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THE END OF GREAT EPIDEMICS IN WESTERN EUROPE

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"A peste, fame et bello, libera nos, Domine" was one of the prayers to be permanently said throughout the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the modern times in Western Europe. These words, still repeated even nowadays, recall one of the great themes of the western spirituality in those past ages: fear of the death caused by plague, by starvation and by wars.

That plague should be brought into the foreground shows that for those people of clear thought it certainly held first place among the great epidemics sweeping over Europe. In view of a survey of the end of the great epidemics exclusively in Western Europe on the basis of a critical investigation of the preceding studies and records, we should necessarily try their delineation.

This represents a twofold necessity: on the one hand, people in the Middle Ages, deprived of medical education and frightened by plague, used this term for any epidemic with killing effects that took a great toll¹; on the other hand, the lack of a special study on the subject which should specifically deal with those epidemics with notable demographic effects.

Viewed from the angle of their consequences, the ordinary epidemics in Western Europe between the 16th and the 18th centuries include:

— *Smallpox (variola)*, considered very widespread², half epidemic, half endemic³, caused disfiguring⁴, blinding and even death⁵. It was subdued by the beginning of the 18th century thanks to the Eastern type vaccination suggested and performed, among others, by Jacob Pylarino, the physician assigned to the princely court in Bucharest⁶,

¹ Mirko D. Grmer, *Préliminaires d'une étude historique des maladies*, Annales. Economies. Sociétés. Civilisations, Paris, 1969, No. 6, pp. 1473-1489; when discussing the diseases one should take into account the history and evolution of each of them, which makes defining an epidemic of the past all the more difficult.

² Samuel Tissot, *Avis au peuple sur sa santé*, Paris, 1775, pp. 221-222: "la plus générale de toutes les maladies: sur 100 personnes 95 sont touchées; une sur 7 en meurt...".

³ Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation de l'Europe classique*, Paris, 1984, p. 165.

⁴ Danton's and Mirabeau's cases are best known and quite conclusive.

⁵ King Louis XV is a classical example: he died as a result of the dirt in his environment, and of the smallpox he had been suffering from; it seems to have been a form of black smallpox (Cf. Jacques Levron, *Louis XV - l'homme et le roi*, Nouvelle édition, Paris, 1984, p. 468).

⁶ Jacob Pylarino (1659-1718) was the physician of prince Șerban Cantacuzino (1678-1688) between 1684-1687 and then of the latter's nephew, prince Constantin Brancovan (1688-1714) between 1694-1708; having become Venice's diplomatic official in Smirna in 1708, he acquainted his British homologue William Sherard (1659-1728), a famous natu-

but especially thanks to the immunization method conceived by the British physician Edward Jenner⁷ early in the 19th century.

— *The typhoid and paratyphoid* spread quite easily over areas of hundreds of square kilometers as a result of the virus-polluted waters which, in their turn, contaminated vegetables, fruit, cereals a.o. The fact that they first affected the badly nourished poor seems to have been favoured by the warm temperature and damp climate, circumstances already perceived by the 18th century people although the etiology of the disease had not been established so far⁸.

— *Rubeola and other eruptive diseases (le pourpre)* generally erupted in summer. They are poorly described being mixed up with the "miliaires" fevers — eruptions brought forth by perspiration —, with the scarlet fever (scarlatina), with the typhoid and paratyphoid, etc.⁹ Consequently, all the epidemics hidden under the name of "pourpre" or even "red plague" represent another aspect to be considered from the definition point of view.¹⁰

— *Malaria (marsh fever)* is the great dominant of all the marshy regions of Western Europe. It frightened as it sapped the body and even killed the contaminated. Cesare Borgia's story has become quite a legend: ill with malaria he was reduced to immobility in Latium, far from Rome, being unable, on his father's death, to fight for succession to the pontifical throne¹¹.

