

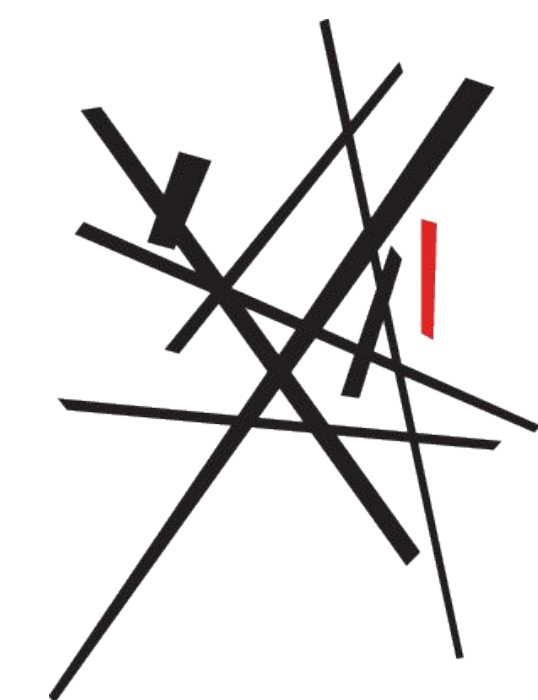


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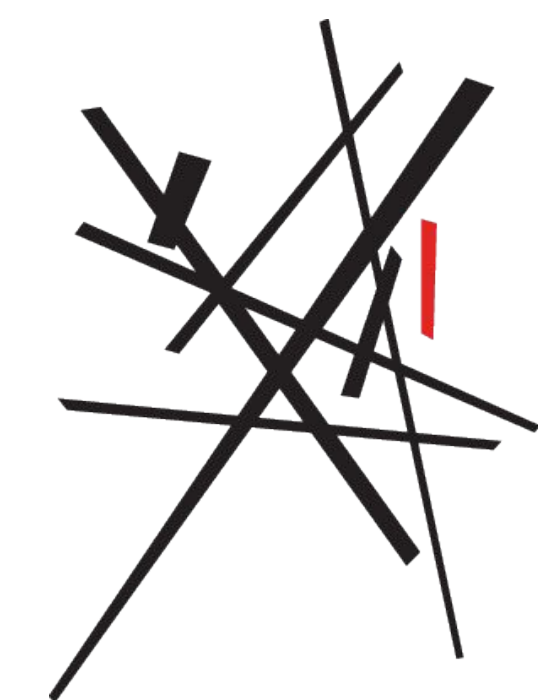
Life in the Ottoman Empire During WWI

FAMINE AND DISEASE



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Why did the Ottomans Fight in WWI?



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Watch: Why did the Ottoman Empire Join the Central Powers?

- Watch this video explaining why the Ottomans fought during WWI.
- As you watch, take notes on what you are learning from the video.
- When you are finished, discuss the reasons that prompted the Ottomans to join the war.

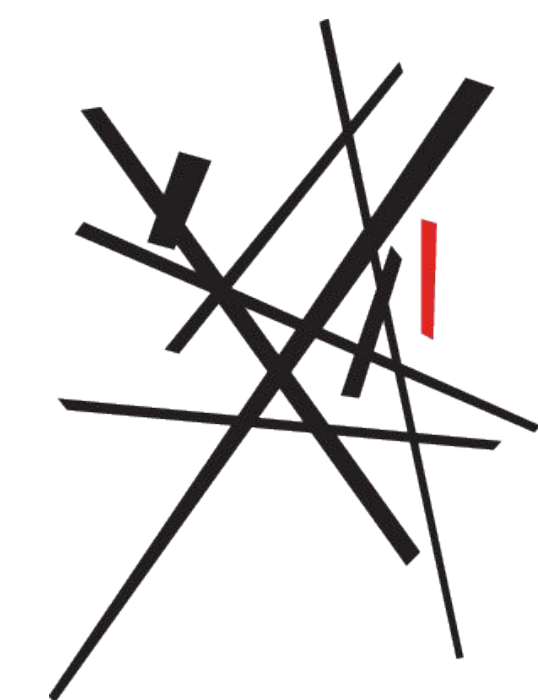


Video Credit: History Matters, Firstname Lastname, *Why did the Ottoman Empire Join the Central Powers?*, (2021; United Kingdom), YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84IYrMlxgDI>



