This is the first systematic scholarly study of the Ottoman experience of plague during the Black Death pandemic and the centuries that followed. Using a wealth of archival and narrative sources, including medical treatises, hagiographies, and travelers’ accounts, as well as recent scientific research, Nükhet Varlık demonstrates how plague interacted with the environmental, social, and political structures of the Ottoman Empire from the late medieval through the early modern era. The book argues that the empire’s growth transformed the epidemiological patterns of plague by bringing diverse ecological zones into interaction and by intensifying the mobilities of exchange among both human and nonhuman agents. Varlık maintains that persistent plagues elicited new forms of cultural imagination and expression as well as a new body of knowledge about the disease. In turn, this new consciousness sharpened the Ottoman administrative response to the plague, while contributing to the makings of an early modern state.

Nükhet Varlık is Assistant Professor of History at Rutgers University–Newark. She is the author of several articles and is currently editing a collection of essays titled *Plague and Contagion in the Islamic Mediterranean*. She is the recipient of an NEH Fellowship by the American Research Institute in Turkey, a Senior Fellowship from Koç University’s Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations, and a Turkish Cultural Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellowship.
Plague and Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean World

The Ottoman Experience, 1347–1600

NÜKHET VARLIK

Rutgers University–Newark
To Ben, with love and gratitude
Contents

Figures, Maps, and Tables page ix
Acknowledgments xi
Abbreviations xv
Note on Transliteration and Dates xvii

Introduction 1

PART I. PLAGUE: HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY
1 A Natural History of Plague 17
2 Plague in Ottomanist and Non-Ottomanist Historiography 55
3 The Black Death and Its Aftermath (1347–1453) 90

PART II. PLAGUE OF EMPIRE
4 The First Phase (1453–1517): Plague Comes from the West 131
5 The Second Phase (1517–1570): Multiple Plague Trajectories 160
6 The Third Phase (1570–1600): Istanbul as Plague Hub 185

PART III. EMPIRE OF PLAGUE
7 Plague Transformed: Changing Perceptions, Knowledge, and Attitudes 207
8 The State of the Plague: Politics of Bodies in the Making of the Ottoman State 248
  Epilogue 292

Bibliography 295
Index 327
Figures, Maps, and Tables

Figures
1 Outbreaks of plague in Ottoman-controlled areas (1347–1600). page 132
2 Letter submitted to the Palace during an epidemic. Second half of the sixteenth century. 222
3 Brief note submitted to the Palace reporting the death toll during an epidemic in Istanbul. Undated. 254
4 Report by the kadi of Istanbul submitted to the Palace during a plague epidemic. May 1513. 256
5 Report by the Chief of Janissaries submitted to the Palace during a plague epidemic. May 1513. 257
6 Pieter Coecke van Aelst, A Turkish Funeral from the frieze Ces Moeurs et fachons de faire de Turcz (Customs and Fashions of the Turks), 1553. 266
7 Jewish Burial in Turkey, from the Travel Album of Bartholomäus Schachman (17v), 1590. 267
8 Christians Lamenting Their Dead, from the Travel Album of Bartholomäus Schachman (86v), 1590. 267
9 Turkish Burial, from the Travel Album of Bartholomäus Schachman (3v), 1590. 268
10 Pieter Coecke van Aelst, The Turks in MDXXXIII: A Series of Drawings Made in That Year at Constantinople. 273

Maps
1 Anatolia and surroundings during the Black Death, circa 1346–49. 101
2 Plague networks, 1453–1600. 134
3 Plague networks in the First Phase, 1453–1517. 137
Figures, Maps, and Tables

4 Plague networks in the Second Phase, 1517–70. 161
5 Plague networks in the Third Phase, 1570–1600. 188

Tables

1 Frequency of Plagues in the Mediterranean World Following the Black Death 125
2 Loss of Business Owing to Plague, Reported by Shops Selling Fermented Millet Beer in Bursa (1491) 146
3 Plague Mortality in Istanbul, May 16–18, 1513 150
4 Mortality Report of Plague and Nonplague Deaths in Istanbul, May 23–25, 1513 151
5 Burial of Plague Victims, (probably) During the Reign of Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) 255
Acknowledgments

This book is the result of my fascination with plague – a fascination that took me on a long and winding journey in life – but I first caught the “germs” at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, and they gradually incubated and amplified at the University of Chicago; finally, the infection ran its course at Rutgers University. Along the twists and turns of the journey, I crossed paths with many people, who each in his or her special way left behind a mark on this project; their signatures are hidden in the pages of this book. I am deeply grateful to every one of those people with whom I exchanged ideas and shared long hours of discussion, frustration, and hope. This book would simply not have been brought to completion if it were not for the inspiration, support, and assistance I received from these individuals.