In the 18th century, malaria caused the death of thousands of people in France and Sologne and in the sandy moors of Gascogne¹²; in Italy, in the Po plain where it carried away one third of the population¹³; in Spain in the rice-planted region of Valencia¹⁴; in north Germany¹⁵, etc.

ralist, with his research on prophylactic inoculation, a technique not known as yet in the western countries but performed empirically in the East. Taking Sherard's advice as well as Hans Sloane's, a member of the Royal Society, Pylarino printed — in 1715 in Venice — an opusculum dealing with inoculation. Dedicated to Sherard, the treatise was translated and published in Boston (Massachusetts) in 1721 under the title *Some account of what is said of inoculating a transplanting of the smallpox*. See comment on Pylarino's method and work in N. Vătămanu, *Cel dintii tratat despre variolozare, opera unui fost medic al curții din București*, "Igiene", XI (1962)1, pp. 67–74; P. Cernovodeanu, I. Stanciu, *Imaginea lumii noi în țările române și primele lor relații cu Statele Unite ale Americii până în 1859*, București, 1977, p. 61.

⁷ For the importance of his discovery, see F. G. O. Drewitt, *The life of Edward Jenner*, 2nd edition, London, 1931, passim.

⁸ Pierre Chaunu, *op. cit.*, p. 165; Bouffey, a member of the Medical Academy was given as particular example.

⁹ Cf. Gaston Roupnel, *La ville et la campagne au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1955, pp. 28–29.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*; Louis Sébastien Mercier, *L'an deux mille quatre cent quarante. Rêve s'il en fut jamais*, vol. III, Paris, 1771, pp. 186–187.

¹¹ Francesco Ercole, *Da Carlo VIII a Carlo V; la crisi della libertà italiana*, Firenze, 1932, p. 89.

¹² Cf. Isabelle Guérin, *La vie rurale en Sologne aux XIve – XVIIIe*, Paris, 1960, passim.

¹³ Cf. D. H. Haeser, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Medizin*, vol. III, Berlin, 1882, p. 325 et seq.

¹⁴ Pierre Chaunu, *Un modèle d'histoire sociale*, "Bulletin Hispanique", Janvier-Juin, 1965, pp. 78–90.

¹⁵ *Idem*, *La civilisation de l'Europe classique*, ed. cit., p. 175.

— *Influenza*. The most dangerous, sweeping over western Europe between the 16th and the 18th centuries, were the Asiatic and the Spanish ones. Such was the one the king of France Henri IV is said to have caught in 1595 and described by Pierre de l'Estoile. The latter gave a piece of the Frenchmen's mentality by writing "... there followed several strange deaths caused by the *plague*¹⁶ which had spread over various places in the city as it was God's scourge...¹⁷"

— "*Suette anglaise*", a disease no longer active today, ravaged western Europe five times, from 1486 to 1551¹⁸. Being cardiac, pulmonary, rheumatic, it induced death instantly, within a few hours, as it happened in London, in Flanders, in Germany, in Switzerland but not in the rest of the continent, which, strangely enough, remained untouched by its fury¹⁹.

— *Tuberculosis* was also quite widespread and in spite of some preconceived ideas, it struck irrespective of social status: king François II died of tubercular meningitis (1560); king Charles IX died of pulmonary tuberculosis (1574); Louis XIII passed away with intestinal tuberculosis (1643), etc.²⁰ Starting with the 18th century an even more violent tuberculosis was brought along on ships from India: it was to become the disease of the 18th century carrying away the 19th century romanticists. But first the rich and then the poor raised barriers against it, too.

— *Syphilis* (venereal disease), though known ever since prehistoric times²¹, swept over Europe soon after the discovery of America (1492)²². It spread fast: only four or five years it reached Europe being known under several names: "mal français", "the French disease", "10 mal francioso", etc. France made herself conspicuous in the fight against the new disease: in 1503, the surgeon barbers from Hôtel Dieu were able to treat syphilis patients by means of the red iron²³ and later on by help of mercury²⁴. From the 19th century on it was held in check owing to the physicians and to the specialized hospitals — "spittle"²⁵ set up in London that tackled frontally and successfully the whole mass of people from beggars to princes²⁶.

