

The Epidemics' Role in the Destruction of the Ancient Empires

Ahmed Hassan Ali Murshed¹, Ahmed Abdullah Hashal²,
Abdulqawi Hamood Alyasery³, Khalil A. A. Abdulqader⁴

^{1,2,3}(Ph.D. Research Scholars, Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, UP, India)

⁴(Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Linguistics, Aligarh Muslim University, UP, India)

Abstract

Epidemic is a Greek term, which alludes to any plague sickness causing a high part of mortality, or more generally, as a representative for any abrupt episode of a heartbreaking tribulation (Buchill, 523). Throughout the Biblical text, Epidemic episodes are the bookends of human presence, thought about both a piece of beginning human community, and a part of the very completion of mankind. The epidemic is a scourge happening on a scale, which passes global frontiers, typically influencing an enormous number of individuals. In a basic manner, an epidemic is a pestilence, with higher extent regarding topographical territory, number of cases and long periods of enduring representing death (Samal, 165). Human populace has experienced numerous epidemics from the dawn of history, be it the previous type of smallpox, tuberculosis or the ongoing occurrence of Coronavirus, so the Human history is plagued by the deadly epidemics of catastrophes that caused the demise of empires and kingdoms, which were once dominant, prosperous, and the best example.

This paper will discuss the impact of the Epidemic throughout history on the different flourished empires and how the scourge destroyed the economic, political and military systems of many empires such as Greek, Roman, Aztec and others. It also tries to outline how the Epidemic devastated the tremendous armies in short times, and killed great talent leaders before performing their tasks and getting their aims, for instance Alexander the Great.

Keywords: Epidemic, Plague, History, Black Death, Civilization, Empire

Introduction

In human history, there are many scourges and epidemics have represented a change in the balance of political power, brought down ancient empires and established new kingdoms. What is even more impressive is how many terrible infectious diseases have produced a great and much good in developing the medical profession, for example, changing the methods of commerce or even influencing the quality of literary, artistic and architectural works, but the pathogenic microbes and infectious germs are frightening, so why the well-known French Bacteriologist, (Louis Pasteur) did not try to soften the negative feeling towards them when he said, "it is not the germs that we need to worry about, but our inner conscience).

In the ancient times, the Greek Empire was so strong, scientific and cognitive advancement that it defeated the repeated invasions of enormous Persian armies. However, the influence of the Greek Empire on the international stage was vanished by the outbreak of the plague in the Greek capital city of Athens. The famous Greek historian Thucydides, the author of (History of the Peloponnesian Wars) between Athens and Sparta, notes that these fatal wars ended in 430 BC, when the epidemic broke out during the siege of the city of Athens and killed not only the city's top leaders such as its seasoned ruler, Pericles, but also for about two-thirds of the city population. Consequently, the epidemic horrifically weakened the ability of the naval defenses to protect the city from the invasion of the Spartan fleet, which was well-

known for their military competence and fierceness, which caused the final and the continuing fall of Greek civilization.

Undoubtedly, the fall of the Roman Empire due to infectious epidemics was a disastrous scourge, so it was a moment of “dangerous deterioration” in the history of the Roman Empire, and its prosperous path faltered when the epidemic of smallpox spread in the year of 165 AD. Indeed, the Roman Empire lasted for five centuries, but the pinnacle for stability, prosperity, and progress of Roman civilization ended with the end of the rule of the Emperor and the Roman philosopher, (Marcus Aurelius), who died as a result of the epidemic of the aforementioned Smallpox, which also eradicated with him for about five million people. The Roman historian, Cassius Dio described the devastating effect of the Antonine Plague that afflicted the Roman Empire and was killing two thousand people daily, thus destroying the economy and military strength of this great empire, and therefore Cassius Dio described it as having descended after the plague from the kingdom of gold to the kingdom of iron and rust. As for the end of the collapse of the Roman Empire in 476 AD. It is not surprising to know that this final fall preceded by several decades of the spread of the plague, which facilitated the humiliating collapse of the Romans by savages and barbarians, whether from the Hun tribes coming from the east of the legions of the Goths.

Obviously, the effect of the epidemic on the Roman Empire was serious, debilitating its military and financial matchless quality. The Antonine plagues influenced antiquated Roman conventions, prompting a reestablishment of fresh spirituality, making the conditions for spreading of new religions, including Christianity. The Antonine epidemic may well have made the conditions for the decay of the Roman Empire and, a while later, for its fall in the West in the fifth century AD (Scheidel, 21).

The Epidemic also was a worldwide flare-up of bubonic plague that began in China in 1334, reached to Europe in 1347, move throughout the Silk Road. During 50 years of its rule, by 1400, it decreased the worldwide populace from 450 million to less than 350 million, perhaps less than 300 million, with the epidemic causing the death of more than 150 million. A few assessments indicate that the Black Death annihilated 60% of lives in Europe around that period.