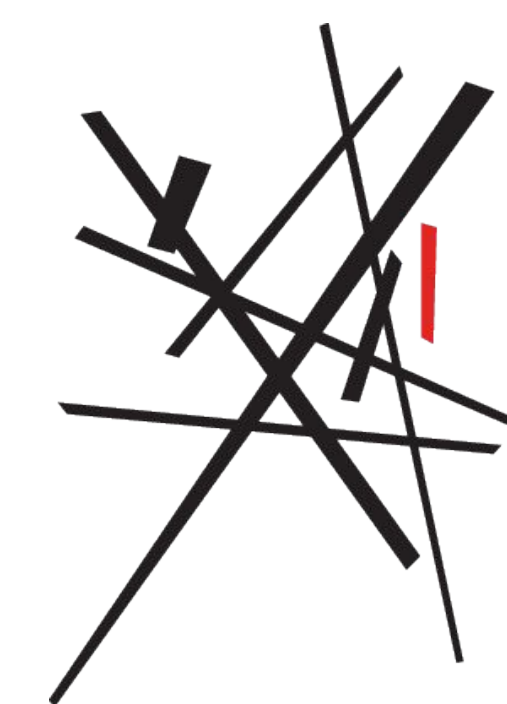
Let's discuss...

Why did the Ottoman Empire join WWI?



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Famine and Memory



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Watch: WWI The Famine of Mount Lebanon

- Watch the BBC Video “WWI: The Famine of Mount Lebanon”
- Please note that this video can be emotionally overwhelming. It’s ok if you need to step away and regroup your feelings.
- Be ready with questions.

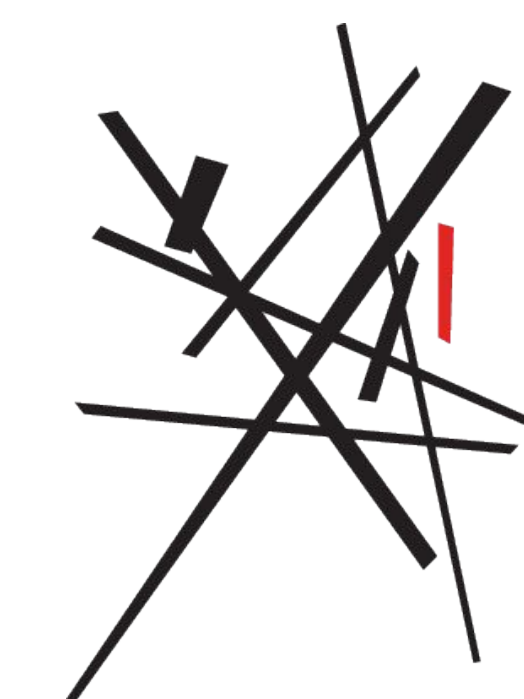


Video Credit: 'WWI: The Famine of Mount Lebanon,' BBC, Oct. 24 2014, video, 4:20, Source: 'WWI: The Famine of Mount Lebanon,' BBC, Oct. 24 2014, video, 4:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVbCFyWQjNg>.