¹⁶ We underlined the word to draw attention upon the confusion between a form of "Spanish flu" and plague.

¹⁷ Cf. Pierre de l'Estoile, *Mémoires et Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris*, Tome I, coll. "Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France", IIe Série, Paris, 1887, p. 261.

¹⁸ Cf. Albert Colnat, *Les épidémies et l'histoire*, Paris, 1927, pp. 103–109.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*; Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économique et capitalisme XVe – XVIIIe siècles*, Tome Ier; *Les structures du quotidien: le possible et l'impossible*, Paris, 1979, pp. 60–61.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ Cf. A. Grenfeld Price, *The Western Invasions of the Pacific and Its Continents*, Harvard University Press, 1966, p. 162.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 172; M. T. Jones-Davies, *Un peintre de la vie londonienne: Thomas Bekker*, London, 1958, p. 335, No. 229.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ M. T. Jones-Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

²⁶ Malherbe, nicknamed "père luxure", "se vantait d'avoir trois fois sué la vérole" (Cf. John Grand-Carteret, *L'histoire, la vie, les mœurs et la curiosité par l'image, 1450–1900*, vol. II, Paris, 1927, p. 322).

The body of records shows that during the period under discussion medical diagnosis had registered such progress that specialists were now able to ascertain the symptomatology of each disease. Out of all diseases two came to stand out owing to their consequences on the demographic plane: leper and plague (Black Death). They were certainly the greatest epidemics between the 16th and the 18th centuries and even in the period extending between the 14th and 18th centuries. Here we might as well attempt a more accurate specification, that of the incriminated geographic area. This is all the more necessary as contemporary authors as Paul Bairoch, Jean Batou, Pierre Chèvre, strangely enough, when dealing with aspects of urban historical demography, limit the area of the continent while leaving out whole south-eastern parts or including other Asiatic ones²⁷. In this case we come to a delimitation on the basis of the epoch's records that show what the 17th–18th century people meant by western Europe. The most characteristic record may well be Maximilien de Sully's memorandum of 1627 known under the title "Le grand dessin d'Henri IV"²⁸. The ex-minister of the king of France, Henri IV, having specified that Europe stretched from the Ural Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean, from the Mediterranean Sea to the North Ocean²⁹ — a conception that might as well have inspired Charles de Gaulle — outlined the West within it. By the West he meant the area defined by geographers today as covering the territory west to Iapetus's land: the British islands, the French kingdom, the Spanish kingdom, Flanders, the Germanic states as far as the Elba, Switzerland, the Italian states.

Jules Michelet was right, being later confirmed by his successors, when he stated that leper had been brought to Europe by warriors returning home from the crusades³⁰. The first crusade took place at the end of the 11th century (1096–1099); this terrible disease broke forth some time later, in the 12th and the 13th centuries³¹. Europe reacted then: it raised a network of "maladreries" and of churches³². French, the language of the country where leper spread extensively produced a wealth of words for designating and communicating horror: ladre, lepreux, méseau, cogot with variants in langue d'oc: gabet, agot, gachet, crestia, gesitain³³. With the lexical enriching of the vocabulary there came a rapid progress of the medical knowledge. In the 13th century, Vincent de Beauvais described the disease perfectly³⁴ and his description was fully approved of in 1624 in the masterly "Encyclopedie" of Douais (4 vols in folio) where leper was made such a clinical description that today a contemporary physician would no longer have anything to add³⁵.

²⁷ Paul Bairoch, Jean Batou, Pierre Chèvre, *La population des villes européennes — banque de données et analyse sommaire des résultats (800–1850)*, Genève, 1988, pp. 287–289.

