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PUSHING THE STONE UPHILL: THE IMPACT OF BUBONIC PLAGUE ON OTTOMAN URBAN SOCIETY IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

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"A history more worthy of the name than the different speculations to which we are reduced by the paucity of our material would give space to the vicissitudes of the human organism. It is very naïve to claim to understand men without knowing what sort of health they enjoyed."
Marc Bloch: *Feudal Society.*
Chicago, 1964, Vol. I., p.72.

Introduction

To say that the study of Ottoman history is in its infancy is a truism often overlooked by practitioners in the field. The formal study of Ottoman history began in the 1820s with the publication of J. von Hammer-Purgstall's ten volume opus entitled the *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches.*[1] This work, which presented a chronological outline of the state from its origins at the end of the thirteenth century through the year 1774, relies primarily upon Byzantine and Ottoman imperial chronicles, the earliest of the Ottoman works having been compiled at the end of the fifteenth century. Von Hammer's methodology consisted of trying to reconcile the often conflicting accounts of events appearing in his sources and stringing them together to form a more or less comprehensible narrative of the state's political history. This narrative (later

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1 J. von Hammer-Purgstall: *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches.* 10 Volumes. Peste, 1827-1835 [Reprinted: Graz, 1963].

supplemented by Zinkeisen's seven volume *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches in Europa*,[2] published in the 1840s and based partially on Venetian sources; Iorga's five volume *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, published between 1908-1913)[3] and, İ. Hakkı Uzunçarşılı's six volume *Osmanlı Tarihi*,[4] published between 1947-1959), remains the primary source of our understanding of even something so basic as the chronology of events.

If we look at the ensuing chronology as the border of a giant jigsaw puzzle, we may describe the contributions of scholars in the past half century as efforts to fill in the vast *tabula rasa* which lies within it. These efforts were facilitated by the opening in the early 1950s of the Prime Minister's archives in Istanbul, whose collection of over one hundred million documents (of which less than 10% are catalogued today) has resulted in successive generations of young scholars setting off for İstanbul in search of the enlightenment they are assumed to hold. The results of these efforts are little more than the addition of a few hundred pieces of the puzzle scattered at random within the borders established in the preceding century. While many of these monographs are indeed well researched and written, all too often they stand alone, i.e., they fail to connect to other pieces of the puzzle in a meaningful manner. Similarly, as many of these studies deal with topics previously unstudied they often are not subjected to critical reviews and are simply accepted as fact and unquestioningly cited by other scholars.

In short, we know very little about Ottoman history and our knowledge tends to decrease the further we move back in time. Bearing in mind that even the basic chronology of events as set forth by von Hammer *et al.* was based on accounts compiled in the sixteenth century and thereafter, it takes no stretch of imagination to realize that for the formative period of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, even the border of the larger picture is filled with gaping holes. Similarly, the extant archival documents are, as one would expect, of far greater value and scope for the eighteenth and nineteenth century than for the earlier periods.

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2 Johann Wilhelm Zinkeisen: *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches in Europa.* 7 Volumes. Hamburg, 1840 & Gotha, 1854-1863.

3. N. Iorga: *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*. 5 Volumes. Gotha, 1908-1913.

4 İ. Hakkı Uzunçarşılı: *Osmanlı Tarihi.* 6 Volumes. Ankara, 1947-1959.

Bearing these caveats in mind, I have approached the topic of the impact of bubonic plague on life in the Ottoman capital in the following paper on three distinct levels. First, in order to fill the apparent lacunae in the existing historical narrative, I have attempted to piece together a hitherto missing hand list of the evidence from the contemporary sources on the various outbreaks which impacted the state in the period under study. Then I have sought to interweave the plague data into the better-studied efforts by the Ottoman ruler Mehmed II., the conqueror of Constantinople, to repopulate his new capital in the years between 1453 and 1467. This has been done in an attempt to illustrate the extent of the impact of the pestilence on urban life. Finally, by focusing attention on two particular points in time: the reigns of Sultan Mehmed II (1451-1481) and Sultan Süleyman (1521-1566), I have attempted to address the question of changing Ottoman attitudes *vis-à-vis* the plague. To the extent this latter exercise is successful it will offer up a new explanation to account for what appears to be a retrogressive understanding on the part of the Ottomans towards plague and its causation.

Tracing Ottoman Plague Outbreaks, 1300-1600

Among the myriad of unstudied topics in the field of early Ottoman history none is more glaring by its absence than the question of the impact of the fourteenth century Black Death and later pandemic plague outbreaks in the state during the first three centuries of its existence. To say that we know little about this subject would be an overstatement. We know virtually nothing. Indeed, not so much as a single scholarly article has been devoted to the topic. No contemporary published work even mentions plague in the fourteenth century, and the only references to it in the secondary literature on the fifteenth and sixteenth century are the Encyclopaedia of Islam entry on '*Istanbul*,' authored by Halil İnalcık, where he provides a list of dates (without sources) of known outbreaks in the capital,[5] and a scattering of mentions (again without benefit of sources) to fifteenth century outbreaks in Franz Babinger's *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*.[6] The sole monograph on the subject of plague in

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5 Halil İnalcık: "Istanbul," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2nd. Edition. Vol. IV (Leiden, 1978), pp. 224-248 [Hereafter: İnalcık, 1978]. For plague, see: pp. 238-239.

6 Franz Babinger: *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*. Trans. by W. Hickman. Princeton, 1978. pp. 229, 309 & 342 [Hereafter: Babinger, 1978].

the Ottoman empire, Daniel Panzac's *La Pest dans l'Empire Ottoman*, focuses exclusively on the years 1700-1850, and its readers search in vain for any indication that the scourge of plague had existed in the Ottoman domains prior to the opening years of the eighteenth century.[7]

A perusal of the most widely used textbooks on early Ottoman history, those by Stanford Shaw, Halil İnalcık, and Colin Imber, fails to find any mention of plague in the fourteenth-sixteenth century.[8] Even standard reference works in the field, such as Speros Vryonis Jr.'s 1971 opus entitled: *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*, and the more recent (1994) Cambridge *Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, edited by Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert, virtually ignore the impact of pandemic disease and the bubonic plague in the fourteenth and fifteenth century Ottoman world.[9]

Likewise, a survey of the most recent publications in the field illustrates the extent to which the topic of plague in the fifteenth and sixteenth century Ottoman realms remains virtually ignored. Two cases in point are: a) the entry for "*waba*'" (Arabic: epidemic or pestilence) in the prestigious Encyclopaedia of Islam, where the section entitled "*In the Ottoman Empire*" (authored by Daniel Panzac) while noting that plague had been "*firmly established in the Ancient World since the mid-14th century*," first cites an outbreak in Ottoman lands of 1572-89; and, b) the recently published study by Minna Rozen entitled: *A*

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7 Daniel Panzac: *La Peste dans l'Empire Ottoman, 1700-1850*. Leuven, 1985. For an excellent study of plague in the Arab Middle East, see: M.W. Dols: *The Black Death in the Middle East*. Princeton, 1977 [Hereafter: Dols, 1977].

8 Arranged chronologically these works include: Halil İnalcık: *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*. London, 1973 [with numerous reprints]; Stanford Shaw: *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey. Volume I: Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280-1808*. Cambridge, 1976 [with numerous reprints]; and, Colin Imber: *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650*. London, 2002.

9 There is no reference to the impact of bubonic plague in Speros Vryonis, Jr: *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*. Berkeley, 1971; and, for the 15th and 16th century, only a single mention of an outbreak in 1467 in: Halil İnalcık with Donald Quataert: *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*. Cambridge, 1994.

History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul: The Formative Years, 1453-1566, where, in the first monograph to specifically address the history of a particular religious community in the Ottoman capital, Rozen devotes 400 pages to the century being addressed in the present paper without so much as mentioning the occurrence of a single fifteenth or sixteenth century plague outbreak in the Ottoman capital.[10]

Interestingly, the sole English language work to even suggest that plague was a factor in the early Ottoman period is the 1916 study by Herbert Adams Gibbons which argues that Ottoman growth at the expense of Byzantium may be partially accounted for by the negative impact of the first Black Death outbreak, that of 1346-1348, and a series of later recorded outbreaks between 1348-1431, the very period in which the Ottomans were experiencing their greatest growth at the expense of their Christian neighbors. He argued (without benefit of source) that as Byzantium's urban population was largely Greek and Christian it was therefore more prone to the ravages of plague than the semi-nomadic Turks, and viewed this is an explanatory causal factor in the empire's decline. In so doing he managed to ignore the fact that even prior to the arrival of the Black Death, the Ottomans were firmly ensconced in the major western Anatolian cities of Bursa (Prusa), İznik (Nicaea) and İzmid (Nicomedia),[11] three urban centers located firmly astride key Asia Minor trade routes along which the plague is known to have traditionally spread.[12]

The present study is in no way intended to fill the lacunae regarding this topic, but rather sets itself the limited task of reviewing what little is known of fourteenth century outbreaks in Byzantium, and then examining the extant fifteenth and sixteenth century sources in an attempt to come to terms with the impact of plague in the second and third centuries of the Ottoman state's

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10 See the entry for '*waba*' by Daniel Panzac in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Volume XI. Leiden (Brill), 2000. pp. 2-4 [Hereafter: Panzac, 2000]; and, Minna Rozen: *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul: The Formative Years, 1453-1566.* Leiden (Brill), 2003.

