Effects Of The Plague In The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire began in 1299 and lasted for around 600 years. It came to an end in the year 1922. During the reign of the empire they experienced hardship and a population decline due to the plague. The plague was a horrendous disease, it was very widespread, and killed many people. At first everyone was unsure of what was killing their fellow friends and family, but once they knew they either ran or tried to help and died in the process. The plague was destroyed the empire. The people had no clue what the cause was, and could not find a way to stop it. The effects of the plague on the Ottoman Empire can be determined by how it was transmitted, the attempts the people took to cure it, and how the government reacted.

The Black Death first was introduced when Constantinople was still a part of the Byzantine Empire. They did not have control over this area so their Empire was smaller than it was at the end of the plague. In the beginning stage, the Ottomans were besieged by pestilence imported from the region. They did not understand where it was coming from or why so many deaths were occuring due to it. This is when fear first erupted in the Empire. The plague then pushed in and out of the empires location in the second stage. It was like waves in the second stage. It would hit the Empire and then diminish and this was a continuous cycle. By the third stage, Constantinople had transformed into the plague center. They were the main area that was affected by the plague. This was due to being a large trading center. The rats were coming off of the boats with the new disease and spreading it even more than before. By the fourth stage, the plague was being spread to neighboring cities, which is when the government realized something needed to be done. The plague destroyed the Ottoman Empire, and it would take a lot of dedication and work for this disease to completely leave their empire.

The plague spread rapidly, it was everywhere, you could not hide or run from it. People were extremely confused because they were unsure of how such a horrendous disease was being spread in their area. It took historians to discover that the spread of this disease was being transmitted by fleas, rats and other rodents, as well as trade routes between the regions. No one during the time period of the plague would come to know this information. This caused a great deal of damage, especially in areas where the disease was not yet under control. No one knew how to protect themselves from the disease. Due to rodents liking to live in warm places, such as people's homes, it made the spread of disease even more intense without people knowing so. It was not uncommon to have rats roaming around in your own home, this was a normal thing to most people in this time period. No one had ever found rodents necessarily dangerous, which is hy no one ever presumed that they would be the cause of the plague. Every person in this empire was known for having fleas and lice on them. If you did not have fleas or lice people believed you had very smelly body odor and the bugs did not like that. Hygiene was not a necessity in the time, it was not a standard of life in this time period. The plague was so easily spread. Just by touching the person that was infected or by touching something they had either worn or touched you would develop the disease. There was no hiding from this disease. It was everywhere. People did not know what to do to stop it from spreading. People decided that the, “Plague is spread by smelling, touching and seeing”. Since it was unavoidable that is the conclusion they developed.

Due to this disease begin so deadly people acted very irrational and in many different ways.

One of these ways was, people would form into groups and live in isolation. They would lock themselves away from all the sick people so that the disease could not be given to them. Due to the disease being transmitted by rodents this solution was not very effective sometimes. People knew if they came into contact with the sick they would develop the sickness as well and die very soon. So they did the smartest thing they could think of by sheltering themselves away from every aspect of the disease. Another way people reacted to the disease was, going out and partying. They wanted to live life to the fullest while they still could. They thought of the disease as a giant joke. These people were very ignorant with their choices. Maybe they knew they wouldn't be alive much longer so they wanted to have fun with the last few days they had.

No one really understands what they were thinking but it may be a possibility that they were going crazy from everyone dying around them. There was another way people reacted to the disease, it was by carrying around herbs or posies and smelling them so they did not catch the disease if it was airborne, as well as not smell the air stunk of dead rotten bodies. They did not isolate themselves nor did they live their lives to the fullest. Instead these people decided to carry on with their normal life. They would hide the outrageous smell of dead people by smelling the flowers or spices they were holding. These people should have isolated themselves but they were not intelligent enough to realize the risk of what they were doing. The last and final group triedto run away from the disease. They would pack up their belongings and head for the countryside.