²⁸ Cf. Jean Baptiste Duroselle, *L'idée d'Europe dans l'histoire*, Paris, 1965, pp. 96–97.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France*, Paris, 1877, pp. 171–174.

³¹ Paul Deloney, *La vie médicale aux XVIIe — XVIIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, Paris, 1935, p. 110.

³² Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation de l'Europe classique*, ed. cit., p. 166.

³³ Dr. Charles Petouraud, *Les léproseries lyonnaises aux Moyen Age et à la Renaissance*, "Cahier d'Histoire", Lyon, 1962/4, p. 116.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

The physicians and inhabitants of Western Europe fought against leper so that by the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th they were able to put an end to it. The success was mainly due to the fact that patients were isolated in leper-hospitals as medication was neither better, nor sufficient or satisfying.

The number of the leper hospitals went so high in Western Europe following 1550 that they became quite an attraction for the "marginal" society who would find there suitable conditions of life³⁶. Then the state, supported by physicians, took steps in order to get the would-be diseased, actually frauds, out of the leper-hospitals. Throughout the 17th century monarchs issued ordinances meant to get the leper-hospitals rid of the would-be lepers³⁷.

In France, the succession of edicts between 1543–1612 was followed on May 26th, 1626 by the famous ordinance of the physicians David and Just Laigneau³⁸. It was enforced under the cardinal of Richelieu who had it multiplied, thus exposing the would-be lepers. It may be considered that starting with 1630 leper died away in Western Europe³⁹. The leper hospitals remained as some kind of memory of the "dark millennium" and, gradually, in the course of the same 17th century, under Jean Baptiste Colbert, they were for ever abolished⁴⁰ while their goods passed into hospitals' ownership following five consecutive decrees: December 1673, March 1674, April 1676, September 1682, March 1696⁴¹. There has been put forward the hypothesis that the victory over leprosy was won both owing to the lepers' having been isolated — in a conscious collective effort of the Westerners — and to the fact that in time, the human body had acquired a certain stamina, feeding and body linen having passed through radical changes, the latter especially⁴².

It was certainly only one battle that was won then, but the war had to be further waged against the fiercest enemy: plague (Black Death). As to the moment this most terrible disease first appeared in Western Europe, the specialists consider it to be either in antiquity, in the 5th century B.C. ("Pericle's plague")⁴³ or in the 6th century A. D. ("Justinian's plague")⁴⁴, or, according to the latest opinions, in the 8th century⁴⁵. Without insisting upon the havoc worked by plague the famous "Black Death" in the 14th century, we will discuss only its final period, of the 16–18th centuries. Between 1624–1639, in the Germanic

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 1963/1, p. 6.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ For the whole France their number reduced from several hundred to about ten, their destination being to shelter the isolated diseased.

⁴⁰ Dr. Charles Petouraud, *op. cit.*, II, 1963, No. 1, p. 11; Pierre Chaunu, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ Albert Colnat, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–19.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 28–35.

⁴⁵ William M. Bowsly, *The Black Death: a turning point in history?*, New York, 1971, p. 21; Frederick F. Kartwright, *Disease and history*, London, 1972, p. 35; Monique Luceret, *Les grandes pestes en France*, Paris, 1985; the best synthesis on the evolution of plague is due to Jean-Noël Biraben, *Les hommes et la peste en France et dans les pays européens et méditerranéens*, Paris — La Haye, 1975–1976.

world plague was associated with the great devastations caused by the "30 years' war"⁴⁶. An immediate consequence was the depopulation of whole districts as it happened in Saarebrücken⁴⁷. Then, gradually, when the chaotic marching of the mercenary troops came to an end, the epidemic was cantoned on the Germanic lands to later disappear at the end of the same century⁴⁸.