11 Herbert Adams Gibbons: *The Foundation of the Ottoman Empire: A History of the Osmanlis up to the Death of Bayezid I (1300-1403).* Oxford, 1916. For plague, see: pp. 95-96. For the record of plague outbreaks in the region of Bithynia, see: Heath W. Lowry: *Ottoman Bursa in Travel Accounts.* Bloomington, 1993. Pages: 77-79 [Hereafter: Lowry, 2003b].

12 Dols, 1977: pp. 42-43 & Lowry, 2003b: pp. 77-79.

existence. Even this limited task is complicated by virtue of the fact that there are almost no contemporary Ottoman chronicles or narrative sources covering the years 1299-1500, and, those few late fifteenth century chronicles which have survived are, with one exception, completely mute on the question of plague. As for the surviving Byzantine sources, they too provide little more than the year and locations in which outbreaks occurred, a fact which the Byzantinist Donald Nicol ascribes to their author's belief that such events were regarded as visitations from God and that there was therefore little point in complaining about them.[13]

Its silence in regard to the fourteenth century reflects the fact that I have heretofore not encountered any source specifically noting its impact on the growing Ottoman polity in that era. While the great Black Death of 1346-1348, which is generally believed to have swept south from the Crimea, via Trebizond and Constantinople before striking westward to Marseilles and the rest of Europe, is known to have wracked havoc in Constantinople (one western chronicler makes the seemingly high claim that it killed eight-ninths of the city's inhabitants), there is no written record of it having affected Ottoman cities such as Bursa, İznik, or İzmid,[14] even though, from the fact that Arabic sources mention it as having ravaged the coasts of Asia Minor, we may infer that it had not left the Ottomans untouched.[15]

Later in the fourteenth century the Byzantine Short Chronicles record outbreaks in 1361-1362 (Constantinople), 1363, 1365 (Crete), 1374 (Arta), 1376 (Crete), 1381-1382 (Pera), 1388-1389 (Crete), 1390-1391, 1398 (Crete) and, 1398-1399 (Peloponnesus: Koron & Modon). However, as might be expected, they too are totally silent as to what affect they may have had in Ottoman territories.[16]

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13 Donald M. Nicol: *The Last Centuries of Byzantium*. Second Edition Cambridge, 1993. p. 216 [Hereafter: Nicol, 1993].o

14 Nicol: 1993: pp. 216-218 & P. Schreiner: *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken (Chronica Bzyantina Breviora)*. Vol. XII/2 Vienna, 1977. pp. 271-272 [Hereafter: Schreiner, 1977]. See, also: Heath W. Lowry: *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*. Albany (SUNY Press), 2003 [Hereafter: Lowry, 2003a].

15 Dols, 1977: pp. 61-63.

16 Schreiner, 1977: pp. 290-292, 308, 311, 324, 337, 344 & 361-362.

This leaves us with the fifteenth century chronicles authored by subjects of the states with whom the Ottomans were in contact (primarily Byzantine authors such as Doukas, Sphrantzes, & Kritovoulos), plus a scattering of notices penned by Italian merchants resident in the Ottoman territories. It is from this very sparse body of material that we must attempt to trace the series of outbreaks and likewise highlight the necessity of any work dealing with the formative Ottoman centuries to come to terms with the questions they pose.

The impact of the Black Death and later plague pandemics, in fourteenth and fifteenth century western Europe has been the subject of numerous studies, those of John Aberth, William Naphy & Andrew Spicer and Stephen Porter being just a few of the more recent.[17] These works are united in one important aspect: they all basically silent in regard to the impact of these outbreaks in the Byzantine and Ottoman territories. Their silence in this regard stems less from a Euro-centric bias than it does from gaps in the late-Byzantine and early-Ottoman historiographies. My own failure to place the ensuing discussion into the broader context of the far better studied genre of western European plague studies stems primarily from constraints of time and space rather than an ignorance of that body of work. Stated differently, in intent this paper is designed to provide the skeletal framework upon which later studies may build, rather than to provide a comparative discussion of European and Ottoman reactions to such scourges.

Our earliest reference to plague in Ottoman lands is, somewhat fittingly, associated with the greatest manmade disaster to strike the state in the fifteenth century, namely, the invasion of Anatolia in 1402 by the Central Asian conqueror Timur (Tamerlane). Not only did this result in the defeat, capture and ultimately the death of the fourth Ottoman ruler, Sultan Bayezid, it also (according to the Byzantine chronicler Doukas) resulted in a plague outbreak in Anatolia. Doukas relates how in the spring of 1403 "*a dire famine and*

17 John Aberth: *From the Brink to the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages*. New York, 2001; William Naphy & Andrew Spicer: *The Black Death and the History of Plagues, 1345-1730*. Gloucestershire, England, 2000; and, Stephen Porter: *The Great Plague*. Gloucestershire, England, 1999. For an interesting revisionist approach which argues that the Black Death was not in fact the rat-based bubonic plague, see: S. K. Cohn, Jr.: *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe*. London, 2002. See, also: William H. McNeill: *Plagues and Peoples*. New York, 1976.

pestilence struck all the provinces where the feet of the Scythians had trodden,"[18] thereby indirectly suggesting that the outbreak originated in the camp of Timur's army. As the Timurid forces swept through western Asia Minor in the months following the defeat of Bayezid at Ankara, finally stopping only at the shores of the Aegean, we may infer that this outbreak affected all the Ottoman lands through which they past.

The second recorded outbreak that of 1416-1417, appears to have been concentrated primarily in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople and its hinterland. It is once again Doukas who records the event and the fact that it clearly struck within the walls of the Imperial palace. For three of the victims of what Doukas states were the "*large numbers of the populace who succumbed to the bubonic plague,*"[19] were none other than the Byzantine Empress Anna of Russia, Lord Michael the son of the Emperor Manuel II., and the youngest son of the late Ottoman Sultan Bayezid, who, following his father's death at the hands of Timur, had been raised in the palace of the Byzantine emperor Manuel II. These deaths are also mentioned in the account of a second Byzantine chronicler, George Sphrantzes, who specifically dates the death of the Empress Anna to August of 1417.[20]

Of particular interest is the information provided by both these authors linking the plague-precipitated deathbed conversion to Christianity of Bayezid's youngest son Yusuf, a tragic figure whose very existence is unnoted in the later Ottoman chronicle tradition.[21] Doukas describes the fate of Yusuf in the following long passage:

> "Bayazid's eldest son, who was included among the hostages handed over by Sulayman to Emperor Manuel, was released with his sister Fatma and reared in Prusa [Bursa]. The other son [Yusuf] acquired a passion for Greek learning. He accompanied John, the emperor's son, to school and there as a student he was introduced to intellectual matters. So absorbed was he by the love

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18 Harry J. Magoulias (Ed. & Trans): *Decline and Fall of Byzantium the Ottoman Turks by Doukas*. Detroit, 1975. pp. 112 [Hereafter: Doukas, 1975].

19 Doukas, 1975: p. 112.

20 Marios Philippides: *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire: A Chronicle by George Sphrantzes, 1401-1477*. Amherst, 1980. p. 24 [Hereafter: Sphrantzes, 1980].

21 Doukas, 1975: p. 111 & Sphrantzes, 1980: p. 112.

> of learning when he attended school with John that he came to Emperor Manuel and requested to be baptized according to Christian law. Daily he professed to the emperor that he was a Christian and not a believer in Muhammad's doctrines. The emperor did not wish to listen because it might cause scandal. Then when the dreaded disease continued to consume and destroy bodies, neither respecting nor sparing any age, it attacked Bayazid's adolescent son [emphasis is mine] The stricken youth sent the following message to Emperor John, 'O Emperor of the Romans, you who are both master and father to me, my end is near. Against my wishes I must leave everything behind and depart for the Heavenly Tribunal. I confess that I am a Christian and I accuse you of not granting me the earnest of faith and the seal of the Spirit. Know, therefore, that as I must die unbaptized, I shall bring accusations against you before the Judgment Seat of the impartial God.' Yielding finally to his plea, the emperor sent for him and as his godfather sponsored his baptism. He died the next day. The Emperor buried him with great honor in a marble sarcophagus near the church and within the gate of the Studite Monastery of the Prodromos."[22]

This passage makes the Ottoman Prince (unnamed in Doukas' account) unique in three aspects. First, he was the only scion of the house of Osman who is known to have been a *Hellenophile* educated in the classics (Doukas having reported that he "*acquired a passion for Greek learning*"). Second, he was the only known member of the Ottoman dynasty to have converted from Islam to Christianity (a fact which may well account for his not even being mentioned in the later Ottoman chronicle tradition). Finally, he was the first member of the dynasty who is known to have died of the plague in the period under study.

It is Sphrantzes who supplies the name of Bayezid's youngest son when, in describing the aftermath of Bayezid's defeat at the hands of Timur, he writes: "*Bayezid's five sons - Sulayman, Musa, Isa, Mehmed and Yusuf-arrived in Europe; Yusuf converted and took the Christian name Demetrios. Lord Michael* [son of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II], *the prince, was born in the*

22 Doukas, 1975: p. 112.

city but fell victim to the plague, which also killed the converted Prince Demetrios."[23]

The next recorded outbreak of plague in Constantinople is reported only in the work of Sphrantzes, who notes that in 1420 an outbreak in the city caused the Emperor Manuel II to temporarily transfer his residence from the imperial palace to the monastery of Peribleptos.[24] Manuel's caution in this regard may have been induced by the still fresh memory of having lost his wife three years earlier when plague permeated the confines of the palace. He seemingly felt that the smaller walled enclosure of the monastery afforded more security than the larger palace.