Source: 'Six Unexpected WW1 Battlegrounds,' BBC. November 26, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30098000>



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About Lebanon

- During WW1, Lebanon, then Mount Lebanon, was part of the Ottoman Empire.
- Lebanon was one of the world's greatest silk exporters, mostly to Europe.
 - A lot of agricultural labor went into producing silk over other crops.
- When the Ottomans joined the War along the Central Powers, the French, who were fighting for the Allied Powers, blockaded the ports that allowed Lebanon to import most of its crops.
 - With their ports blockaded, the people of Lebanon lost their access to most of their food, leading to scarcity, which, eventually led to famine.
- In addition to the famine, a plague of locusts destroyed most extant crops, further diminishing food availability in the country.

Source: Graham Auman Pitts, Famine and the Making of Lebanon: Blockades, Food and Hunger in WW1. Lecture at the National World War 1 Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, MO, July 19, 2022.



Why did the French do this?

- By the time the War came around, Europe thought of the Ottoman Empire as the ‘Sickman of Europe’, a really problematic term that does not acknowledge how Western powers contributed to the tribulations of the Ottomans.
- Western European powers like England and France were expanding into overseas colonies, so the Allied Powers were interested in claiming pieces of the Ottoman Empire to then colonize.
- By blockading Lebanon, the French hoped that the Lebanese people would rebel against the Empire, which would not be able to help them because they were too busy fighting in WWI.
- The French would then ‘help’ the Lebanese gain their independence, but mostly because they were interested in the country’s resources.
- Lebanon did eventually become a French colony until 1943, when the country was able to gain its independence from the French.

Source: Antun Yamin, *Lubman fin al-Harb: Dhikra al-Hawadith wa-l-Mazalim fi Lubman fi al-Hard al-'Umumiyya, 1914-1918*, 2 vols. (Beirut: al-Matba'a al-Adabiyya, 1919), 1:4. Cited in al-Qattan, Najwa. 2014. "When Mothers Ate Their Children: Wartime Memory and the Language of Food in Syria and Lebanon." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (4): 719–36.
<https://discovery-ebSCO-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/linkprocessor/plink?id=395f5df0-8055-3baf-a65e-8283ef179905>.



Did the Empire try to help?

- During this time, the Ottoman Empire used *all* available resources for the War.
- People's homes, animals, tools, among other things, were **requisitioned**.
 - The government was taking these items away from the people and giving it to the soldiers, even though they knew they were not prepared to win this war.
- The Ottomans did try to send some resources to Lebanon, but:
 - They didn't have enough. They were fighting a losing war.
 - The Ottomans did not control how the food they delivered was distributed.
 - Affluent people living in Lebanon took over distribution, charging excessive prices that most people could not afford.
- The influx of refugees to other parts of the empire meant that there were at least one more million people to feed.
- The war meant that a lot of men were fighting and were unable to harvest crops.
- Less labor available to produce food.