Going back in time to the first “seeds of disease” planted in my mind and the people who nurtured this curiosity, I would like to acknowledge the faculty in the Department of History at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, in particular Nevra Necipoğlu, Edhem Eldem, Selim Deringil, Selçuk Esenbel, Tony Greenwood, Günay Kut, and Halil Berktay (now at Sabancı University). I would also like to acknowledge the support and encouragement I received from Nil Sarı, of Istanbul University, and Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, formerly of the Research Center of Islamic History, Art, and Culture (IRCICA) in Istanbul.

Chicago became a second home after Istanbul. Beyond all, I am deeply grateful to Cornell Fleischer of the University of Chicago, who first saw merit in my project, welcomed me as a graduate student, and offered thorough training in Ottoman history, culture, and language. He was the one who unlocked the doors to a new cultural landscape and made me believe that I could venture into writing the history of Ottoman plagues. I thank him for his unwavering support, encouragement, and guidance and, most importantly, for being a model to emulate. As a graduate student at the University of Chicago, I had the privilege of working with Robert Dankoff,
Fred Donner, Adrian Johns, Holly Shissler, and the late Farouk Mustafa. I remain grateful for everything I have learned from them.

In more recent years, I have been blessed with the support, guidance, and encouragement of scholars who transformed my perception and understanding of past plagues. Ann Carmichael of Indiana University has been an invaluable mentor, guide, and friend in this journey. I thank her from the bottom of my heart for guiding me through the difficulties of writing in moments of self-doubt and for ever-rejuvenating my passion for plague. It was thanks to her that I discovered a larger community of scholars who shared a similar passion for the subject. I am truly grateful to Monica Green, for she has transformed my thinking about plague by opening my horizons to the world of research in other disciplines, especially the new plague science. With her inexhaustible energy, dedication, and resourcefulness, she continues to be an inspiration. I would also like to acknowledge Michelle Ziegler and the other members of the plague working group, which has been an invaluable resource for keeping each of us informed and updated about new research in the field. I have benefited from these conversations in numerous ways.

I would like to acknowledge the support and encouragement I have received from my colleagues formerly in the Department of History at James Madison University and currently in the Federated Department of History at Rutgers University–Newark and NJIT. Rutgers has been a home away from home, and my colleagues have been enormously supportive in every possible way. I am honored and humbled to have such colleagues, and I thank every single one of them. At Rutgers, I would also like to thank Tuna Artun, Nahyan Fancy (of DePauw University), and the RCHA “Networks of Exchange” seminar colleagues, in particular Toby Jones and James Delbourgo. The friendship of Zeynep Çelik at Rutgers has been like a breath of fresh air. I thank her for being a relentless source of support and guidance every step of the way.

Several institutions have been instrumental in supporting me as I researched and wrote this book. I am grateful for the financial support provided by the American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT)–National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Advanced Research Fellowship; Koc University’s Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (RCAC) Senior Fellowship; and a Turkish Cultural Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellowship during the academic year 2010–11, which I spent in Istanbul. I am also grateful for research support provided by Rutgers University–Newark FASN and the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis Faculty Fellowship in 2012–13.

I conducted research for this book in several libraries and archives across two continents. I thank the librarians and archivists of Koc University’s RCAC, IRCICA, İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi (ISAM), the Department of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine at Istanbul University Cerrahpaşa Medical School, Atatürk Library, Bayezid Library, Süleymaniye Library, the
Acknowledgments

Topkapı Palace Museum Archives, the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives in Istanbul, the Joseph Regenstein Library in Chicago (especially Basima Bezirgan and Marlis Saleh of the Middle East Collection), and, last but not least, the John Cotton Dana Library and its interlibrary loan staff. I would like to thank Esra Müyesseroğlu and Sevgi Ağıca from the Topkapı Palace Museum and Lauren Jones from the Orientalist Museum, Doha for their help with publication permits.

I have had the privilege of presenting earlier versions of this work and benefiting from the feedback of colleagues at various institutions. I thank them for commenting on my work in progress, offering suggestions, and sharing insights. Among these, I would like to mention in particular John Brooke, Snjezana Buzov, and Carter Findley of Ohio State University; Scott Redford of Koç University–RCAC, Stefan Leder of Orient-Institut Beirut, Asa Eger of the University of North Carolina–Greensboro; the faculty at the Department of Medical History and Ethics at Istanbul University Cerrahpaşa Medical School; and Tolga Esmer and Tijana Krstić of Central European University. Over the many years of research and writing, several colleagues helped with research, shared sources, and answered questions about various issues. I would like to mention Zahit Atcıl, Günhan Böreççi, Rainer Brömer, John Curry, Canan Çakır, Semavi Eyice, Christopher Markiewicz, Miri Shefer-Mossensohn, Uli Schamiloglu, Justin Stearns, Kahraman Şakul, and Tunç Şen. I am grateful for the assistance of Israa Alhassani of James Madison University, Burçak Özüdil Altın of NJIT, William Kynan-Wilson, and Erkan Karakoyun at various stages of the preparation of this book. I would like to thank Marigold Acland, who oversaw the first stages of this project; my editor, William Hammell; Sarika Narula and Kate Gavino; and the anonymous reviewers from Cambridge University Press.