A decade later in 1431 Sphrantzes notes an outbreak of the plague at Patras in the Morea (Greece), and adds the fact that "*it claimed numerous victims.*"[25] Then nine years later the Byzantine Short Chronicles record a bubonic outbreak in 1440-1441 in the Peloponnesus.[26]

In his description of the Ottoman ruler Murad II's thwarted campaign against Belgrade in 1436, Doukas attributes his failure to conquer the strategic city to the fact that "*he sustained heavy losses of nobles and servants as a result of both pestilential disease and the missiles discharged by the fortress's war engines.*"[27]

Once again, as in the case of the 1403 outbreak in Anatolia, we have a causal linkage between a plague outbreak and a military campaign. Factoring in the aforementioned references to several early fifteenth century outbreaks in Constantinople, it takes no great stretch of the imagination to realize (with the benefit of hindsight not available at the time), that it was the unsanitary, crowded conditions, which were found in both military encampments and large urban centers, which provided the necessary fertile conditions for the spread of the highly contagious bubonic plague.

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23 Sphrantzes, 1980: p. 22.

24 Sphrantzes, 1980: p. 26.

25 Sphrantzes, 1980: p. 46.

26 Schreiner, 1977: p. 459.

27 Doukas, 1975: p. 178.

In 1455, the chronicler Doukas, who was in the service of the Latin family of the Gattilusi, the Ottoman tributary rulers of the Aegean island of Mytilene (Lesbos), reports how he traveled as part of a delegation taking the island's annual tribute to the Ottoman ruler Mehmed II. They set out, just two years after the fall of Constantinople, to find the Sultan. Crossing from Mytilene to Gallipoli they then moved north to Edirne (Adrianople), where they learned that Mehmed:

> "was moving about from place to place because of the bubonic plague. There was such a pestilence in the Chersonese [the Thracian peninsula west of the Hellespont] and in all of Thrace at that time that many were thrown into the thoroughfares and left uninterred. On learning that the ruler was sojourning in Philippopolis [Filibe], we made our way there. We missed the ruler by two days. In order to escape the dreadful disease which had also reached that city, he marched towards the region of Sofia."[28]

Here we have nothing less than the fearless conqueror of Constantinople running back and forth across the Balkans in an attempt to stay one step ahead of a bubonic outbreak. Given the scope of the carnage described by Doukas it is easy to understand his concern. With no known cure or antidote, the only avenue left was flight. Doukas and his delegation had no option but to follow Mehmed II as he crisscrossed European Thrace in an effort to outrun the dreaded scourge which was devastating the entire region. This was only the first recorded instance of Mehmed's fear of the plague keeping him from returning to the city. Later, in 1467, 1471, 1472 and 1475, he is also known to have fled to various mountainous regions of the Balkans in attempts to escape outbreaks in the capital.[29]

Doukas' comment that the numbers of the dead in the 1455 outbreak were such "*that many were thrown into the thoroughfares and left uninterred*"[30] is a poignant reminder of the scope of the devastation wrought by the disease.

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28 Doukas, 1975: p. 251.

29 Charles T. Riggs (Trans.): *History of Mehmed the Conqueror by Kritovoulos*. Princeton, 1954. p. 222 [Hereafter: Kritovoulos, 1954], & Babinger, 1978: pp. 209, 329 & 342.

30 Doukas, 1975: p. 251.

In a recent study on the fifteenth century I have argued that Mehmed II's desire to regain control of the Aegean island of Limnos (Lemnos) from the Venetians in this period stemmed primarily from its being the sole source of what was believed by the Ottomans to be a unique preventative/cure for plague, the medicinal earth known by the ancients as *Terra Lemnia* and by the Italians as *Terra Sigillata*, or Sealed Earth (the Turkish name *tin-i mahtum* was a calque on the Venetian).[31] No sooner had the peace treaty of 1479 brought an end to the long war between Venice and the Porte (1463-1479), thereby reestablishing Ottoman control of the island, than Mehmed II sent a delegation of doctors to Limnos with orders that they locate the site of the medicinal earth. For the ensuing four hundred years its extraction was closely regulated by the state, and the frequency with which tablets made from it were included among the precious gifts presented to visiting European envoys leaves little doubt but that generations of successive Ottoman rulers continued to consider it an effective remedy/preventative against the perennial scourge of plague.[32] As the following breakdown of recorded instances of plague outbreaks during the reign of Mehmed II (1451-1481) indicates, their frequency in the second half of the fifteenth century was of such epidemic proportions that his concern to find a cure/preventative was warranted.

An anonymous Greek chronicle, detailing events in 1459, relates how Mehmed II's campaign in the Morea (Peloponnesus) was sidetracked when plague struck the army near the fortress town of Leontari: "*then the Turks could not stay there because the plague fell upon them and they even perished from hunger.*"[33] The following year in 1460 the chronicler Sphrantzes mentions having encountered a plague outbreak both at Methone in Greece and on the Adriatic island of Corfu.[34]

In the fifty-seven years between 1403 and 1460, the works of Doukas, Sphrantzes, the Byzantine Short Chronicles and the Greek Anonymous

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31 Heath W. Lowry: *Fifteenth Century Ottoman Realities: Christian Peasant Life on the Aegean Island of Limnos*. İstanbul, 2002. see: pp. 153-171 [Hereafter: Lowry, 2002].

32 Lowry, 2002: p. 169].

33 Marios Philippides: *Byzantium, Europe, and the Early Ottoman Sultans (1373-1513): An Anonymous Greek Chronicle of the Seventeenth Century (Codex Barberinus Graecus 111)*. New Rochelle, New York, 1990. p.79.

34 Sphrantzes, 1980: pp. 82-84.

Chronicle, record no less than nine separate outbreaks of bubonic plague: 1) 1403 in western Asia Minor; 2) 1416-17 in Constantinople and surrounding areas; 3) 1420 in Constantinople; 4) 1431 at Patras in Greece; 5) 1436 at Belgrade in Bulgaria; 6) 1440-1441 in the Peloponnesus; 7) 1455 throughout western Thrace and Constantinople (İstanbul); 8) 1459 at Leontari in Greece; and, 9) 1460 at Methone in Greece. Interestingly, none of the surviving late fifteenth century Ottoman narrative accounts mention a single one of these occurrences.[35] Could it have been that the frequent outbreaks were so much a part of life for the Ottoman writers, who, accustomed to a belief in fate where pestilence was viewed as divinely ordained, did not view them as fitting events to mention in works designed to chronicle the heroic deeds of the House of Osman?

That this was the case a century later is inferable from the work of Busbecq, a sixteenth century envoy of the Holy Roman Emperor to the Porte, when he reports on his attempts in 1561 to gain the permission of the Sultan, Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566), to temporarily leave the house which he had been assigned in the capital as plague had already taken the lives of several of his staff. He conveyed his request to Rüstem *Paşa*, the Grand *Vezir*, who responded that he would raise the matter with the Sultan and get back to him. The next day he brought the following message from Sultan Süleyman:

> "'What did I mean and whither did I think of flying? Did I not know that pestilence is God's arrow, which does not miss its appointed mark? Where could I hide so as to be outside its range? If he wished me to be smitten, no flight or hiding place could avail me. It was useless to avoid inevitable fate. His own house at the moment was not free from plague; yet he remained there. I likewise should do better to remain where I was" [36]

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35 *Die altosmanische Chronik des 'Âşıkpaşazade*. Edited by Friedrich Giese. Leipzig, 1929. [Hereafter:Aşıkpaşazade, 1929]; *Die altosmanischen Anonymen Chroniken*. Edited by Friedrich Giese. Breslau, 1922 [Hereafter: Anonymous, 1922]; & *Die frühosmanischen Jahrbücher Des Urudsch*. Edited by Franz Babinger. Hannover, 1925 [Hereafter: Oruç Beğ, 1925].

36 Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq: *Turkish Letters*. Oxford, 1927. pp. 182-183 [Hereafter: Busbecq, 1927].

Busbecq had no recourse but to obey the sovereign's order, and contented himself by writing: "*thus I was obliged to remain in that plague-stricken house of death.*"[37] Within a matter of days (but not before several more members of his staff including his personal physician, William Quacquelben, had succumbed to the outbreak), the Ottoman Grand *Vezir* Rüstem *Paşa* himself died and Busbecq reiterated his plea to be allowed to move out of the city to the new Chief Minister, Ali *Paşa*. This time his request was granted and he moved to the island of Prinkipo in the Sea of Marmara where he spent the next three months waiting for the outbreak to abate.

The silence of the Ottoman writers on this topic was broken only once in the fifteenth century, and then in regard to what may well have been the most devastating bubonic outbreak to strike the Ottoman realm in that era. Recording events which occurred in the Islamic year h. 871 (1467), the chronicler Oruç *Beğ*, commenting on Mehmed II's return from his Albanian campaign, wrote:

> "Sultan Mehmed yine Arnavuda sefer etti. Yuvan Vilayetine tamam müsahhar iydub gelüb Filibe'da [karar] etti. Ol yıl taun-i ekber oldu. Bir nice gün dörüp Edirneyi geldi. Ondan İstanbula varüb karar etti sekiz yüz yetmiş birinde."[38]

> "Once again Sultan Mehmed campaigned in Albania. After he had subdued the Province of Yuvan he passed on to Filibe and settled there. In that year there was a great bubonic plague outbreak. After staying there some days he came to Edirne. From there he went to İstanbul and settled down. It was in 871 [1467]."