In France, over the 16—18th centuries plague was most obstinate, appearing in the least expected forms and in the least expected places. Paris was swept over by plague in 1612, 1619, 1631, 1638, 1662 and lastly in 1668⁴⁹; in Besançon, between 1439 and 1640 it manifested itself 40 times, in Dole in 1565, 1586, 1629, 1632, 1637; the Limousin county was ravaged by plague 10 times in the 17th century and Orléanais 22 times within the same interval⁵⁰. The most terrible but also the last of its outbreaks in France was in Marseille and Provence between 1720 and 1723⁵¹.

In Flanders, the most characteristic and conclusive manifestation was that in Amsterdam between 1622 and 1628, actually the last one, too.

In Britain, the plague which left the deepest mark, being described most suggestively⁵², ravaged London between 1664 and 1665, the last to devastate the country, too.

In the southern parts of the continent, more backward and closer to the East, plague was to have its last great outbursts. In Spain, plague — known as the "Black Death" — first ravaged between 1596 and 1602. Unable to predict the course plague might take, the people did not quite know how to protect themselves. In his memoirs, Pierre Gaiyet wrote that "the great losses caused by the Black Death were the consequences of the road taken by it to infiltrate itself..."⁵³. Then it broke forth again with relative intensity between 1629 and 1639 and with the greatest force in the interval 1647—1652, 1676—1683⁵⁴ to be back again only casually and later disappear (1800—1802)⁵⁵.

About the end of the 17th century Italy passed through terrible times: plague spread over as a result of the same causes to which there was added the pillage of the country by the northern mercenaries (Germans, Swedes etc.). The peninsular population did not know how and was unable to protect itself as the terrible epidemic propagated either by sea through the numberless Mediterranean harbours, or by land from the steppes round the Black Sea⁵⁶.

⁴⁶ Albert Colnat, *op. cit.*, p. 109—121.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 118; the author quotes several desperate cases of people reduced to anthropophagy.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*; F. Braudel, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁴⁹ M. Fosseyeux, *Les épidémies de peste à Paris*, "Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Médecine", XII/1913, p. 110.

⁵⁰ Pierre Chaunu, *Seville et l'Atlantique*, vol. VIII, 1st part, Paris, 1959, p. 290, No. 1; J. and A. Nicolas, *La vie quotidienne en Savoie*, Paris, 1979, p. 119.

⁵¹ René Baehrel, *Epidémie et terreur. Histoire et sociologie*, "Annales Historiques de la Révolution française", No. 122/1951, p. 113—146; C. Carrière, M. Courdurié, F. Rebuffat, *Marseille, ville morte. La peste de 1720*, Paris, 1968, *passim*.

⁵² Daniel Defoe, *Journal de l'année de la peste*, ed. by Joseph Aynard, Paris, 1943.

⁵³ Cf. Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation...*, p. 174.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, *Seville et l'Atlantique*, vol. VIII, 1st part, p. 295.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ William M. Bowski, *The Black Death*, p. 129.

The depressing state of mind brought about by the plague epidemics was described by contemporaries but their words prove rather meaningless. One of the barristers in the Parliament of Paris, Nicolas Versoris wrote in his book "Livre de Raison" that in the summer of 1623 "principalement la mort c'estoit tournée sur les pouvrez en manière que des crocheteurs gaigne deniers de Paris qui auparavant la fortune estoient en grand nombre et ne denouera que vient... Au regard du quartier des Petiz Champs, tout le pays feust nestoé des pouvres gens qui auparavant y habitoient en grand nombre"⁵⁷. The image was continually reiterated in the fiction, memoirs and epistolary literature of the epoch. A memoirist with a story-teller's gift and an observer's accuracy described the great event of his life: in 1637 he escaped safe from the plague which had been sweeping over Florence. The houses in the city were barred, the traffic stopped except for carts carrying food or a solitary priest's coach. Only seldom could one see the coach of some privileged who had been granted permission to enter his own premises. Florence was dead: it no longer had business and religious services, maybe with the exception of a mass said in the street corner watched through windows hardly set ajar by those shut up in the houses⁵⁸.

