

The Plague of 749 H \ 1348 A.D and its Impact on Egypt During the Reign of Sultan Alnasser Hassan

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Abstract:

- Egypt was overwhelmed by some of fatal infections during the era of Mamelukes (648-923) and came on top of them all, that plague of the year (749) which left demographic , social , economic and political influences – That was the plague which swept Belad Al-Sham , Hejaz and Egypt during the era of Sultan (Al-Nasser Hassan) and its peak was at the west of Europe, and it lasted for seven years which led to goods shortage which was best described by (Ibn Aias) : "Egypt was about to be destroyed at that year due to high prices and deaths as this plague infected cats , dogs and beasts as I saw some of them lying in the wild carrying this epidemic under its inner-arm , also horses , camels, dogs and even birds such as ostrich "-

- This study aims at casting the shadow on the aspects of this plague of the year (749) such as immigration and its positive and negative effects on Egypt during this period in addition to the protective and cautious procedures done by the Mameluke Authority in order to reduce the spread of this epidemic throughout the Egyptian big cities such as reciting Saheeh Al-Bukhary, going out to the deserts and holding meetings in mosques.

- Also, this study concentrates on the most important negative effects which this plague brought, like population's demographical re-distributing of all the Egyptian cities and districts, stopping Aza"n (calling for prayers) and praying at mosques located at the infected places, the decay of Agricultural activity especially harvest time due to the death of a great number of farmers and the stopping of navigation and fishing work, etc.

-Historians stated that the origin of this plague first appeared in the East of Asia particularly in China and India since the year (1334/742) then moved to the rest of the countries.

- This plague reached Europe through the southern road for ships which sailed in the Mediterranean carrying the infection to the Italian ports then moved to the whole European cities killing the third of the European population at least.

- The plague is classified as one of the infectious diseases , it is a fatal tumor that gives out harmful and severe inflammations and the skin's color turned to be black or green around these inflammations which appear at a specific places of the body such as armpit and behind ear and also at the loose muscles in general ; this kind of plague was known as Bubonic Plague or Glandular , it is a very infectious disease that transfers from dead or live animals to human beings .

-It is worthy of mention that the plague is one of the strongest infectious diseases that caused by *Persenia Pestis* Bacteria which transforms from animals to human beings and considered the source of infection such as mice and dogs, the plague transfers from one animal to another through fleas then transfers to human beings through mouse's fleas.

- Sources have mentioned that the causes of the spread of this plague were such as water, plant and air corruption in addition to that animals and insects infected with the plague like mice and fleas which transfer disease through blood to the human beings.

- The plague is considered a serious disease to be cured so they had to take protective precautions in order to stop this plague from spreading such as houses' sterilizing, cooling its air by using steam, camphor, sandalwood and musk which hadn't a specific time besides using lovely smelling, staying at the shadow, dry places away from cold air currents and extracting blood waste from the body -

- The most common symptoms of the plague used to be high body temperature and continuous feeling of sickness until the person vomits blood from his mouth immediately followed by his companions of the house one after another causing death to all in one night or two and doctors were helpless to treat this disease.

-We can conclude the symptoms of the plague as follows: -

-The plague of the year (749) is considered of the most serious plagues that Egypt witnessed at this period as it had a great effect on it causing great damage as it started in Alexandria, where about 100 people used to die every day then it was raised to 200 and finally reached 700 apart from animals and insects – Then it spread to Damnhour and other cities to the extent that most of the population of Al-Behira region met their end , after that it moved to Al-Borolos , Nestrawah , Mahala , Belbis and Damietta -

-The plague reached Cairo, the capital and was killing about 10000 every day to the extent that people had to dig collective graveyards in order to provide a suitable place for the increased number of deaths – This plague killed most of the Egyptian population at this time, a larger number of Assuit had died and lots of villages were completely deserted.

-A great number of people died due to the spread of this plague at the whole of the Egyptian cities in (749) to the extent that Al-Gharbiea region was emptied from its population and streets, and lanes at Senbat , Sanhour and Samanoud were completely free of people who had died of this plague

-Also there had been great numbers of dead people at upper Egypt especially in Assuit which had a toll of 6000 of Ghraj payers , most of them died and only 100 left while in Al-Borolos a great number of fishermen died on board of their boats and ships while in Cairo , the capital , it wasn't much luckier than other cities as its great graveyards were completely full of the corpses to the extent that people had to sleep with their deaths as a result of the disability of burying them.

-Egypt had witnessed a great increase in prices of some goods at the year (749) such as the high cost of coffin's clothes, burying requirements and some food products that needed by some patients like sugar and some medical plants such as (Regla), some fruits like pears apart from some medicine, that all happened as a result of this plague.

-In addition there was a raise of the fees of Holy Qur'an and Saheeh Al-Bukhary reciters during this crisis due to the death of a great number of them infected with this plague and the

great number of funerals held in the graveyards that forced some people who were doing other jobs to recite Qur'an for dead people in both mosques and graveyards.

-A lot of agricultural crops had decayed as there weren't any farmers to harvest them as a great number of them died of the plague before the harvest season, for an example (Belbis) as its people were not capable of harvesting their crops in the Summer of (749) due to stopping of waterwheels' from working because of the death of cows and sheep.

-Some of weighing dishonesty and cheating activities spread over the country during this crisis of the plague which extended to include the weight of the bread as it became less in weight and was sold by counting and not weighing.

-The spread of this plague in some of the Egyptian coastal cities resulted in the complete stopping of the movement of fishing due to the death of fishermen as it happened in Borolos , Nestravh and Damietta.

-Also some industries stopped and some people changed their jobs into another, such as burying the dead as some of them worked as managers while others worked as dead washers which was a natural result for the increasing of the death toll.

-It was a remarkable notice that the closing of some mosques during this plague in (749) at both Cairo and Al-Fostat where Az'an was stopped for all prayers at the most of mosques while Az'an was limited only on one mosque for both of the previous cities.

-As Al-Safady mentioned some aspects of fear and anxiety that prevailed among people due to the spread of this plague in (749).

(The protective and Precautious procedures took by the Mameluke Authority in Egypt)

-The Mameluke authority in Egypt embodied in Sultans and Princes took some protective and precautious procedures in order to limit the spread of the plague and reducing the death toll, such as going to mosques and deserts to recite Holy Qur'an, Saheeh Al-Bukhary , Qunoot prays , fasting and begging to Allah in order to be merciful on them . Its worthy of mentioning that it was a natural matter at this time especially after some scholars gave (fatwa) or the religious point of view of the approval of doing this at the time of the plague as it was a custom that the sultan accompanied his princes going out of Cairo to (Seriakos House) ping and begging to Allah to have mercy on them and with the increase of the death toll , the Sultan ordered people to go out praying and reciting the Holy Qur'an for several days and also he gave his orders of banning wine , some drugs like cannabis and banning of outrageous acts by some whores .

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