Actually, many events are examples of an epidemic and the plague in pushing another scourge for Muslims countries, and Arab history has many such contradictory events because, they could not prevent the fall of Islamic cities, but slightly postponed their inevitable fate. For example, after the fall of Baghdad and its destruction at the hands of the Mongols, the Tatars hesitated some time to storm the Levant (Syria, Lebanon and Palestine) and the reason behind this is that after killing for about a million people in the city of Baghdad, the epidemic diseases spread in the lands of the Levant to most of the major cities, and this is what made the Mongols delay a little while to overcome the rest of Muslim lands.

The same thing was repeated when the Spanish conqueror, Francesco Pizarro landed on the Peruvian Coast in 1531 AD, with a trivial military battalion of no more than 180 soldiers and 27 horses. However, he was able to overthrow the Inca Empire that he had exhausted before fighting the Spaniards, a Smallpox epidemic that killed millions of the Inca people including the emperor himself. The demise of the Aztec Empire, whose Mexican pyramids are comparable to the magnitude and grandeur of the Egyptian ones, but death due to small germs was confusing and perhaps difficult for some people to believe, as it is difficult to convince everyone that the demise of one of the most important and influential empires in the history of mankind was the result of the death of the infectious epidemics.

In a lightening moment in history, the plague almost wrote the history not only by stopping the fall of the Levant in the grip of Mongols in 1259 AD, but also in postponement the sad series in completing the fall of Andalusia in the grip of Christians. History Books say that in 1489 AD, the Spanish Christian Army, prepared 25.000 fighters to besiege the last stronghold of Islam in the land of Andalusia, the city of Granada. Here, the promises of relief are waving, as the Typhoid epidemic has spread among the Christian army and killed within one month for about 17,000 soldiers, and with the flight of the rest of the army, the siege of Granada ended. As is well-known, this was a temporary relief and a delay for the major catastrophe, which occurred three years later when the city of Granada finally fell in the hands of the King Ferdinand V, in 1492 AD.

The history of Arabs region would have been coursed when Napoleon Bonaparte and his modern military could combine the invasion of Egyptian lands with the occupation of the Levant. After an easy incursion by

the French Army and their invasion of Haifa and Jaffa in the early 1799, the course of history changed sharply when Napoleon's soldiers stumbled upon the siege of Acre and then were swept away by the great disaster when the terrible plague in the French campaign army broke out, forcing Bonaparte to flee and return to Egypt, thus marking the first major defeat of his life.

Undoubtedly, in 1809, Napoleon used (the germ weapon) in his war against the British enemy, when the two armies met on the shores of the west coast of the Netherlands, and in this situation, Napoleon ordered the demolition of dams and flooding the area near the English army with flood waters. A while later, mosquitoes spread in the atmosphere and the Malaria epidemic hit the British army and killed more than 4,000 soldiers, so Napoleon stated his malicious comment (we must not resist the English without fever, which is enough to kill them all).

In 1812, Napoleon began his great adventure to invade the Russian Empire and although he set off with a formidable army from France for about 600,000 soldiers, but Napoleon's greatest defeat ever was the one in which he lost some 300,000 soldiers from his army, which he was proud of and called the Great Army. Unfortunately, when he passed with his army through the Polish territory and there his soldiers tasted the bath of death not with a sword and rifle bullets, but because of the spread of the Typhoid epidemic among them, which failed Napoleon's original plan to reach Russia in the summer. Definitely, the Russian army defeated the remnants of the French army, which reached the Russian ice ground at the height of winter, thus causing the scourge of ice and the Typhoid epidemic to write the political and military sad end not only for Napoleon, but for the entire French nation, so it was the last major defeat of the French emperor Bonaparte at the Battle of Waterloo as it is well-known.

Actually, we have to recall the role of the epidemic and the scourge in writing the history of Arab regions, where the epidemic and plague contributed to the survival of the Arab countries and people from the invasion of Napoleon or the obstructing the implementation of Alexander the Macedonian plan to invade the Arabian Peninsula. Noteworthy, the scourge of the epidemic contributed at some point in protecting the land of Arabs from the invasion of the Crusaders in the Levant and Jerusalem, where the plague contributed to breaking the wave of the Eighth Crusade, the last one. In 1270 AD, the French King Louis IX led himself the eighth crusade, which was aimed at occupying Tunisia and then proceeding from it to the east to invade Egypt and finally retrieve Jerusalem, but the legions of the Crusader armies were dispelled at the time when they arrived there, and due to the outbreak of the epidemic of the Cholera among the soldiers and it was not escapable from that, so the King Louis IX himself ended his term with death in Tunisia.

