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Is the plague the will of God? Should one accept the plague as God's will or be allowed to leave a location that is infected and go to a place that is not? These questions faced the Ottoman government since, after all, the sultan claimed the title of "caliph," leader of Sunni Muslims. Also, the issue had practical implications: How can the government keep order – and collect taxes – when large groups of people are moving from one place to another?

Osman (18th century) describing an area struck by plague:

Some look outside and inadvertently imagine that this terrible disease spreads. If someone in the household is struck by the plague (taun), they decide to flee due to the fear of contagion and they go to another location. Sometimes those who remain are firm, and do proper supplication to God and do not change their location. Consequently three to four die in their household. People are perplexed as a result of these deaths, and change their location in order to expel the terror. The majority of the population surmises [that the disease] is contagious.... They prefer changing location and have come to support fleeing out of fear.

As quoted in Bulmus, Birsan. *The Plague in the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1838*.

And a quote from the law code of Suleiman the Magnificent (mid-16th century) about responding to the plague (taun):

What is taun? Is it reoccurring? Is it legal to flee and how should those who have fled be judged? According to the sayings of the Prophet and the Muslim community, plague [taun] is *jinn* which has afflicted the Muslim community with God Almighty's permission. A prior case judged that fleeing is not prohibited. However, it is also right for one to pray for God's mercy.

From the law code of Suleiman the Magnificent, as quoted in Bulmus, Birsan. *The Plague in the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1838*.