These people believed that running away from the source of disease would save them. In fact they were wrong because this disease was being spread everywhere. It wasn't just in their city, it was everywhere. Some methods they would use included, ?rubbing onions, herbs or a chopped up snake (if available) on the boils or cutting up a pigeon and rubbing it over an infected body, drinking vinegar, eating crushed minerals, arsenic, mercury or even ten-year-old treacle, and sitting close to a fire or in a sewer to drive out the fever, or fumigating the house with herbs to purify the air. If people believed this all because of god also known as 'flagellants', went on processions whipping themselves. They tried everything to destroy this disease. Nothing seemed to work though.

When the plague first became an issue in the Ottoman Empire they were unsure on how to cure this disease or stop it from spreading. They took many attempts to stop this disease but failed many times and realized it was impossible to cure. This didn’t make them stop fighting for a cure. According to a document they would prescribe figs, dates, raisins, nuts, pomegranates, light white wine, and fresh spring water to strengthen one’s humoral balance. They would prohibit foods that would spoil easier, such as meat, milk, and vegetables. They also advised people to move to higher ground because the air was less corrupt in those areas. They also recommend not to bathe either because this would open your pores allowing the sickly air to enter your skin. They decided that the air was corrupt so anything that was touched by the air would be corrupt as well. Lower grounds they decided were more sickly areas so they recommended that you moved to higher areas to protect yourself. They had no set effective way to prevent the disease or cure the symptoms. They began to notice that whomever you developed the disease from would have the same exact symptoms. For example, if the person you contracted the disease from had boils on their arms you would have them as well. The symptoms you had were never different than the person who gave you the illness symptoms.

The government realized that they had to take measures quickly to stop the spread of the plague. The first step was to stop the disease from spreading. This meant that anyone who was

infected with the plague was put into quarantine. They could not go anywhere near people who were considered healthy. A quote from the police stated,“Patients who have come down with plague are to be sent for quarantine to prison-like cells for solitary confinement. Their clothes and undergarments will be destroyed or put inside metallic boxes encased in solution. Their houses must also be emptied. The houses should be burned along with the furniture if they are of little value. Their prior inhabitants should be sent far away and examined in tent-hospitals.” They wanted to eliminate the plague to the best of their ability. If this meant burning things and tearing families apart they would do so. The next step they took was to keep everyone who was healthy, healthy. This meant sheltering them from all diseases in the empire. They wanted them to stay alive, so they would try their hardest to achieve this goal. They would send them away from the main center of the plague and have them checked into a tent hospital to be examined to make sure they did not contact the disease. To discard the dead bodies they would use plague pits. Plague pits are mass graves were victims of the plague were buried. They had people come to the homes and take the dead bodies away. They would usually leave them on the side of streets. They determined that bad hygiene and lack of proper sewage methods were a major cause. People were lucky enough if they could get a bath. Gathering clean water was extremely difficult during this time. So to help this problem, “Hospitals, vaccination centers, seweres, plumbing and building codes were, of course, established” “The only way the disease in question could be defeated was through governmental action. This meant establishing a sanitary administration that would not only establish hospitals to treat the sick through vaccinations and other modern treatments, but also constantly police the impoverished and marginal.” They took extreme measures to make sure the whole population of the Empire would not diminish. The knew what was happening was aggressive, so they had to act fast.

In conclusion, the plague spread rapidly in the Ottoman empire and the government reacted in many different ways to try and stop it. The plague spread so rapidly due to rats, fleas, lice, and trade. The effects of the plague on the Ottoman Empire can be measured by how it was transmitted, the attempts the people took to cure it, and how the government reacted. People took many different actions to either avoid the disease or to cure it themselves. None of these methods worked due to not knowing the true cause of the disease. If they could have found the source earlier and found a treatment this disease would not have been so deadly. The government did try to ease the effects of the plague but it was not very successful. They took many actions against it but not all were effective. The Black Death was a traumatic and awful event that occured. It took the lives of so many people, caused outrage, and drove people apart. It killed two thirds of the population in the Ottoman Empire. The Black Death had so many other effects than the ones that are known about. History only provides a limited amount of understanding about the true effects of this illness. The Black Death lasted a while and it destroyed the Ottoman Empire. Luckily, the Ottoman Empire bounced back and began to thrive again in the sixteenth century.

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