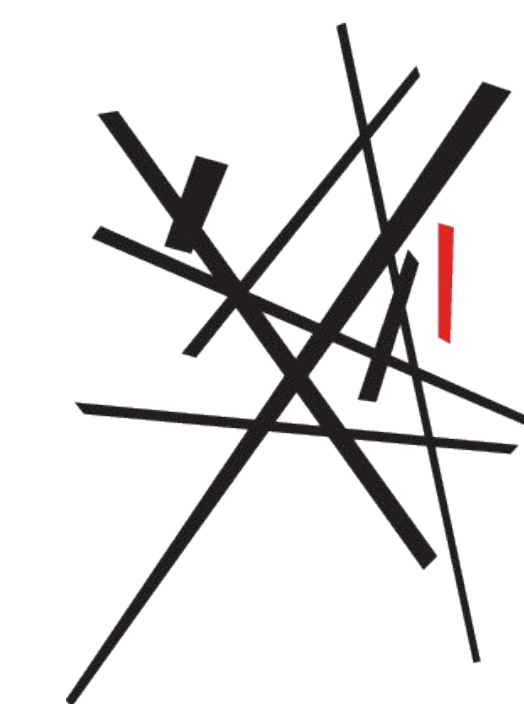
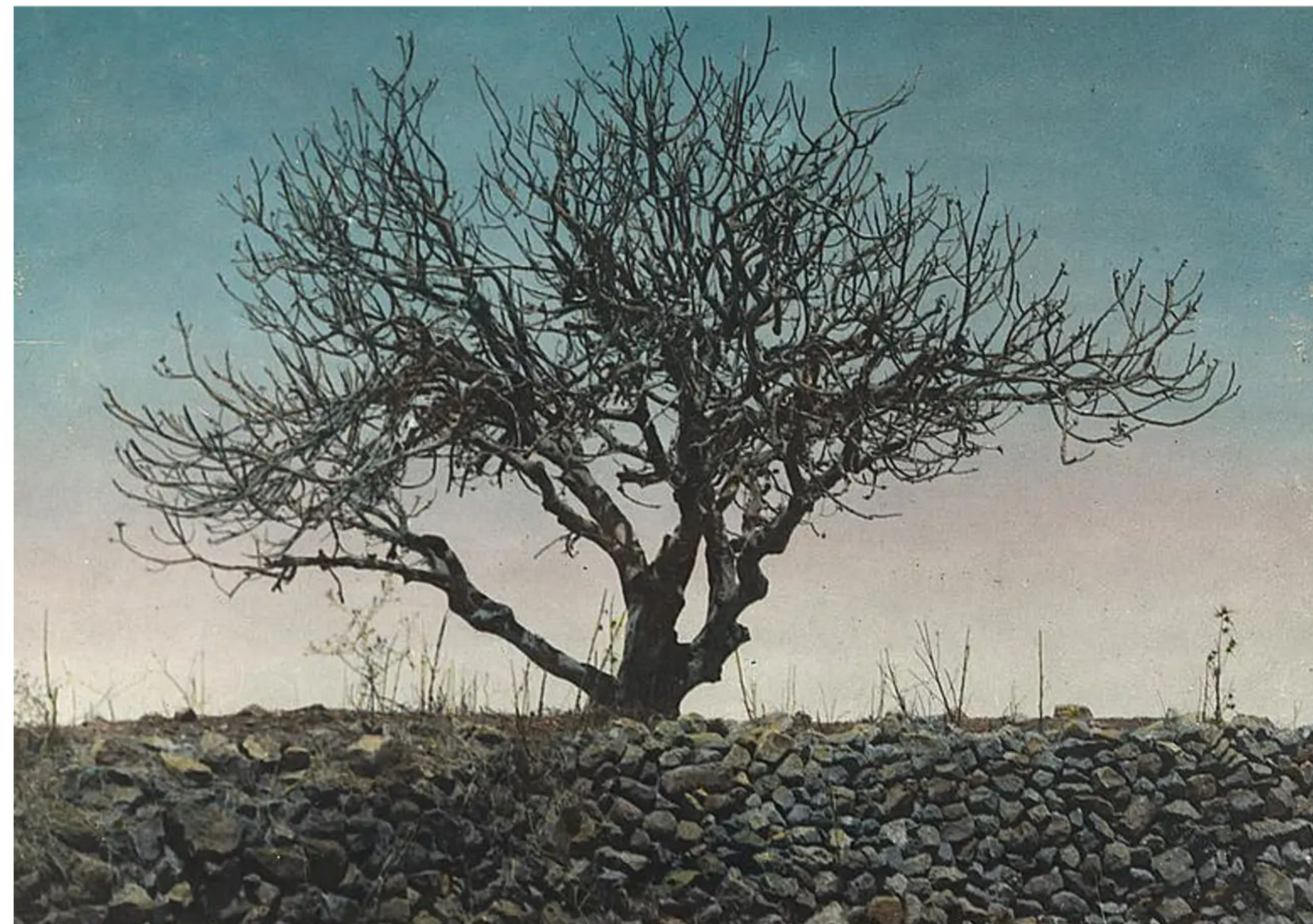
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The Locusts

The locust plague contributed to the abject misery that the Lebanese experienced as the insects latched onto crops and ate everything.