The plague of the epidemic of the deadly disease often rewrote history in a new course of the phrase that the epidemic (obliteration) can be rewritten an alternative course of historical text. Napoleon invaded the East and the West including the European countries. Even if his plan to invading the Palestinian territories was failed, because of the bacterial microbe to the epidemic, the writing of the history about two thousand years before that was obliterated when Napoleon was the predecessor and ideal of the Macedonian leader, (Alexander the Great), who after conquering the East and West, he was thinking to complete his occupation to the world by invading the Arabian Peninsula as he told his close army chiefs. At the end of his short life, Alexander the Great was residing in the capital of his empire in the city of Babylon, and due to the spread of the epidemic of Malaria in Iraq in that period, he passed away before the 32-years old. He was the fighter, who intending to launch the Macedonian campaign to storm the Arabs countries.

The horrified and most traumatic example, in reality, is the mention of the impact of the Measles and Smallpox epidemics in Latin America. For centuries the Aztec civilization flourished in the Mexican lands and the people of the Indian Inca tribes on the slopes of the Peruvian mountains. The course of history and its written style changed dramatically when the Spanish leader, Herman Cortez landed on the coast of Mexico at the beginning of the sixteenth century AD, in a marvel of history, the Spanish army consisting of 600 soldiers managed to invade the Mexican Aztec Empire with a population of tens of millions. The Spanish conquest coincided with the invasion of the microbes of the Smallpox epidemic that arrived in Mexico in 1520 AD, and destroyed for about half of the Aztec population, including the Emperor Kitiahuk. At the same time, Spanish invaders have fitting immunity against Smallpox, this is why the Spanish soldiers were not greatly affected by this epidemic, which made the Aztecs fear them as indomitable gods,

especially since they are fortified with good lethal weapons, that the Indians of Mexico do not know horses, vehicles and gun powders.

The Justinian epidemic was a "disastrous plague" (i.e., Brought about by *Yersinia pestis*) that began in the early of the sixth century AD either in Ethiopia, passing through Egypt, and in the Central Asian regions, where -at that point- it went along the convoy trading roads. From one of these two areas, the scourge immediately spread all through the Roman Empire and outside it (Bessel, 582). Like most epidemics, the Justinian plague for the most part followed trading courses giving a "exchanging of contaminations just as of merchandise," and in this way, it was particularly fierce to beach cities. Military advancement at the time likewise added to spreading the ailment from Asia Minor to Africa and Italy, and further into Western Europe.

Many historical writers think that the 1918 flu epidemic is the horrifying disease. In spite of the fact that the world has advanced significantly in moderating numerous plagues occasionally, but the event of an epidemic in an enormous scope can't be denied completely. This is a result of the changing model of infectious sicknesses and the epidemiological progress (Samal, 166). Actually, at the beginning years of the twentieth century, the Spanish influenza epidemic, was the main disastrous worldwide epidemic and the first that happened in the setting of current medication, with strengths, for example, irresistible maladies and the study of disease transmission considering the idea of the ailment and the course of the pandemic as it unfurled. It is additionally, as of this time, the last obvious worldwide epidemic with threatening the lives of communities over the globe (Reed, 3).

Conclusion

Noteworthy, studying the history is useful to transfer knowledge and experiences from the past and applying them at the present time and the future. Therefore, reading the history of the epidemics and dangerous diseases doesn't mean to entertain storytelling, but rather it aims to take the sermon and to understand the lesson as well as realize that the arrival of the epidemic diseases to any society in any place, means the destruction of that community completely, or the sudden shortage of a large number of its members. In short, studying the history of the epidemic diseases doesn't lead to defeat and fear, but rather it is beneficial in adopting the principles of caution and mobilizing the capabilities to cope the deadly epidemic diseases and preparing oneself to overcome this black death and protect oneself, family and the entire society.

In a long progression from the beginning of time, the epidemic outbreaks have devastated communities, decided the results of wars, cleared out whole populaces, yet in addition, incomprehensibly, made room for developments and advances in the sciences (counting medication and general health), economy, and political frameworks. Pandemic episodes, or diseases, as they are frequently alluded to have been firmly analyzed through the viewpoint of the humanities in the domain of history, including the historical background of the medication (Humphreys, 220).

Discovering history of epidemic is not an easy task, as a similar time can't be handily duplicated in a brief article, but it remains to say that the epidemic diseases and plague in particular deserve the right title of (Black Death), which is a terrifying event in the memory of human history, and even if it served some countries in some way in preventing and destroying some calamities and horrors from other countries, but it is an enemy that must be feared and well-protected against it.

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