If anything, Oruç *Beğ*'s rather laconic comment may have been an understatement. Other observers, including the Byzantine chronicler Sphrantzes and the Byzantino-Ottoman writer Kritovoulos provide a depth of detail which allows us to comprehend just what Oruç *Beğ* had in mind when he mentioned the *taun-i ekber* (great bubonic plague) outbreak.

Sphrantzes, whose references to earlier outbreaks in the century had been confined to simply recording the fact that plague had struck in a given year (1413, 1416, 1417, 1420, 1431 and 1460), provides greater detail on the 1467 epidemic:

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37 Busbecq, 1927: p. 183.

38 Oruç Beğ, 1925: p. 126.

> "In the summer of the same year, the plague overwhelmed Constantinople, Adrianople [Edirne], Kallipolis [Gallipoli], and the immediate castles, towns, and villages. No outbreak of such intensity had occurred for many years. They say that tens of thousands, not merely thousands, of human beings perished."[39]

Even the tone of Sphrantzes in relating the casualty figures: "*they say that tens of thousands, not merely thousands, of human beings perished,*" suggests that he, like Oruç *Beğ*, was reporting on what he heard rather than on what he had observed firsthand.

This was not the case with Kritovoulos, whose detailed account (unparalleled for this or any other outbreak in the fifteenth century), leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that he was reporting on a disaster which he had experienced firsthand. Indeed, so lengthy is his description that he divides it into three separate chapters. He begins with an introduction in which he names all of the regions affected:

> **Telling of the Beginning of the Pestilential Disease and Whence it Came**
>
> "During those days, in the middle of the summer, a contagious disease struck the whole region of Thrace and Macedonia, beginning with Thessaly and its adjacent regions. I do not know how it first got to Thrace, but it spread and contaminated all the cities and districts in the interior and the coasts. Crossing also into Asia, it attacked and devastated the shores of the Hellespont [Gallipoli] and the Propontis [Marmara], and it went up into the interior, to the Brousa [Bursa] region and all around there, and as far as Galatia [Central Asia Minor], and it even wasted and killed people in Galatia itself."[40]

From the detail he provides we may follow the course of the outbreak as it moved from Thessaly in northern Greece, along the coast of the Aegean and through the Balkans, and then crossed into Asia Minor, where it affected Bithynia and Galatia. That was only a preamble for what came next. For the plague then struck the city of Constantinople itself with devastating impact:

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39 Sphrantzes, 1980: p. 89.

40 Kritovoulos, 1954: pp. 219-220.

Showing the Great and Terrible Suffering

"It was also introduced into the great City of Constantinople, and I hardly need to say what incredible suffering it wrought there, utterly unheard-of and unbearable. More than six hundred deaths a day occurred, a multitude greater than men could bury, for there were not men enough. For some, fearing the plague, fled and never came back, not even to care for their nearest relatives, but even turned away from them, although they often appealed to them with pitiful lamentation, yet they abandoned the sick uncared for and the dead unburied."

"Others were themselves stricken with the plague, and having a hard struggle with death, and could not help themselves. There were also some who shut themselves up in their rooms and would allow no one to come near them. Many of these died, and remained unburied for two or three days, often with nobody knowing of them. There were often two or three dead, or even more, buried in a single coffin, and only one available. And the one who today buried another, would himself be buried the next day by someone else."

"There were not enough presbyters, or acolytes, or priests for the funerals and burials or the funeral chants and prayers, nor could the dead be properly interred, for the workers gave out in the process. They had to go through the long summer days without eating or drinking, and they simply could not stand it."

"People died, some on the third day, some on the fourth, and some even on the seventh. And the terrible fact was that each day the disease grew worse, spreading among all ages, and being increasingly widespread. The City was emptied of its inhabitants, both citizens and foreigners. It had the appearance of a town devoid of all human beings, some of them dead or dying of the disease, others, as I have said, leaving their homes and fleeing, while still others shut themselves into their homes as if condemned to die. And there was great hopelessness and unbearable grief, wailing and lamentations everywhere. Despair and hopelessness dominated the spirits of all. Belief in providence vanished altogether. People thought they must simply bear

whatever happened, as though no one were presiding over events. So did the mystery of the disease perplex everyone."[41]

This seeming eyewitness account of the devastation wrought by the 1467 epidemic is followed by an even more poignant description of the symptoms which accompanied it, an account which leaves no doubt but that what Kritovoulos observed was indeed an outbreak of the bubonic plague:

As to the Nature of the Disease

"I shall here describe the nature of the disease. At first the malady would gain lodgement somehow in the groins, and the symptoms would appear there, more or less strong. Then it vigorously attacked the head, bringing on a high fever there, and swellings near the convolutions and membranes of the brain, and inflammation and reddening of the face. As a result of this, in some it brought unconsciousness and deep sleep and diarrhea, while in others on the contrary it brought on delirium and madness and sleeplessness."

"Then the whole pain and terrible condition would go to the heart, with a burning fever, inflaming and burning up the inner parts, and bringing on most fearful swellings, and contamination of all the blood, and its ruin. And in consequence of this, severe pains and terrible aches, and the cries of the dying, continuous sharp convulsions, hard breathing, bad odors, fearful terror, chills, insensibility of the extremities, and finally death. Such was the nature of the disease, as it appeared to me, leaving out many of the symptoms."[42]

Finally, the author returns to the real subject of his work, the life of Sultan Mehmed II, and makes it clear that the ruler who at the time of the outbreak had been campaigning in Kroues (Albania) had, by taking a series of evasive steps, managed to stay out of the path of the pestilence. In describing the aftermath of Mehmed's unsuccessful siege of the heavily fortified city of Kroues, Kritovoulos returns to the topic of the plague:

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41 Kritovoulos, 1954: pp. 220-221.

42 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 221.

> "[Mehmed] disbanded the troops and left with the royal court for Byzantium [Constantinople]... But since he learned on the way that the whole region of Thrace and Macedonia and the cities in it through which he had planned to travel were in the grip of the plague and were badly devastated, and that even the great City itself was completely under the terror and destruction of it, he suddenly changed his mind, and went to the region of the Haemon and upper Moesia, for he found out that this region and all the region beyond the Haemon was free of the plague."
>
> "As he found that the country around Nikopolis and Vidin was healthful and had a good climate, he spent the entire autumn there. But after a short time he learned that the disease was diminishing and that the City was free of it, for he had frequent couriers, nearly every day, traveling by swift relays, and reporting on conditions in the City. So at the beginning of winter he went to Byzantium. So closed the 6975th year in all [A.D. 1467], which was the seventeenth year of the reign of the Sultan."[43]

Somewhat strangely Kritovoulos' chronicle breaks off at this point. Is it possible that he himself fell victim to the very scourge he had been describing? While there is no way to confirm this impression, it is well within the realm of possibility. For in his section entitled: 'As to the Nature of the Disease,' in which he had given a detailed account of the symptoms associated with the outbreak, he ends his passage by saying "*such was the nature of the disease, as it appeared to me*," thereby leaving little doubt that he was indeed in the city during the 1467 bubonic outbreak.

Here, once again, we have Mehmed II unable to return to his capital in the aftermath of a campaign due to plague. While in 1455 Doukas related how he had moved from Edirne to Filibe to Sofya in a successful attempt to stay ahead of its ravages, now, twelve years later, he was forced to autumn in the countryside between Nicopolis and Vidin for the same reason (as discussed earlier he would do the same again in 1471, 1472 and 1475 in the course of later outbreaks).[44] On no less than five occasions, in the twenty years from

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43 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 222.

44 Babinger, 1978: pp. 299, 309 & 342.

1455-1475, the Ottoman ruler was forced to delay his return to his capital at the end of a campaign season due to the presence of plague in the city. Interestingly, Kritovoulos notes that while unable to return home due to the 1467 outbreak, Mehmed II had news of the epidemic's progression relayed to him by swift relays of couriers on practically a daily basis.

Interplay Between Plague Outbreaks & Efforts at Repopulation

To understand the full imprint of these periodic outbreaks on Mehmed's larger agenda we must go back to Kritovoulos and examine his extremely detailed description of the ruler's efforts at repopulating the city in the preceding fourteen years. A thorough reading of Kritovoulos' account of events between 1453 and 1467 leaves little doubt but that the Ottoman ruler Mehmed II was fixated upon both rebuilding and repopulating his new capital Constantinople (İstanbul). To comprehend fully the negative impact of the 1467 bubonic outbreak (and that of the earlier one of 1455) on the ruler's plans it is useful to juxtapose Kritovoulos' detailed description of Mehmed's efforts at repopulating the city between 1453 and 1467 with the same author's account of the devastation wrought by the 1467 outbreak.

We are assisted in the first part of this reconstruction by Halil İnalcık's important 1960 article on Mehmed's policies *vis-à-vis* the Greek population of the city, in which he made extensive (albeit, by no means exhaustive) use of the account of the Byzantino-Ottoman chronicler, Kritovoulos of Imbros,[45] as it related to the ruler's efforts at turning the ruined shell of Byzantine Constantinople once again into the thriving metropolis of Ottoman İstanbul his new capital.

Immediately following the conquest on May 29, 1453, Kritovoulos makes it clear that Mehmed's first aim was to repopulate the city "*not merely as it formerly was but more completely.*"[46] As the city's first regent he named a certain Süleyman, whom Kritovoulos states he put in charge of everything, "*but in particular over the repopulating of the City*" and he instructed him "*to be*

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45 Halil İnalcık, "The Policy of Mehmed II Toward the Greek Population of Istanbul and the Byzantine Buildings of the City," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vols. 23-24 (1969-1970), pp. 231-249 [Hereafter: İnalcık, 1969/70].