The same sight was to be later depicted from memory by Daniel Defoe in 1772, that of the last plague in London ravaging between 1664 and 1665. When the epidemic was declared in 1664, the royal court left the capital for Oxford. The rich accompanied the monarch taking their servants along and piling up their luggage hurriedly into the carts. There were no longer litigations in London, "the men of the law had all fled into the country", 10,000 houses had been deserted, some of them with boards nailed across the doors and windows, others, the contaminated ones, marked in red chalk⁵⁹.

Perhaps the most terrible image was occasioned by the violent plague of 1720—1723 sweeping over Marseilles and Toulon as well as the whole Provence. At the time, the streets in Marseilles were full "des cadavres à demi pourris et rongés par les chiens"⁶⁰.

The terror apparent in the writings of some of the contemporary witnesses is quite accountable having in view that there is plenty of such evidence, Boccaccio's "Decameron" being the best known, and that the disease took a great toll on each outbreak.

In Germany, where the most accurate calculations are available owing to a critical investigation of the records, the conclusions are terrifying: as far as the period 1621—1635 is concerned, it has been estimated that if in a normal year there died 100 persons, in a plague year, there died in Munich—155; in Augsburg—195; in Bayreuth—187; in Lantsberg—556; in Strauling—702; The same survey shows that those who died were mostly children, old people and women⁶¹.

⁵⁷ Nicolas Versori, *Livre de raison*, published by G. Fagniez, Paris, 1885, pp. 23—24.

⁵⁸ Venezia, Marciana, Italian Mss., III/I. 4.

⁵⁹ Daniel Defoe, *Journal de l'année de peste...*, ed. cit., p. 24, 31—32, 43, 66.

⁶⁰ "Lettre de Monseigneur de Belsunce, évêque de Marseille", 3 Sept. 1720, apud Joseph Aynard, *Préface à Daniel Defoe, op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁶¹ Erich Woelkensk, *Pest und Ruhr im XVI und XVII Jahrhundert*, Munich, 1954, *passim*.

In London, between 1593 and 1664–1665, as a consequence of the five plague attacks there died 153,463 people⁶² while Amsterdam, between 1622 and 1628, when the plague raged annually, registered 35,000 dead people⁶³. In France, the plague at the beginning of the 17th century laid waste the whole Gascogne which made Montaigne tell how he “servit 6 mois miserablement de guide” to his family wandering in search of a shelter “. . . une famille ezgarée faisant peur à ses amis et à soy-mesme et porreur où qu'elle cherchast à se placer”⁶⁴. The records in Beauvais show that in this town of maximum 10,000 inhabitants, between 1625 and 1640, 1,500–2,000 inhabitants died of plague⁶⁵. The figures are high and should they be subject to a critical analysis, they become unbelievable. The same state of things is revealed by the records in Amiens. For this town with a population of 25,000–30,000 people, the records show that in 1632 there were 25,000 plague-stricken persons, while in 1668–30,000⁶⁶. The figures were certainly exaggerated as there never was such a depopulation. Nevertheless they are accountable if the terror caused by plague and the wish to depict its ravages are taken into consideration. In connection with the massive toll taken by plague in France we will mention only the situations in Marseilles and Toulon between 1720 and 1723. There the population was reduced to half while in neighbouring Provence to about two thirds⁶⁷. Trying to minimize the demographic disaster, the marquis of Chasteleux stated that by 1770 the inhabitants of Marseilles, of Toulon and of Provence had grown in number. Reading his statement, Voltaire replied with his well-known irony: “Oui! par les voisins”⁶⁸. The founder of the French Enlightenment was right as plague had killed mainly old men and when it was over, young men came and got married and made their living in the region. Equally devastating was the plague in the countries of southern Europe. In Spain, between 1596 and 1602, the plague struck the population savagely, simply reducing it to half⁶⁹. It reappeared in the same country between 1629 and 1639 but not in serious forms. Not long after, between 1649 and 1652, Spain was again swept over violently by plague. The human losses were enormous: Andalusia was shut off and subject to quarantine; Valencia was ravaged; Seville lost 60,000 lives out of 110,000 it had had⁷⁰. Not even now were overstatements due to plaguephobia missing: Malaga was said to have lost 40,000 people, more than the actual figure of the city inhabitants⁷¹. The consequences were terrible: the country lost 9% of its population, the Mediterranean Levant, if it did not disappear as Pierre Chaunu⁷² seems to believe, then