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Documents: The Famine of Mount Lebanon

- In your handout, you will find two poems and a first-person account of the famine.
- Read the sources and answer the questions that follow.



Why haven't we heard about this before?

- There aren't many testimonials discussing the famine because those who were suffering would not necessarily be focused on writing anything down.
- The testimonies available discuss harrowing experiences of women selling their bodies for food and women eating their children.
- It's hard to say who died of hunger versus who died of the many diseases triggered by the famine.
- A theory is that, for the collective Lebanese memory, this is a humiliating episode where the country couldn't feed its own people and the rich tried to take advantage of a terrible situation. Thus, it is seldom discussed.

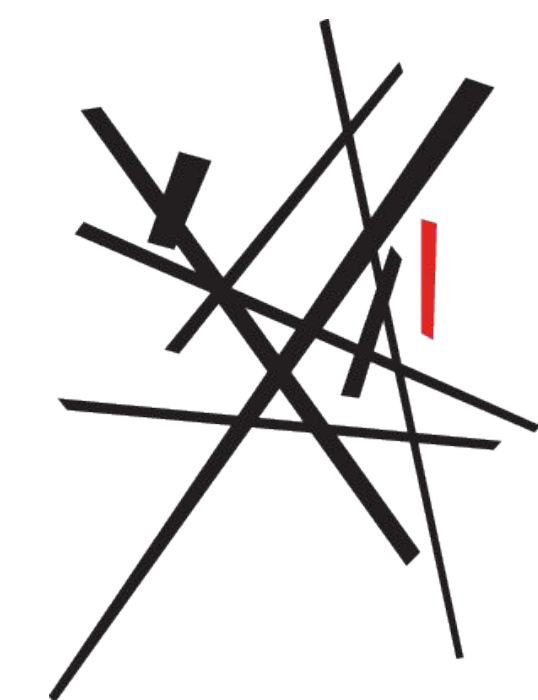
Source: Graham Auman Pitts, *Famine and the Making of Lebanon: Blockades, Food and Hunger in WW1*. Lecture at the National World War 1 Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, MO, July 19, 2022.

Source: Antun Yamin, *Lubman fin al-Harb: Dhikra al-Hawadith wa-l-Mazalim fi Lubman fi al-Hard al-'Umumiyya, 1914-1918*, 2 vols. (Beirut: al-Matba'a al-Adabiyya, 1919), 1:4. Cited in al-Qattan, Najwa. 2014. "When Mothers Ate Their Children: Wartime Memory and the Language of Food in Syria and Lebanon." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (4): 719–36.

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Public Health and Disease



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How did disease affect civilians?

- A famine is a public health crisis: a population that is not nourishing itself is vulnerable to all sorts of infectious diseases.
- In addition, the Empire did not have enough resources to help an ailing population.
- The Ottomans knew that their public health infrastructure was frail, but were unable to make much of a positive impact on it prior to the War.
- There were limited medical services, and what was available went to troops rather than civilians.
- Crowded spaces, influx of refugees throughout the empire, and general lack of hygiene made it impossible to contain infectious diseases.
- In addition, a lack of access to water and contact with flies and other organisms that transmitted bacteria further assailed the Ottoman population.
- Shortages of medicine, including quinine for malaria, furthered hindered any effort to curb the spread of disease.

Source: Melanie Schulze-Tanielian, *Disease and Public Health (Ottoman Empire/Middle East)*. (1914-1918 Online, 2014).
https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/disease_and_public_health_ottoman_empiremiddle_east

Source: Yucel Tanikdak, *Contagion and Chaos: Disease, Suffering and Death in the Ottoman Empire during WW1*. Lecture at the National World War 1 Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, MO, July 19, 2022.