46 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 83 & İnalcık, 1969/1970: pp. 231-249.

very zealous about this matter."[47] That this remained a primary concern of the Ottoman ruler is clear from numerous subsequent passages in this author's work as well.

Writing about events a year later he states:

> "When the Sultan had captured the City of Constantine, almost his very first care was to have the city repopulated.... He sent an order in the form of an imperial command to every part of his realm, that as many inhabitants as possible be transferred to the City, not only Christians but also his own people and many of the Hebrews."[48]

In describing events in 1456, Kritovoulos once again reiterates the importance attached by Mehmed II to ensuring that the city be repopulated:

> "Above all he was solicitous to work for the repeopling of the City and to fill it with inhabitants as it had previously been. He gathered them there from all parts of Asia and Europe, and he transferred them with all possible speed, people of all nations, but more especially of Christians. So profound was the passion that came into his soul for the city and its peopling, and for bringing it back to its former prosperity."[49]

That the Sultan had a particular interest in rebuilding not only the physical structure of his new capital but also in guaranteeing that it had the inhabitants it needed is a theme also stressed by the contemporary Ottoman chronicler Tursun *Beğ*. After describing how Mehmed initially sought to attract new immigrants via the promise of free housing, he then realized that this was no guarantee that the class of people necessary to revitalize the city's economic life were responding to his offer and changed his tactics. Tursun *Beğ* writes:

> *"Responding to this incentive* [the offer of free housing], *rich and poor people came pouring in from all over and took possession of houses and mansions. But the group that constituted the mainstay of the provinces, namely the gentry or the wealthy notables, were reluctant to leave their hometowns where they were fully satisfied. But they were made the*

47 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 83.

48 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 93.

49 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 105.

respondents of an edict issued by an authority which is obeyed by the whole world, whereby prominent people cited by name came from every city."[50]

This passage, which confirms the account provided by Kritovoulos cited above, in regard to Mehmed's issuing imperial commands to all parts of his realm ordering the transfer of his subjects to the city, leaves no doubt but that Mehmed had a particular interest in ensuring that his new capital be adequately populated. A year by year survey of the passages in Kritovoulos' work (supplemented by data extracted from other contemporary sources) detailing the steps taken by the ruler in this regard is illustrative of the extent of his concerns:

1453

In 1453, immediately after the conquest he settled his share of the captives, together with their wives and children along the shores of the city harbor. They were given free houses and exempted from taxation for an unspecified period. Likewise he proclaimed that all those captives who had paid (or were intending to pay) their ransom be settled in the city with their families. They likewise either had their own houses restored to them (or were given others in their place) and were exempted from taxation.[51] These steps suggest that the very first residents of the city were a portion of the Latin and Orthodox Christians drawn from among its pre-conquest residents. This interpretation is strengthened by the contents of a letter written on August 16, 1453, whose Italian author states that in the months following the conquest on May 29, 1453, Mehmed II had leveled the fortifications of the town of Silivri (west of the city on the Sea of Marmara), and those of the Genoese settlement of Galata (across the Golden Horn from the city) and forcibly transported their populations to İstanbul.[52]

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50 "Tarih-i Ebu-l Feth." Edited by Mehmed Arif, in *Tarih-i Osmani Encümeni Mecmuasi-İlâveler* (İstanbul, 1330/1911). p. 60 [Hereafter: Tursun Beğ, 1911].

51 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 83.

52 N. Iorga: *Notes et extraits pour server à l'histoire des croisades au XVe siècle*, Volume IV. Bucharest, 1915. p. 67.

1454

As noted above, in 1454, he issued an imperial decree under which Christians, Muslims and Jews from throughout his realms were transferred to the city. Here is the first clear example of *sürgün,* or forced deportation, being used as a resettlement tool.[53]

The contemporary Ottoman chronicler, Aşıkpaşazade provides the following account of Mehmed's thinking in this regard:

> "And he sent officers to all his lands to announce that whoever wished should come and take possession in İstanbul, as freehold, of houses and orchards and gardens, and to whoever came these were given. Despite this measure, the city was not repopulated; so then the Sultan commanded that from every land families, poor and rich alike, should be brought in by force. And they sent officers with fermans [Imperial orders] to the Kadıs [Religious Judges] and the prefects of every land. And they, in accordance with the fermans, deported [sürgün] and brought in numerous families, and to these newcomers, too, houses were given; and now the city began to become populous."[54]

In the same year he ordered that Byzantine prisoners should work and be paid wages with which they could save money toward their ransoms. Further, that when they had regained their freedom they were to be allowed to live in the city.[55]

1455

Interestingly, Kritovoulos, in describing events which occurred in 1455, makes no mention whatsoever of Mehemed's efforts at repopulating

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53 Heath W. Lowry: "'From Lesser Wars to the Mightiest War': The Ottoman Conquest and Transformation of Byzantine Urban Centers in the Fifteenth Century," in A. Bryer & H. Lowry (Eds.): *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society*. Birmingham, England & Washington, D.C. (1986), pp. 323-338. See: pp. 323-325.

54 Aşıkpaşazade: *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*. Edited by 'Ali Bey. İstanbul, 1913. pp. 143-143 & quoted in İnalcık, 1969-70: p. 241.

55 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 93.

Constantinople. Might this stem from the fact that this was the year in which a serious plague outbreak struck the capital? Rather than focusing on his repopulation schemes, the ruler was faced with the loss of many of those very individuals he had resettled in the city during the previous two years. Kritovoulos, whose work is designed to herald the successes of Mehmed, simply chose to ignore both the plague and the setback it had caused his ruler's plans.

1456

In 1456, he continued the process of repopulating the city by gathering people from throughout his state. In so doing, Kritovoulos reports that he was particularly targeting Christians. Given the fact that the overwhelming majority of his subjects were Christians this was a logical step.[56]

1457

In 1457 he began transferring Triballi (Serbs), Paeonian (Hungarian) and Moesian (Bulgarian) peasants by force in large numbers and settled them in the city's suburbs and surrounding villages. Kritovoulos states that he did so with the dual purpose of wanting to take advantage of the fertile land surrounding the city and thereby provide for the city's fruit and vegetable needs, and also because the area was largely uninhabited and therefore dangerous to travelers.[57]

1458

In 1458, in the course of a campaign against Corinth in the Peloponnesus, his troops captured four thousand inhabitants from the town of Elis and its environs. Kritovoulos relates that Mehmed sent the men, women and children to Constantinople "*so as to people all the outskirts of the city.*"[58] Later in the same year, after the city of Corinth had fallen, the Sultan demolished several of the small nearby fortress towns which had capitulated in the face of the might arrayed against them. Their inhabitants "*men, women and*

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56 Kritovoulos, 1954: p.105.

57 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 119.

58 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 133.

children, he sent to Constantinople, all unharmed, with others from other places, so as to people all the suburbs of the city."[59]

1459

In early 1459 after Mehmed returned to the city from the Peloponnesus [southern Greece] and almost his first action was to settle the Peloponnesians he had brought with him:

> "He selected and settled inside the City as many of the Peloponnesians whom he had brought back as seemed to be better than the rest in their knowledge of trades. The rest of them he placed in the surrounding region in villages, distributing to them grain and yokes of oxen and every other necessary supply they needed for the time being, so that they were able to give themselves to agriculture."[60]

Seemingly not satisfied with his efforts to date, he then undertook an even more drastic step and, in the words of Kritovoulos:

> "After this, he sent to Amastris [Amasra], a city of Paphlagonia and a port on the Euxine Sea [Black Sea], and transported to Constantinople the larger and more able part of its people. He also transported to the City those of the Armenians under his rule who were outstanding in point of property, wealth, technical knowledge and other qualifications, and in addition those who were of the merchant class. These he took from their homes and removed to the City, and not only Armenians, but also persons from other nations among his subjects."[61]

Now he once again employed the administrative tool of *sürgün* (forced deportation) to bring not only the majority of the Muslim inhabitants of Amasra, but Armenians and "*persons from other nations*" from throughout his realms to Constantinople.

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59 Kritovoulos, 1954: pp. 135-136.

60 Kritovoulos, 1954: pp. 139-140.

61 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 140.

1460-1461

When even these steps were inadequate to meet his needs he adopted a policy of trying to attract former residents of the city to return home:

> "Then he sent out notices and orders everywhere through his domain in Asia and Europe that all who had left Constantinople whether as captives or emigrants, either before its capture or since, and were living in other cities, should return from exile and settle here."
>
> "For there were many such in Adrianople [Edirne], Philippopolis [Filibe], Gallipoli, and Bursa and other cities, people who had been scattered through the capture of the city or still earlier and who had settled in those cities, learned men and men of the most useful kinds, men who, profiting by their abilities, had in a short time secured a competency and become wealthy. All these, then, he transferred here, giving to some of them houses, to others building lots in whatever part of the city they preferred, and to still others every sort of facility and needed benefit, most generously for the time being." [62]

Still unsatisfied he once again reverted to emptying out towns in other parts of his realm and via the policy of *sürgün* transferring their inhabitants to Constantinople (İstanbul). Kritovoulos reports that he employed this tactic in the Aegean port cities of Old and New Foças, and on the Aegean islands of Samothrace and Thasos:

> "At the same time he uprooted the people of the two towns of Phocea [Foça] in Ionia in Asia, and settled them also in the City. And he sent Zaganos, Governor of Gallipoli and admiral of the entire fleet, to the islands with forty ships. When this man arrived there, he removed some people of Thasos and Samothrace and settled them there likewise. So great a love for the City inspired the Sultan's soul that he wished to see it again established in its former power and glory and brilliancy."[63]

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62 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 148.