⁶² J. Aynard, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*, Paris, 1962, pp. 1018–1019.

⁶⁵ Pierre Goubert, *Beauvais et les Beauvaisis de 1660 à 1730*, vol. II, Paris, 1960, p. 168.

⁶⁶ Roger Molls, *Introduction à la démographie historique des villes d'Europe du XI^e au XVIII^e siècles*, vol. III, Louvain, 1956, pp. 193–194.

⁶⁷ C. Carrière, M. Courdurié, F. Rebuffat, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

⁶⁸ Cf. René Baehrel, *Une croissance: la basse Provence rurale (fin du XVII^e siècle — 1789)*, Paris, 1961, p. 389; see also the demographic atlas annexed to the paper.

⁶⁹ Pierre Chaunu, *Seville et l'Atlantique*, vol. VIII, 1st part, ed. cit., p. 310.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 311.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 316 et sqq.

⁷² Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation . . .*, p. 174.

it declined, Seville changed from a world trade centre into a provincial town⁷³.

The last great plague epidemic appeared in Spain between 1676 and 1685 but it was no longer as powerful as in the previous cycles.

Approximate, moderate and closer to reality calculations indicate that Spain lost 1,250,000 people during the three great epidemics in the 17th century⁷⁴.

The spreading of the plague between 1800–1802 in Spain was a simple accident. Brought over from Morocco, it killed 7,000 people in Cadix, 3,000 in Seville etc., but much as in the French harbour Marseille, it was checked.

Simultaneously with Spain, the other southern country in Western Europe, Italy, was also struck by plague. Owing to its geographical position and to the historical events the population of the Italian Peninsula was involved in, it was hit by all forms of plague, coming by land or by sea, from the north or from the south. The human losses were impressive: in 1600 the total figure was of 13,620,000 inhabitants while in 1650 only 11,343,000 and therefore a loss of 2,057,000 people representing about 14%⁷⁵. The demographic catastrophe of the 17th century took place in the Po Plain. There, plague came quietly, both through the Mediterranean harbours and by land, from the plains north of the Black Sea. The figures speak for themselves: in 1600, in Italy there were 5,412,000 people while 50 years later, in 1650 there were only 4,225,000, therefore a loss of 22%⁷⁶.

After this calamity, Italy started recovering and a century later, towards 1750 it reached a normal demographic situation.

Could Western Europe accept this monster with 1,000 faces, a professional killer?

The answer can be only negative. People fought against it to defeat it as they had done with leper, syphilis etc. The records of the period registered such actions. In Paris, after 1612, “on enlevait par force les malades de chez eux et out les transferait à l'Hopital Saint-Louis et à la maison de Santé du faubourg Saint-Marcel”⁷⁷. In Genoa, in 1656 there were taken some obligatory prophylactic steps: one should not talk to a suspect in town when the wind blew from his direction; aromatic plants should be burnt for disinfection; the linen and the rags of the suspect should be washed in lye or better burnt; prayers should be said; police should be called if necessary⁷⁸.

⁷³ *Idem*, *Seville et l'Atlantique*, vol. VIII, 1st part, ed. cit., p. 318 et sqq.

⁷⁴ Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation . . .*, p. 174.