I have also enjoyed the friendship of many kindred spirits who shared ideas, offered every imaginable type of help, and, most importantly, made the journey meaningful and enjoyable. I thank Mehmetcan Akpınar, Betül İşirli Argı, Abdurrahman Atcıl, Bülent Kitapçı Bayrık, Betül Başaran, Peter Bondarenko, Lale Can, Esin Eşgıt, Pinar Emiralioglu, Side Emre, Mayte Green, Kelda Jamison, Ashl Niyazoğlu, Ertuğrul Ökten, Ayşe Polat, Kaya Şahin, Kabir Tambar, Ece Turnator, Gökben Uluderya, Patrick Wing, Bike Yazıcıoğlu, Sara Nur Yıldız, and Betül Yılmaz. My thanks also go to my students, especially those in my recent Black Death seminar at Rutgers, for sharing my fascination with plague and resisting, against all bids, to call me Dr. Morbid.

Last but not least, I would like to mention the members of my family across two continents: my mother-in-law, Karen Hutchens; my brother, Askin Varlık, and his family; my parents, Nermin and İmdat Varlık; and my beloved children, Alanur and Evan Arda. I cannot thank them enough for their love, unwavering support, and help in every possible way. Benjamin Hutchens, my husband, love, and friend, has been absolutely the greatest
source of support through this journey. I thank him for listening to me tirelessly even when the conversation was mostly about rats, fleas, and bacteria; for reading countless drafts of this work; and for making suggestions and comments, thus saving me from many embarrassing mistakes, not only thanks to his sound reasoning skills as a philosopher but also as a fervent student of history. To dedicate this book to him is the least I can do in the way of thanking him.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOA</td>
<td>Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives), Istanbul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI²</td>
<td><em>Encyclopaedia of Islam 2</em>, electronic edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IJMES</td>
<td><em>International Journal of Middle East Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRCICA</td>
<td>Research Centre for Islamic History, Art, and Culture, Istanbul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JESHO</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHMAS</td>
<td><em>Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KK</td>
<td>Kamil Kepeci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Mühimme Defteri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLoS</td>
<td><em>Public Library of Science</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNAS</td>
<td><em>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDVIA</td>
<td><em>Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi</em>, electronic edition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSMA</td>
<td>Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi, Istanbul (Topkapı Palace Museum Archives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTK</td>
<td>Türk Tarih Kurumu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note on Transliteration and Dates

To make reading easier for the nonspecialist, I have followed an eclectic and practical approach to transliteration. I have simplified book titles and personal names in Ottoman Turkish by following modern Turkish orthography and omitting diacritical marks as much as possible. Place-names, if within the boundaries of modern Turkey, are given in modern Turkish forms. For example, I have used “Trabzon” but not “Trebizond,” with the exception of place-names that are well known in Anglicized form, for example, “Gallipoli” but not “Gelibolu.” If outside Turkey, then modern English place-names are adopted, followed by the Ottoman Turkish name in parentheses the first time a place is mentioned in the text. For example, I have used “Rhodes” instead of “Rodos.” When using terms pertaining to the Islamicate culture that are already established in modern English, I have preferred Anglicized forms over Turkicized versions. For this reason, I have used “ulama” instead of “ulema,” “hadith” instead of “hadis,” “waqf” instead of “vakıf,” and so on. For other such terms where an Anglicized form is not used commonly, the Turkicized version has been used, without transliteration, for example, “taun” or “askeri.” Names and book titles in Arabic and Persian in the text follow a simplified version of the IJMES transliteration system. Full transliteration is given in the bibliography. Long vowel markers have been omitted as much as possible. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

For Turkish pronunciation, the readers are kindly referred to the following guidelines prepared by Erika H. Gilson: www.princeton.edu/~ehgilson/alpha.html.

Dates in the main text are given in the Common Era. In the notes, documents from the Ottoman archives are given in the original Hijri date followed by the Common Era date. Conversion of Hijri dates to the Gregorian calendar follows the conversion software of Tarih Çevirme Kilavuzu, offered online at http://193.255.138.2/takvim.asp.
Note on Transliteration and Dates

I have used the Hijri months in the following forms:

Muharrem
Safer
Rebiülevvel
Rebiülahir
Cemaziyelevvel
Cemaziyelevation
Receb
Şaban
Ramazan
Şevval
Zilkade
Zilhicce