MEASURES TO PREVENT AND CONTROL NATURAL DISASTERS AND EPIDEMICS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Gabriela-Carmen Diaconescu
Valahia University of Targoviste
gabrielacarmen84@yahoo.com

Abstract

Natural disasters and epidemics in middle Ages in Romanian countries were a constant source of fear. Fighting them was a concern both for ordinary people, as for the authorities.

The strong desire of the people was to limit as much as possible the catastrophic consequences of these phenomena.

Key-words*: epidemics, natural disasters, prevention, control, consequences.*

By the occurrence, magnitude and their consequences, most apocalyptic phenomena that were deeply marking human life and their activity at the time, were serious moments of concern and that is why people seek to prevent, and when not possible, to combat these sources of constant fear.

It is obvious that, if for the epidemics there could be done something to mitigate the catastrophic consequences of the result of such disasters, for those caused only naturally as flooding, earthquakes, etc., the people had very little influence.

Combating such natural disasters was a concern, both for ordinary people, but especially for the authorities of the time.

BDD-A20440 © 2010 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:26 UTC)

To eradicate plague, for example, the authorities used the empowerment of individuals to contribute to informing the population in this respect: "The leaders of the order. Fully empowered President of the ottomans to the High committee of infectious diseases control” (1).

Also in combating plague, there is a manifesto issued at Bucharest in 1817, when the ruler Ioan Gheorghe Caragea addressed a command to the messenger to announce the people: "That the ruler exonerates them, because of the infertility of the earth, giving the plague, from taxes, for some years, paying himself the damage to the treasury (2).

Exasperated by the large scale that the plague was taking in that period, the people used the advice of specialists. Here is how the doctor Stefan Piscupescu was helping the people of Bucharest, in his book *Means of protection from plague* "Life is always persecuting with death, as light with darkness:

The plague feeds faster and quicker than all other human diseases, it takes over villages and cities and lands full of people and it ruins and brings to extinction the breed raised and built many years ago, in a short time and leads it to forgotten centuries”. Further, the doctor teaches the people how to protect themselves and avoid the plague:" Lead contaminated things at the edge of the setting and set them on fire, quickly bury the dead from the plague and to protect themselves in other ways. To do not have contact with contaminated people, to quickly bury all the dead to not allow decomposition, etc ... " (3).

There are notes attesting that, those who do not followed the indications of the authorities, in these times of restrictions were punished: "By whom the news are spread, punitive actions against offenders, of the orders during the plague" (4).

Following the magnitude that these epidemics took, there were also medical instructions, as for example those they were issued at Chisinau, in Romanian as in Russian: "Short teaching on signs and plague disease, made up by higher command of the doctors of Basarabia, to not let this plague, which came upon Focsani (5).

BDD-A20440 © 2010 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:26 UTC)

Still in the measures that were taken by authorities to combat plague, joins the following bookmark on a leaflet issued at Chisinau, in 1800, in which it is set in particular, the measures of isolation. Galatii din Moldaviia near our border ..." (6) is declared contaminated.

Literally frightened of the epidemics of the time, but especially of the plague, the people of that time believed that some saints by their miraculous and divine power, could improve their life, such a saint, regarded as having miraculous powers in fighting the plague was Saint Haralambie, so, in a paper published in 1815 and called Chapel of Saint Haralambie , an engraving representing the holy Haralambie appears as well, stepping on the plague (7); by this, the engraver followed exactly the tradition of the Romanian people, according to which, Saint Haralambie protects them from plague.

There were, among the combat measures, especially from the plague, the so called *Prayers gatherings*, religious books or compositions, by which the people were reading, addressing themselves to divinity; and canon to the Holy Trinity. Mediators for everything, we will pray, and to the dangers of plaque. (8)

Due to the high rate of death, as a result from the plague, many people found refuge in other villages.8.

Since the summer of 1710, the plague reached Cluj, in June 20 persons were dead, and in August 82. (9)

The chronicler Radu Popescu attests that: "In this summer there was a great drought in the country and no bread was made, nothing actually, and many people died of starvation not only at the country side, but also in Bucharest, every morning people dead from starvation were found ". (10)

In the Romanian Country, because of hunger, human bodies "were dried" and in 1719 many people died, same thing happening in Szeklers. (11)

On the heavy status of the Moldavian peasants and remembers Ioan Neculce, who says: "After five months of reign, during Grigore the second Ghica,

BDD-A20440 © 2010 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:26 UTC)

the situation did not improve, because the country was pressed by great needs." (12)

The ruler Grigore the second Ghica, decided on October 12, 1735, to establish a hospital, for those who suffered from plaque. (13)

In 1747, in the church in Urziceni, people prayed for the cessation of this calamity, caused by locusts. (14)

And for the Romanian Country, the ruler Constantin Mavrocordat, commanded, as the people were scared, that people are to make services in churches and prayers to be raised to remove the calamity. (15)

However, the measures taken against the plague, have been applied, during epidemics, hardly and incomplete, proving for the rest of the country rather not efficient. When such an epidemic broke out in Ploiesti, in 1750, the established quarantine around town was not able to prevent the escape of some of the people of the settlement, and the "the thieves forgiven by the ruler and sent there for burial of the bodies, were made unseen and took the clothes and effects of the dead." (16)

This is how the situation of that time is related in Moldova: "Those left alive ran horrified to the Carpati, but there they found no salvation in which they had hope”. Dogs, many in Moldavian cities, walked the street, without masters, and because they had no food, they ate the bodies of the infected dead, as usually happens in times of calamities, they were buried carelessly on the surface or remain unburied. " (17)

Another document says: "The look was not that horrifying”...” Grave-diggers are taking the dead to the special cemetery outside the city, and the patients who they recognize they take to a near forest.