⁷⁵ The figures were taken over from Karl Julius Belloch, *Bevölkerungs Geschichte Italiens*, vol. III, Berlin, 1965, p. 189 et sqq.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ M. Fosseyeux, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁷⁸ Père Maurice de Tolon, *Preservatifs et remèdes contre la peste, ou “le Capucin charitable”*, Paris, 1668, p. 68; the work gives an account of the way the 17th century people in Western Europe fought against plague.

The steps taken by the isolated municipalities supported by the Catholic Church helped to win small battles but did not defeat plague definitively in Western Europe in the 17th century. The historical moment, decisive for the new conscious approach, was the plague in Marseille between 1720 and 1723. The full proof in this respect, among others, is the unpublished letter of the French consul Charles de Partyet from the Cadix harbour⁷⁹. On September 15th, 1720 he let the royal councillor know that the French merchandise in the Spanish harbour had been burnt, the reason given being that they came from the plague-infested Marseille. Due to the content of the letter, the procedure was rather unusual for a simple consul's correspondence: the annotation reveals that "Mgr. le Régent" should be informed about this. At the time the relationships between France's regent Philippe d'Orléans and the king of Spain Philippe de Bourbon were tense, the two of them detesting each other. Nevertheless, they both were aware of the danger. Consequently, it was agreed that all the goods coming from Marseille and Toulon should be burnt in Cadix and soon after in the other Iberian harbours. A token of political wisdom was thus given which made cooperation between states possible while the flowing waves of ink prevented the firing of cannons, as it would most probably have happened. France also cooperated with Holland, Britain and with the principalities of Western Germany. The steps taken by the states were unitary, making use of those means which were of maximum efficiency.

Following the example of the Catholic Reformation, the Order St. Vincent de Paul was resorted to and under its control and protection a network of asylum-hospitals where patients or suspects were obligatorily hospitalized was set up. Simultaneously, the houses of the diseased were completely isolated, the pavements were washed with lye, the corpses were buried in lime pits dug on the outskirts of the settlements or even burnt⁸⁰, the dwellings and streets were disinfected by burning aromatic plants or gunpowder⁸¹, the dogs or other animals belonging to the infested areas were killed as well⁸². In the years when the slightest danger of plague was signalled, those people travelling from the suspect areas were asked to have health cards. These were granted only after rigorous check-ups sometimes preceded by confinement periods⁸³.

With a view to observing all these steps taken by the Western European states, the authority of the royal high officials was resorted to. They proved implacable in carrying these measures into effect and, consequently, the results were the expected ones.

⁷⁹ Archives National, Ministère d'Affaires Etrangères, fond B 1, Ds. 225, f. 272.

⁸⁰ Cf. Père Maurice de Tolon, *op. cit.*, passim; for up-to-date syntheses of these actions, see F. Braudel, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-69; Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation...*, pp. 174-177.

⁸¹ P. Gaffarel, Marquis de Duranty, *La peste de 1720 à Marseille et en France*, Paris, 1911, pp. 60-61.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 61; in 1720, in Marseille, exceptionally, the banknotes were disinfected, too.

⁸³ Samuel Tissot, *AVIS au peuples sur sa santé*, Paris, 1775. "Bulletins de santé"; Ge-173; suntheitspässe; Cartas de salut, etc.

The fact that people were fully aware of the great importance of the actions taken by the states — as shown by the written records and by the iconography of the time — their being carried out correctly and immediately made it possible that something very similar to the present-day "Red Cross" be set up a century and a half before its institutionalization.

But the most important thing was the victory over plague — the propagation of which is still being debated by physicians⁸⁴—thanks to the people's wisdom, to the states' unitary efforts, actually an example of how intelligence fought and defeated evil without drugs.

⁸⁴ Monique Luceret, *op. cit.*, p. 20 et sqq.; Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation...*, pp. 173-176; it seems to have been propagated not only by fleas or rats as it was believed in the past, but also by people.