63 Kritovoulos, 1954: pp. 148-149.

This action had the effect of introducing still another Latin Catholic element into the evolving admixture of the capital's inhabitants, i.e., the former Catholic residents of the two Genoese settlements of old and new Foça.

Next, Kritovoulos suggests that Mehmed was also employing *sürgün* in 1460-1461 to help achieve his desire of physically rebuilding the city as well. When he writes that: "*he also took care to summon the very best workmen from everywhere --- masons and stonecutters and carpenters and all sorts of others of experience and skill in such matters,*"[64] he is suggesting that skilled workmen from throughout the empire were also being forcibly transported to the capital.

Finally, following another campaign in the Peloponnesus in 1460, Kritovoulos reports that: "*he* [Mehmed II] *allowed the inhabitants to remain in their homes and live as organized villages, but some of them he deported, and brought to Constantinople.*"[65] His account is confirmed by Doukas who reports that "*he transferred about two thousand families from the Peloponnesus and resettled them in the city.*"[66] It is easy to visualize a steady flow of new arrivals on what most have been virtually a daily basis moving into the capital. In 1460-1461 alone the influx consisted of: a) an unspecified number of educated and wealthy former residents of the city who had earlier left and settled in various regions (Edirne, Filibe, Gallipoli, Bursa, and other cities), who were now forcibly returned and resettled in Constantinople; b) the entire populations of the cities of Old and New Foça on the Aegean coast were likewise forcibly resettled in the capital; c) the majority of the inhabitants of the two northern Aegean islands of Samothrace and Thasos were likewise uprooted and transported by ship to the city. While the number is unspecified in the afore cited passage, in a later one Kritovoulos notes that the "*greater part of the inhabitants of Thasos and Samothrace had been transferred to Byzantium* [Constantinople];"[67] d) skilled workmen (masons, stonecutters, carpenters, etc.) were likewise gathered up from throughout the Ottoman territories and transported to the city to assist with its rebuilding; and, e) finally, up to 2,000 families from the towns and fortresses of the Peloponnesus who had

64 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 149.
65 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 157.
66 Doukas, 1975: p. 258.
67 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 159.

surrendered to Mehmed's army were likewise deported and brought to Constantinople.

The cost of all this movement was great. Leaving aside the human cost, the outlay of expenses to facilitate the actual transport and resettlement must have been immense, e.g., the sending of a fleet of forty ships to transport the inhabitants of Thasos and Samothrace. Then there was the negative impact on the regions which were decimated on behalf of Mehmed's efforts to repopulate his capital. As a case in point, the two Foças on the Aegean coast were important Genoese trade emporia for the export of goods from Anatolia to the west. One can only imagine the loss of income from their profitable commerce when suddenly all of their merchants and traders were packed off to Constantinople.[68]

1462

Mehmed's efforts to repopulate the city continued apace in 1462. The chronicler reports that when not discussing philosophy with the Byzantine scholar George Amiroukis [Amoiroutzes], the ruler:

> "gave himself anew to efforts in behalf of the City, taking special pains to increase its population and also for its general beautifying, including everything ornamental and useful. He erected houses of worship, naval arsenals, theaters, marketplaces and other buildings. In addition, he introduced into it all the different trades and crafts, searching in every direction for men who knew these and were skilled in them, then bringing them in and settling them, sparing no cost or expense for this end."[69]

Later that summer, after forcing the surrender of the Aegean island of Mytilene (Lesbos), Kritovoulos reports that Mehmed left arrangements in the hands of his Grand Vezir Mahmud *Paşa*, who:

> "gathered all the inhabitants of the City, men, women, and children, and divided them into three parts. The first part he allowed to stay in the city and inhabit it, retaining and enjoying

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68 Kate Fleet: *European and Islamic trade in the early Ottoman State: The merchants of Genoa and Turkey.* Cambridge, 1999.

69 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 177.

their own property and paying the customary yearly tribute. The second he deported to Constantinople and settled there. And the third he made slaves and distributed to the soldiers As for the other forts and towns in the island, he allowed them temporarily to remain as they were. But later he captured and destroyed some of them, transferring the men and children and women to Constantinople."[70]

Now in addition to depopulating the northern Aegean islands of Thasos and Samothrace, Mehmed II has likewise relocated many if not most of the inhabitants of Mytilene to Constantinople. Only the inhabitants of Limnos (Lemnos), the fourth of the northern islands, were spared a similar fate due to their having voluntarily surrendered following the fall of the city in 1453.[71]

1463

Upon his return to the capital in early 1463 the chronicler writes that "the Sultan established the Mitylenians in one quarter of the City. To some he gave houses, to others, land to build houses on, and to still others, whatever else that they needed."[72] Clearly, a decade after the fall of Constantinople its Ottoman conqueror was still engaged (if not obsessed) with its repopulating and rebuilding. With the same drive with which he had as a twenty-one year old determined to conquer the City, the new ruler now spared neither expense nor effort to ensure that it had a population with all the requisite skills and talents necessary to make it a fitting capital for his imperial ambitions.

1464

By 1464 Mehmed II was engaged in what was to become the long war with Venice (1463-1479), and his armies struck against Venetian territories in

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70 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 184 & Lowry, 2002: p. 3. Doukas' chronicle breaks off midway through the siege of Mytilene. However, an Italian version of his work adds the information that following the island's surrender: "*a census was taken of the citizens, who were divided between the worthless who stayed behind, those who were sold at public auction, and the remainder, some 10,000, who were transported to Constantinople*." Doukas, 1975: pp. 322-323, fn. 325.

71 Contra İnalcık, 1969-70: p. 238, see: Lowry, 2002: pp. 52-53.

72 Kritovoulos, 1454: p. 185.

the Peloponnesus. After capturing several towns and fortresses they arrived before the town of Argos. Following calls to surrender, and having received pledges that they would not be mistreated should they do so, the residents capitulated to the Grand Vezir Mahmud *Paşa*. One can only imagine their surprise when Mahmud *Paşa*: "*colonized all of them to Byzantium* [Constantinople], *with their wives and children and all their belongings, safe and unhurt, but the city he razed to the ground.*"[73] Assuming the residents of Argos shared the religion of their Venetian rulers this action on the part of Mahmud *Paşa* had the effect of introducing still yet another Latin Christian element into the admix of peoples previously settled in the city. Stated differently, Muslims, Romaniot Jews, Orthodox Greek Christians, Gregorian Armenian Christians, and those Latin Catholics brought previously from Galata and the two Foças, were now joined by yet another group of *sürgün*ed Latin Catholics. Once the Argives had arrived in the capital, Kritovoulos states that: "*the Sultan settled all the Argives in the monastery of Peribleptos, giving them also houses and vineyards and fields.*"[74] Interestingly, in light of the bubonic outbreak which was to decimate the city's population three years later, these involuntary Venetian arrivals were settled in and around the very monastery in which the Byzantine emperor Manuel II had taken refuge in an attempt to flee an earlier plague outbreak in 1420.[75]

1465

That twelve years after the initial conquest of the city, in 1465, Mehmed II was still actively concerned with its rebuilding and repopulating may be inferred from yet another passage in the work of Kritovoulos. There, he reports that: "*the Sultan spent the winter in Byzantium* [Constantinople]. *Among other things he attended to the populating and rebuilding and beautifying of the whole City.*"

For the first time since becoming Sultan fourteen years earlier Mehmed II did not campaign in 1465. Instead, according to our chronicler, he spent the summer in Constantinople where "*he did not neglect his efforts for the City,*

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73 Kritovoulos, 1954: pp. 196-197.

74 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 197.

75 Sphrantzes, 1980: p. 26.

that is, for its populace giving diligent care to buildings and improvements."[76] This passage is of particular interest in that it is the first such not to specifically mention the ruler's repopulating scheme. Can it be that twelve years after its conquest Mehmed II was finally satisfied with his efforts in this regard? That this may have been the case is suggested by the fact that the chronicler's description of events in the next year (1466) likewise makes no mention of peoples being transferred to the city.

As indicated by the preceding chronological synopsis of passages in Kritovoulos relating to the efforts by Sultan Mehmed II to repopulate the city of Constantinople in the first fourteen years following its conquest, this was an issue of the greatest concern to the Ottoman ruler. He spared no expense, and apparently had little regard for the negative impact his efforts to repopulate his capital would have on the rest of his realm. Indeed, it appears as if he was fixated upon the goal of revitalizing the former Byzantine capital and willing to do whatever was necessary to obtain what he considered to be an appropriate mix of inhabitants. When he deemed it useful he stripped his provincial capitals (including Bursa the center of the state's wealthy silk industry), of their merchant classes. On occasion, such as with the Genoese settlements of old and new Foça in Anatolia and the Venetian town of Argos in the Peloponnesus, he simply moved all the inhabitants to the city. His objective of achieving in his lifetime a well-populated and fitting capital for his growing empire might well have been met were it not for the scourge of plague.

No sooner had he begun his efforts at repopulating the city, than his resettlement plans were undermined by the plague outbreak of 1455. Such was the devastation wrought by it that Mehmed II was for the first time unable to return to his new capital from his Balkan campaign and forced to remain for an unspecified time moving about the region of present-day Bulgaria in a successful effort to stay one step ahead of the scourge. Our sole source for this outbreak, the Byzantine chronicler Doukas, while not giving casualty figures, does note that the deaths were such that it was impossible to bury the dead and that bodies were left unburied in the roads.

