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Summary :

In mid-July 1913, a plague epidemic struck Smyrna. The plague was spread to Smyrna by Muslim refugees from Macedonia. Finally, the epidemic was eliminated in early October of the same year.

Date

Mid-July 1913 – October 1913

Geographical Location

Smyrna (İzmir)

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1. Onset of the Epidemic

In mid-July 1913, a plague epidemic broke out in Smyrna. It was not the only epidemic disease that struck the city that period, as the inhabitants were suffering from the smallpox broken out in early February 1913.

2. Spread of the Epidemic

The plague was spread to Smyrna by Muslim refugees from Macedonia. The first cases appeared at Başoturak. Immediately after the meeting of the sanitary committee, the region of Başoturak started to be disinfected and the inhabitants were taken to 40 tents at Kızılçulu on the mount Pagus (Kadifekale). The hospital of contagious diseases in the quarter of Tepecik was used as a quarantine station. The Municipality of Smyrna asked the vilayet authorities to approve a credit of 5000 liras in order to fight the plague. On July 20, the steamship 'Magda' coming from Thessaloniki and Kavala with about 700 Muslim refugees from various regions of Macedonia was forbidden to enter the harbour of Smyrna.

3. Precautionary Measures

The sanitary service imposed measures on food and water. Coffee shops and wine shops had to use boiled water. The municipality stopped the water supply in the Upper quarter and the people suffered from water shortage. The supreme council (*meclis*) of the vilayet decided that the waters of the spring Osman Ağa or Vezir Suyu should be examined. The surfaces of the streets, where problems had appeared, were whitewashed. About 500 Jews were removed and settled in tents, on the hill of Katiboğlu, near the city, where they remained in isolation. The civil health inspectorate ordered that all infected inns and hotels should close down; their operation would be allowed only after their disinfection and medical examination. Several butchers and grocers had to close their shops because they did not adopt the sanitary measures.

On July 24, Smyrna was divided into eight sectors so that the patients could be better treated; the sanitary supervision was undertaken by 101 doctors. On July 25, the diocese issued a decision that assigned the parishes with the task of collecting money for the purchase of whitewash and disinfectants, while in case of emergency the ecclesiastical funds were summoned to make their contribution. The circular letter also ordered that the disinfections of roads and other places should be supervised and the families should be informed about the application of measures.

The section for infectious diaseases of the English hospital opened on July 29, but it accepted only foreign subjects. On

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July 31, following a medical examination, several shops and inns of the Jewish quarter were closed down. The huts of the Muslim porters in the area of Zekiye inns were burned, because they had become foci of infection. In order to prevent the epidemic from spreading, the authorities placed guards in all the houses that had been infected by the disease and banned contact with the residents.

4. The Victims

The Chief Rabbi of Smyrna died of the disease on August 17. Most of the victims in August died between the 15th and the 21st of the month, thus making a total of 23 casualties. On September 7, following a decision of the diocese, the beginning of the school year was put off because of the seriousness of the epidemic. Vaccination started on September 13. The doctors Koutouvalis, Logothetis and Husni Bey were responsible for vaccinating the inhabitants. The diocese issued a new decision on September 17 and ordered that school classes should start the following day. On September 22, the municipality decided that a disinfector should be used for sanitising items such as the furniture of the people who moved from one quarter to another, old clothes, etc., before they were sold in the market of Bit Pazar. Because the students, out of fear for the epidemic, did not go to school, on September 22, the metropolitan asked them to return to their classes; he added that the plague was in decline and they had nothing to worry about. No more cases of the disease appeared in the city from late September onwards and, finally, the epidemic was eliminated in early October. During the epidemic in Smyrna, there were 284 cases resulting in 166 deaths.[1]

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1. *Αμάλθεια*, October 3, 1913. Solomonidis (Σολομωνίδης) reports 300 cases, which resulted in 181 deaths; see Σολομωνίδης, Χ., *Η ιατρική στη Σμύρνη: Ασκληπιεία, σχολές, το Γραικικό Νοσοκομείο, επιδημίες, γητειές, γιατροσόφια, γιατροί, φαρμακεία* (Athens 1955), p. 74.

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Glossary :

vilayet (valilik)

The larger administrative unit in the Ottoman provincial administration system. The large provinces of the Ottoman Empire were previously called eyalet. The new regulation of 1864 introduced the vilayet as an equivalent of the French département - albeit of smaller size. The governor of the vilayet was called vali and had extensive authority.

Sources

Newspaper *Αμάλθεια* (July-October 1913).