historical epidemiology of plague.

Plague and Empire is divided into three parts totaling eight chapters that speak to three different genres of historiography. The first part of the work is concerned with the behavior of plague as a disease and the relationship between plague historiography as a whole and the Ottoman experience. The second part of the book is devoted to different phases of the long Ottoman encounter with plague and the relationship of these phases to the political and socioeconomic expansion of the empire. The final part of the book studies the Ottoman experience of plague as a social phenomenon, delving into the cultural history of disease and how the processes discussed in earlier sections of the book impacted the development of Ottoman society.

Chapter 1 offers what Varlık refers to as a natural history of plague with an emphasis on the Ottoman domains. In addition to integrating the latest developments in the study of plague, Varlık offers some clues as to how plague fits into the different climatic, environmental, and social conditions of the Ottoman Empire. This chapter attempts to bring together as many clues as possible concerning how plague may have functioned and the wide variety of factors that may have contributed to outbreaks and epidemics. With regard to human activity, she places particular emphasis on the diverse and often ignored types of movement and mobility in the empire such as trade, nomadic rhythms, and population movements both within and into the Ottoman Empire. Chapter 2 tackles misrepresentations of plague in the Ottoman Empire and seeks to rectify the silence of Ottoman historiography

on the history of plague and disease, complicating the orientalist notion of the "fatalistic Turk." Chapter 3 deals with the period of the Black Death (1346-1353)—a cataclysmic and pivotal moment in European historiography—from the vantage point of the Ottoman Empire, tracing the spread of plague and the century that followed up until the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

Chapter 4 focuses on the early spread of plague eastward to the Ottoman Empire from European ports during the period of Ottoman expansion between 1453 and 1517 and explores the relationship between the emergence of new urban centers and the transformation of the plague. Chapter 5 charts the movements of plague during the 1517-70 period and its intertwining with conquest, commerce, and continued urbanization. Chapter 6 details the consolidation of Istanbul as the empire's plague hub during the apogee of Ottoman expansion over the last decades of the 16th century. Chapter 7 reconstructs Ottoman understandings of and attitudes towards plague as a disease and studies how ideas and practices changed in light of plague's spread and persistence. Chapter 8 outlines the administrative response to plague in Istanbul and other Ottoman cities, bringing to light the ways in which the Ottoman government sought to document the plague and in the process, track as well as regulate the spaces and bodies that facilitated its spread. According to Varlık, the encounter with plague brought early examples of public health practices that are sometimes ascribed later provenance and played an important role in the making of the early modern state.

Varlık's most important corrective to the extant historiography is found in the central argument of the work. Neither Ottoman society nor the presence of plague within it were static; rather, plague spread and changed as the empire itself grew and new geographical connections took shape. Varlık argues that "the growth of the Ottoman Empire and the expansion of plague epidemics are intimately intertwined." (p. 4) During the medieval period and the Black Death, the typical manifestation of plague was eruption in certain locations, a spread along main routes, and an eventual disappearance. This pattern would recur every ten to fifteen years. However, beginning in the second half of the 15th century, plague in the Ottoman Empire deviated from this pattern to recur in locations such as Istanbul on a practically annual basis. This shift was the result of the growth of the Ottoman Empire as an interconnected imperial space and the creation of what Varlık calls "a capital effect," which is to say the intensification of plague in Istanbul due its dense population and its place at the center of various social and economic flows within the empire.

Readers will no doubt be intrigued by the periodization and subdivision of *Plague and Empire*, which conform neatly to a conventional periodization of early Ottoman political history. While the historiography of disease and environment tends to emphasize that microbes and other ecological factors rarely conform to human-made boundaries of space and time, Varlık makes a good case that the phases of political expansion and restructuring in the empire coincide with phases of distinct plague contagion and spread. While plagues are often cited in the fall of empires, Varlık notes that the processes that shaped the Ottoman Empire were the same that would facilitate the spread of plague. Thus in contrast to the typical presentation of plague as harbinger of imperial decline, in the Ottoman Empire plague was part and parcel of the empire's formation. As a handy table on page 132 suggests, plague outbreaks became more frequent as the Ottoman domains and state apparatus grew.

Plague and Empire is an excellent complement to the other studies of environment and disease in the early modern Ottoman Empire released through Cambridge University Press, especially Sam White's *Climate of Rebellion* (2011). Whereas the latter's narrative emphasizes the impacts of global climate change on Ottoman society and economy, Varlık emphasizes the impact of human activity in the empire on the creation of new plague networks and environments. Together, these studies demonstrate the complex and dialectical relationship between human society and the environment in the Ottoman Empire.

Another important contribution of *Plague and Empire* is its incorporation of detailed discussion concerning the latest scientific developments in the understanding of plague and consideration of new findings in light of evidence of plague epidemiology in the Ottoman Empire based on Ottoman and European sources. With imagination and rigor, Varlık brings a multi-layered reading of plague in the "natural history" laid out in Chapter 1 and throughout the subsequent chapters on plague's transformation. This reviewer was particularly enticed by the interspersed details concerning differentiated responses to plague among the Ottoman populace. For example, Varlık shows that in different parts of the empire, both urban and rural populations took to the mountains during warm seasons associated with the proliferation of plague. In later centuries, this behavior is also observable as a response to summertime malaria, even as plague ceased to be a central public health concern in the 19th and 20th centuries. The fact that seasonal migration to the mountains was a common response to malaria does not mean that the supposed link between seasonal migration and plague is

invalid or overstated but rather suggests that the frequent conflation of different epidemic diseases among the early modern Ottoman population was not merely due to an inability to differentiate. Strategies such as the avoidance of particular environments may have proven effective in warding off a range of ailments with similar seasonal signatures. While historians of disease have learned the dangers of over-speculative retroactive diagnosis, the overlap and convergences between past understandings of what may be identified as distinct ailments in epidemiological terms point to the potential benefits of studying past disease and environments through the ecological worldviews of the actors in question.

In this regard, the final chapters of *Plague and Empire*, which deal with the intellectual, social, and political reactions to the plague, are especially critical for working towards a means of studying the subject of plague through the eyes of contemporary historical observers. Varlık demonstrates that views and understandings of plague changed, arguing that plague was both *naturalized* in the sense that it became part of the Ottoman cultural landscape as well as medicalized in that it was approached not merely as a natural disaster but as a disease to be studied and treated. These chapters raise important questions for historians of disease and medicine working on later periods of history in the Middle East. They also suggest that the Ottoman encounter with the plague was on the whole similar to the better studied experience of European societies during the medieval and early modern periods.

Plague and Empire contends that the Ottoman experience, rather than being a foil or counterpart to the European experience, was one facet of a broader early modern encounter with plague that occurred within an increasingly interconnected world. In this important response to a Eurocentric field of study, Varlık has written a new narrative that will be the subject of much discussion and interest within plague studies. Likewise, by connecting the spread of plague to the rise of the Ottoman Empire as we know it, Varlık impels the field of Ottoman studies to pay more attention to disease and environment. Whether continuing the study of diseases and their relationship with a transformation polity or exploring how cats became cuddly co-agents in an Ottoman reaction to repeated epidemics, Ottomanist scholars will return to *Plague and Empire* as an important source of new questions in the years to come.

Chris Gratien
Yale University