As we have seen, in the following decade his efforts at repopulating the city continued apace and we may conjecture that his apparent zeal in that regard

76 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 209.

stemmed in some part from the fact that a portion of those initially attracted to the city by offers of free housing and those deported by decree (between 1453-1455) must have perished in (or fled from) the 1455 outbreak.

Then twelve years later, just when it must have appeared that he had obtained the desired admixture of peoples, the devastating bubonic outbreak of 1467 struck his capital. The two contemporary observers who provide information on the number of victims it claimed (Sphrantzes and Kritovoulos), both suggest that it carried away tens of thousands of those very individuals Mehmed II had been so busy transporting to Constantinople throughout the past decade. Sphrantzes put the casualties in the "*tens of thousands,*"[77] whereas Kritovoulos states that the epidemic in Constantinople itself was responsible for "*more than six hundred deaths a day.*"[78] Bearing in mind that he also provides a *terminus a quo* of the "*middle of the summer*" for the outbreak,[79] and a *terminus ad quem* of the end of autumn (he states that Mehmed II stayed away from the city for fear of the plague until word reached him that it had subsided at "*the beginning of winter),*"[80] it would seem to have raged for four and a half months. Using his figure of more than six hundred deaths per day it appears likely that this particular outbreak may have killed between 50,000-75,000 people in the capital alone. No wonder that Kritovoulos, in our only known eyewitness account, states that:

> "The City was emptied of its inhabitants, both citizens and foreigners. It had the appearance of a town devoid of all human beings, some of them dead or dying of the disease, others, as I have said, leaving their homes and fleeing, while still others shut themselves into their homes as if condemned to die."[81]

In only four months the scourge of the bubonic plague had undone much if not all that Mehmed II had striven to accomplish in the preceding fourteen years. While, given his character, we may assume that he immediately set about once again to repopulate the shell of his capital, this must have been a

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77 Sphrantzes, 1980: p. 89.

78 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 220.

79 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 219.

80 Kritovoulos, 1954: p. 222.

81 Kritovoulos, 1954: pp. 220-221.

terrible shock to the Ottoman ruler. All the time, effort and expense he had invested had been swept away by one terrible outbreak of the pestilence.

While there is no way (given the surviving sources) to quantify the scope of the plague related carnage, one is tempted to conjecture that the Kritovoulos related devastation it wrought among the population of İstanbul may have been linked causally to the nature of the inhabitants settled there by the ruler. Might it be that the bringing together large numbers of peoples whose sense of hygiene and health differed, was a contributing factor in the spread of the outbreak? Stated differently, could it be that mixing resettled peasants and resettled urban dwellers from small towns in Anatolia and the Balkans into the teeming metropolis of İstanbul which still seemingly lacked the infrastructure necessary to accommodate the large number of new dwellers (each with different hygienic practices), created the very conditions which such epidemics are known to have thrived in?

To comprehend more fully the enormity of the devastation wrought by these fifteenth century plague outbreaks in the Ottoman capital, it is necessary to relate the estimates of plague related death to the little that is known about the city's population in the period under study. Once again we turn to the work of the Turkish scholar Halil İnalcık, who utilizing surviving Ottoman documents has tentatively put the late fifteenth century population of İstanbul at close to 100,000.[82] Using this as a benchmark, it would appear that upwards of half the residents died in the 1467 outbreak alone. In short, with alarming regularity the city's population underwent wide fluctuations due to the vagaries of the bubonic plague and other pandemics.

Nor was this the first time (or the last time) Mehmed II was to encounter the plague in his new capital. As noted above, earlier outbreaks in 1455 and 1456 must likewise have hampered his repopulating efforts.[83] Then once again in 1468-1469 the city was struck.[84] The following year, in 1470, a Genoese report filed from Constantinople notes that a new outbreak of plague has once

82 İnalcık, 1978: pp. 238-39 & Lowry, 2003b: p. 72.

83 Doukas, 1975: p. 251 & Babinger, 1978: pp. 133 & 146.

84 Babinger, 1978: 274.

"*again put a halt to trade.*"[85] Nor was there to be any let up of the pestilence, as in 1471, 1472 and 1475 the disease ravaged the city once again.[86]

Sixteenth Century Impact of Plague on İstanbul

Clearly the plague in various manifestations was a perennial scourge in the period under review and it got no better with the passage of time. The frequency with which it struck is impossible to quantify, because, as we have seen, contemporary Ottoman writers tended to ignore many of the most devastating outbreaks. As a case in point we may cite the very serious outbreak of 1501 in the capital, which is known only from a series of letters written by a Florentine merchant resident in Pera, a certain Giovanni di Francesco Maringhi, to his business partner in Florence, Ser Nicolo Michelozzi. The plague (which he calls cholera in his first letter) was initially mentioned in a communication dated August 24, 1501, where Maringhi wrote:

> "The Cholera continues here [Pera], touching in Constantinople also, although mostly among the lower classes. We are alert and on our guard, and now the air is cooler, with the approach of autumn, we think it will entirely stop, if God so wills."[87]

Nine weeks later he returns to the subject in a second letter, this one dated October 29, 1501, where he provides further information on what by that date had become a serious plague outbreak:

> "The plague here has done, and continues to do, damage enough, and two of our drapers in Pera have died Because we are definitely approaching the heart of winter, we hope there will be a decrease of the plague For some weeks past, this has been one of the worst plagues both in Constantinople and in Pera that I have seen since I have been in the country. At the present time there have been over 25,000 deaths. May God care for our good."[88]

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85 W. Heyd: *Histoire du commerce du Levant au Moyen Age*. 2 Vols. Leipzig, 1885-1886. Vol. II: p. 341.

86 Babinger, 1978: pp. 299, 309 & 342.

87 G.R.B. Richards: *Florentine Merchants in the Age of the Medici*. Cambridge, 1932. p. 130 [Hereafter: Richards, 1932].

88 Richards, 1932: pp. 140-141.

Of particular interest in this letter is Maringhi's reference to the current outbreak as being "*one of the worst*" which he has encountered since living in Constantinople. In point of fact, Maringhi had only been a resident of the city since 1497, i.e., for four years.[89] From this reference it would appear that at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century plague in the Ottoman capital was practically an annual event. If Maringhi is to be believed, and he was a merchant given to exactness in all of his communications with his Florentine business associates, this particular outbreak had already claimed over 25,000 lives in the capital alone. Bearing in mind our earlier discussion of İnalcık's estimate of the population of İstanbul as close to 100,000 at the end of the fifteenth century, the 1501 outbreak may have taken the lives of up to a quarter of the residents.

Maringhi's third and final letter mentioning the 1501 outbreak was written on January 14, 1502. He begins it with the following passage: "The plague here has ceased completely and does no more damage; but up to now it has been disastrous. May God who can help and restore us, send us his grace."[90]

Plague ushered in the sixteenth century for the Ottomans in exactly the same manner it had the fifteenth. İnalcık lists eight serious epidemics reported in 1511, 1526, 1561, 1584, 1586, 1590, 1592 (this particular epidemic is reported to have claimed a thousand victims a day), and 1599,[91] which struck the city in the sixteenth century. To his list we may add the following epidemics (for the capital and other areas), which are listed in Maringhi and the Byzantine Short Chronicles: 1501-02 (Constantinople), 1523 (Thessalonica), 1524 (Crete, Rhodes, Corfu, Zakynthos & Arta), 1581 (Constantinople), and 1592 (Crete & Constantinople).[92] Clearly the sixteenth century saw a continuation of the trend of periodic plague outbreaks similar to that seen throughout the preceding century.

Busbecq, the Ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor, was resident in Constantinople at the time of the 1561 outbreak, and, (as discussed earlier) after initially being denied permission had finally obtained leave from the Sultan and

89 Richards, 1932: p. 11.

90 Richards, 1932: p. 148.

91 İnalcık, 1978: p. 243.

92 Richards, 1932: pp. 140-141 & Schreiner, 1977: pp. 563-564, 594 & 595.

fled to the relative safety of the Princes Islands in the Sea of Marmara till the plague abated. While there, he was visited by some Germans who belonged to the household of the Grand Vezir Ali Paşa. In answer to his query as to whether the plague was abating, he was informed:

> "'Most decidedly,' one of them replied. 'What, then, is the daily death-rate?' I asked, 'About five hundred.' 'Great Heavens!' I cried, 'and yet you say that the plague is abating! How many deaths were there each day when it was at its worst?' 'As many as a thousand or twelve hundred,' he replied."[93]

As for the continuation of such epidemics in the seventeenth century, one has only to examine the dispatches of the English envoy, Sir Thomas Roe, who, during his residency in the Ottoman capital, witnessed firsthand a devastating bubonic outbreak in 1625. He states that this particular plague killed "*over 200,000 people in Istanbul alone.*"[94] Bearing in mind that the combined populations of İstanbul and Galata never exceeded 400,000-500,000 in the pre-nineteenth century, this single outbreak may well have resulted in the deaths of over half the city's inhabitants.[95]

The portrait which emerges is one of a city (one of the worlds largest), whose population was in a constant plague-related state of flux. Indeed, were it possible to chart the plague caused fluctuations in the city's population on a graph it would become apparent that such outbreaks had the affect of periodically and radically altering the demographics of the Ottoman capital throughout the period under study. One might well query what, if any, preventative measures did the Ottomans come up with in an attempt to thwart the periodic ravages caused by the plague? The answer is: none whatsoever. It was only in the 1830s that they finally adopted a quarantine regime, a practice which had been in place throughout Western Europe for over two hundred years.[96] This lack of concern clearly discomforted Busbecq, who, during his eight year sojourn in the Ottoman capital (1554-1562), survived more than one

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93 Busbecq, 1927: p. 188.