A preventive mean in which they trust, is the lighting of fire on the streets and in the yards, where piles of garbage, bones and other remains are cast, which, by burning slowly, produce a heavy smelling smoke. It fills the air day and night.

BDD-A20440 © 2010 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:26 UTC)

No one is taking care of the ill. ... There is no cure known to man against the plague, except for the Venetian teriac. The rich and had supplies of the Venetian teriac and they considered it a cure. (18)

Another document says: Those who had little power picked a few twigs and they make a fire" and when they died they were buried by grave-diggers, but this measurement was neglected and the bodies were eaten by dogs, beasts and worms..." (19).

There were punishments for those who did not treat the sick as they should. So: "If in any house where a doctor walked somehow someone was going to die, all the people in that house and the doctor were placed in a cart and taken to the field at a distance of an hour from the city and are forced to remain there for seven weeks." (20)

People feared and locusts. There were notes, that told how they saw their possible expulsion, as Demetrius Eustatievici wrote that: "In 1780, in July 13,... a lot of locusts came from the Romanian Country here…".... people went from Scheai, from the fortress, in the Old Brasov, to send the locusts away and seeing that they can't use anything to make them go away, as it was raining a lot, they commanded that all the houses collect two pots and stop them. And so they have gathered more than 3,000 tubs and still many remained. After that ... they went away". (21) Another note in 1780 said that: Many locusts came and people have boiled them as crawfish and gave them to the valley. (22) These were, generally, the measures of prevention and control of natural phenomena by the population. The strong desire of the people was to limit as much as possible the catastrophic consequences of these phenomena. It is obvious that they realized what stood in its power, as the phenomena of nature, floods, earthquakes, could not in any way be stopped, people only having the possibility of intervention, rather limited in case of epidemics, fire, of phenomena in which the human factor, could have a dominant role.

BDD-A20440 © 2010 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:26 UTC)

References

1. Old Romanian bibliography, volume III, no. 964, page 207.
2. Ibidem, no. 966, page 213.3.
3. Ibidem, no. 1214, page 442.
4. Ibidem, no. 1059, page 322.
5. Ibidem, no. 1415, page 668.
6. Ibidem, no. 1415, page 668.
7. B.R.V., volume IV, no. 882, page 300.
8. B.R.V., volume III, no. 1408, page 613.
9. Binder Paul, Epidemics of plaque in Transylvania in the eighteenth century (1709 --1795), in vol., „Medical retrospective”. Notes and documents studies ", Bucharest, 1985, p. 175-176.
10. Popescu, Radu. Histories of the Romanian Countries rulers (publishing house C.Grecescu), Bucharest, 1963, p.243.
11. P. Binder, op cit p. 179-182.
12. Cernovodeanu P., Binder P., Knights of Apocalypse, Publishing house Silex, Bucharest, 1993, p. l47.
13. Ibidem, p. 149.
14. Corfus, Ilie. Notes from the manuscripts and cult books regarding the Romanian orthodox church history, in “Romanian Orthodox church, no. XCIII, 1976, p. 329.
15. Pseudo-Enache Koganiceanu, Chronicle of Moldova (1733-1774), in "Moldavian Chronicles”, Bucharest, 1987, p.40.
16. Samarian, Pompei, “From the epidemiology of Romanian past. Plague. Bucharest, 1932, p. 88-90.
17. Bologa, V., Simplaceanu, A., Ghitian, T., “An important Russian document history for the plague in Iasi in 1770: Orreus G's work, in "Contributions to the

BDD-A20440 © 2010 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:26 UTC)

Study of Romanian-Russian medical connections, Bucharest, 1952, p. 37-38.
18. Ibidem, p. 38-43.
19. Ibidem, p. 45-46.
20. P. Cernovodeanu, *New army regarding the plaque calamity in Bucharest in 1792*, in "Materials of history and museography ", Bucharest, nr.II, 1965, p.205-208.
21. Armbruster, Adolf, Dacoromano-Saxons. Romanian chroniclers about Iasi. Romanians in the Szeklers chronicles, Bucuresti, 1980, p. 396.
22. P. Binder, P. Cernovodeanu, Op. cit. p. l66.

OKTOIH (1510), TARGOVISTE-OKTOIH (1494), CETINJE
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

BDD-A20440 © 2010 Valahia University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 08:46:26 UTC)