Underdeveloped Empire

- The Ottoman Empire was not nearly as industrialized as the rest of Europe.
- Many European countries helped the Empire industrialize (at an extremely high cost), but this was problematic because:
 - Different countries building different parts of railroad tracks meant that these were different, so it was difficult to transport things.
 - The railroad did not pass through most parts of Anatolia, so there was a great shortage of food in parts of the empire.
- By the time the war started, a lot of people had already died from typhus and other diseases, so men who would normally not be part of the army were drafted to fight.
- Since men that don't usually fight were gone, there were less people available to help harvest crops.
- Additionally, since the army requisitioned everything, there were not enough animals to be used in fields or to be eaten.

Source: Melanie Schulze-Tanielian, *Disease and Public Health (Ottoman Empire/Middle East)*. (1914-1918 Online, 2014).
https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/disease_and_public_health_ottoman_empiremiddle_east

Source: Yucel Tanikdak, *Contagion and Chaos: Disease, Suffering and Death in the Ottoman Empire during WW1*. Lecture at the National World War 1 Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, MO, July 19, 2022.



What diseases affected the empire?

- Diseases like typhus, malaria, dysentery and typhoid were rampant during World War I.
 - Typhus was so common among Ottoman soldiers that it was referred to as ‘military fever.’
- Venereal diseases, mainly syphilis, also were common.
 - Desperate women turned to prostitution and got syphilis from Ottoman soldiers.
- We don't have an exact number of how many people died from diseases because most records of this information were reserved for the military.
- Lethargic encephalitis: While this didn't always kill people, it left them catatonic for life as it attacks the brain and leaves its victims in a statue-like condition.
- While there is very little information on how the Spanish flu affected the Ottoman Empire, it is known that at least one percent of the people of Egypt died, but this number is likely much higher.

Source: Melanie Schulze-Tanielian, *Disease and Public Health (Ottoman Empire/Middle East)*. (1914-1918 Online, 2014).

https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/disease_and_public_health_ottoman_empiremiddle_east

Source: Yucel Tanikdak, *Contagion and Chaos: Disease, Suffering and Death in the Ottoman Empire during WW1*. Lecture at the National World War 1 Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, MO, July 19, 2022.



Long Term Impact of Disease

- While it is possible to overcome some diseases, **trachoma**, which makes a person go blind if not treated early, was rampant in the Empire.
- The constant influx of refugees helped spread the disease.
- Once a person loses their vision because of trachoma, they cannot get it back.

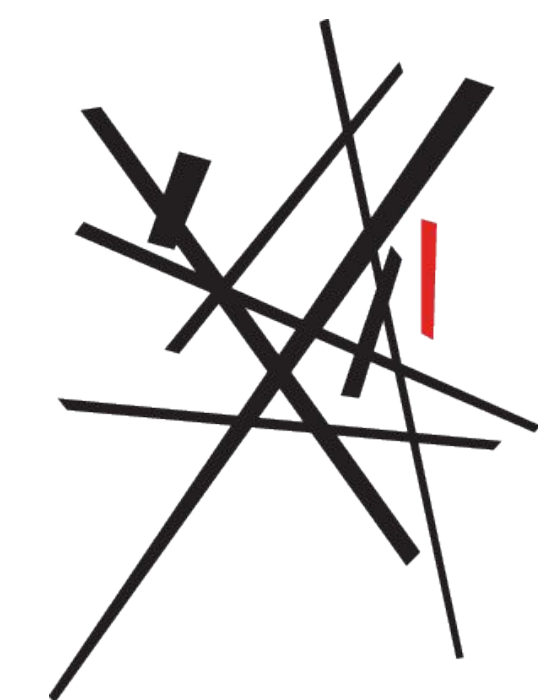
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Source: Yucel Tanikdak, *Contagion and Chaos: Disease, Suffering and Death in the Ottoman Empire during WW1*. Lecture at the National World War 1 Museum and Memorial, Kansas City, MO, July 19, 2022.



Think about it...

What can we learn from Lebanon about the cost of World War I for *civilians who did not fight in it?*



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