94 Sir Thomas Roe: *The Negociations of Sir Thomas Roe in his embassy to the Ottoman-Porte from the year 1621 to 1628.* London, 1740. See: p. 443.

95 İnalcık, 1978: pp. 238-39 & Lowry, 2003b: p. 72.

96 Panzac, 2000: p. 4.

such outbreak. In an interesting passage, he comments on the sixteenth century Ottoman attitude towards pandemic disease:

> "The Turks hold an opinion which makes them indifferent to, though not safe from, the plague. They are persuaded that the time and manner of each man's death is inscribed by God upon his forehead; if, therefore, he is destined to die, it is useless for him to try to avert fate; if he is not so destined, he is foolish to be afraid. And so they handle the garments and linen in which plague-stricken persons have died, even though they are still wet with contagion of their sweat; nay, they even wipe their faces with them. 'If,' they say, 'it is God's will that I should die, then die I must; if not, it can do me no harm.' Thus contagion is spread far and wide, and sometimes whole families are exterminated."[97]

Shifting Ottoman Attitudes Toward Plague

What were the official Ottoman views on plague and its causes and did they change over time? Our attempts to answer these queries are facilitated by what our sources allow us to infer at two specific points in time. First, based on references in the work of the fifteenth century Byzantine chroniclers Doukas and Kritovoulos we are given an insight into the attitude of Mehmed II in the years between 1451 and 1481. Then, based on the first-hand observations of the Ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor Buzbecq, a resident of İstanbul from 1554-1562, we are given the opportunity to hear (in his own voice) the views of Sultan Süleyman. These two points in time, separated by a century, are the only instances where the extant sources allow us glean any insight into how the rulers of the empire viewed such pandemics. It is no coincidence that in both cases our sources were outsiders looking at the Ottomans, rather than indigenous voices.

Seemingly, the attitude of the Ottoman rulers themselves *vis-à-vis* plague appear to have undergone a major shift at some point in time between 1450 and

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97 Busbecq, 1927: p. 189. Busbecq knew of what he spoke, as in the spring of 1556, while traveling near Adrianople (Edirne) in European Thrace, one of his Turkish attendants died of the plague. No sooner had he given up the ghost than the remainder of his retinue divided up his clothing, and, despite the remonstrations of Busbecq and his physician about the danger of infection, refused to part with their booty. Two days later they began to exhibit symptoms of the plague [Busbecq, 1927: pp. 68-69].

1550. Recalling our earlier discussion of Mehmed II's efforts between 1455-1475 to escape the ravages of the plague, efforts which included staying away from İstanbul for months at a time when pestilence was present and moving back and forth throughout the Balkans in a successful effort to avoid areas known to be infected, it would appear that an awareness of the contagious nature of the disease, coupled with a belief in free will rather than in a preordained divine plan, was the operative means of describing the fifteenth century Ottoman attitude toward such outbreaks. By the mid-sixteenth century this desire for and belief in self-preservation appears to have been replaced by the kind of fatalistic attitude expressed in Sultan Süleyman's response to Busbecq, where he stated that there was no purpose in attempting to flee the plague as God's will cannot be challenged and that one must accept what is preordained. What had transpired between the mid-fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries to account for such a change in attitude?

In a series of recent studies I have advanced the proposition that the conquest of the Arab world (1516-1517) should be viewed as a major turning-point, or fault-line in Ottoman history.[98] Specifically, that it was with the addition of the heartlands of the older Islamic world that what had heretofore been a very pragmatic, indeed, latitudinarian society, began to shift into an entity where Islam and its value system, which had evolved throughout the proceeding eight hundred years, was transplanted onto the Ottoman body politic. Earlier, in the first two hundred years of its existence, the Ottoman state had been founded, shaped and matured in the primarily Christian milieu of Byzantine Bithynia and the Christian Balkans. Prior to the incorporation of the older Islamic world at the beginning of the sixteenth century its population had been overwhelmingly Christian. With a deep sense of pragmatism the early Ottoman rulers had evolved a system of rule which implicitly acknowledged this fact and accordingly made little distinction between its Muslim and Christian subjects.[99] The ruler's commitment to Islamic orthodoxy in the state's formative years was questionable at best,[100] a factor which made it

98 Lowry, 2002: pp. 1-4 & pp. 173-176 and Lowry, 2003a: pp. 112-114.

99 Lowry, 2003b: pp. 16-17.

100 Lowry, 2003a: pp. 26-30 & Heath W. Lowry: "Impropriety and Impiety Among the Early Ottoman Rulers, 1351-1451," Forthcoming in Journal of the Turkish Studies Association. Volume 26, No. 2 (Fall, 2003).

particularly painless for large numbers of the Christian they ruled to opt for a version of folk Islam which allowed them to maintain not only many of their traditional practices but also their Christian beliefs in a Muslim guise.

With the incorporation of the older Islamic states in the opening years of the sixteenth century the Ottomans were rapidly transformed from a people possessing a loose version of heterodox Islam to the recognized leaders of the premier orthodox Islamic state in the world. Whether their new found orthodoxy stemmed from a desire to distance themselves from the heterodox Safavid state which was rapidly impinging on their eastern borders, or whether it was inspired by their new role as guardians of all the holy sites of Islam and an emerging self image of themselves as leaders of the orthodox faithful, one thing is certain: from 1517 forward, at all levels of society, a stricter Ottoman adherence to the formal tenets of Islam begins to become apparent.

It was this transformation which I would suggest resulted in the changing attitude on the part of the rulers toward plague and its causes. As noted above, the mid-fifteenth century ruler Mehmed II's actions in fleeing areas where plague was known to be allow us to infer that he accepted the idea that it was spread by contagion. These views were in stark contrast to the more orthodox Islamic outlook which discouraged flight and argued against the contagious nature of plague.[101] Mehmed's views were those commonly held in the Christian west and, like so many early Ottoman practices, may have been inherited from his Byzantine neighbors who were fully aware of the contagious nature of the disease. By contrast, a century later, his great-grandson Süleyman chided Busbecq for being naïve enough to think that he could escape what was preordained by God, and pointed out that even though his own palace was plague-ridden at the moment he had no thought of leaving, for if the Almighty desired his death there was no place to flee.[102] Süleyman's fatalistic statements could easily have been uttered by an earlier Abbasid Caliph or Mamluke ruler, and indicate that Ottoman attitudes had indeed radically shifted in the preceding one hundred years. Flight was now scoffed at and the concept of contagion totally rejected. In short, the more traditional Islamic views on the subject had come to prevail in the Ottoman capital as well.

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101 Dols, 1977: pp. 293-296.

102 Busbecq, 1927: pp. 182-183.

Michael Dols' informative study on the Black Death in Syria and Egypt traces, via a series of plague treatises, the manner in which the orthodox Islamic views on plague had evolved over the centuries. By the fourteenth century and following considerable debate, the religious attitudes towards plague had coalesced into three major tenets: a) that Muslims should neither enter into or flee from plague infested areas; b) that plague is a punishment for the infidel non-Muslims and a martyrdom and mercy from God for the Muslim faithful; and, c) that there simply was no contagion, i.e., infection.[103] These views, so at odds with the actions of Mehmed II in the second half of the fifteenth century, had, a century later, seemingly been accepted by his great-grandson, Süleyman the Magnificent and, as observed by Busbecq, the Ottomans in general. When Süleyman (in one of the extremely rare instances in which we actually hear the voice of an Ottoman ruler speaking) chides Busbecq for failing to understand that "*pestilence is God's will*" which meant that if God so desired "*no hiding place could avail*" as it was impossible to "*avoid inevitable fate*," he is explicitly espousing points 'a' and 'b' above. At the same time he is implicitly acknowledging his acceptance of point 'c' as well.[104] That such views were not confined to the palace is apparent from Busbecq's comments on the manner in which the populace at large rejected the idea of contagion on the grounds "*that the time and manner of each man's death is inscribed by God upon his forehead; if, therefore, he is destined to die, it is useless for him to try to avert fate; if he is not so destined, he is foolish to be afraid.*"[105]

Dols notes that the real importance of the three above stated principles was in what they did not affirm: "they did not declare that plague was God's punishment; they did not encourage flight; and they did not support a belief in the contagious nature of plague - all prevalent beliefs in Christian Europe."[106] Clearly, at some point in time between 1450 and 1550, the Ottomans had come to reject the contemporary Western European views on plague in favor of the more fatalistic attitude which prevailed in the contemporary Islamic world.

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103 Dols, 1977: pp. 109-121.

104 Busbecq, 1927: pp. 182-183.

105 Busbecq, 1927: p. 189.

106 Dols, 1977: p. 293.

As hopefully the present survey has demonstrated, the impact of the frequent outbreaks of the bubonic and other types of plague in the Ottoman realms is a subject deserving of far more study than that offered herein. The history of the impact of pandemic disease on the population of the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries is still to be written. Until it is our understanding of Ottoman urban life will be flawed at best. To paraphrase the quotation from Marc Bloch with which this paper began: 'An Ottoman urban history more worthy of the name than the different speculations to which we are reduced by the paucity of our sources would give space to the impact of pandemic disease. It is very naïve to claim to understand the urban history of mankind without knowing how it was shaped by disease.'