

#4

In 1838, the Ottoman Empire followed the lead of European countries in introducing quarantines to limit the spread of disease occurring because of trade, pilgrimage, tourism, and military troop movements. In the 1830s, Hamadan, an Ottoman official wrote an explanation of what European quarantines were:

“Kings have their officials (balyos) all along the coast. They register every ship. Passengers have to provide sealed official papers indicating who they were, where they came from and certifying that there was no plague in their country. The officer is also in charge of describing where plague is.”

He then describes how sick passengers or passengers on ships that might (but are not proven to) carry the plague should be held in lazarettos.

“Quarantine areas will be guarded on all sides; food will be provided for those who are under quarantine; private bathrooms will be provided . . . People under quarantine will have rooms. Additional space will be provided if requested. People under quarantine can interact with each other irrespective of the time they spent under quarantine. If people become sick, their time under quarantine will increase.”

Archival documents quoted in: Bulmus, Birsen. *Plague, Quarantines and Geopolitics in the Ottoman Empire*. Edinburgh University Press, 2012. *ProQuest Ebook Central*. 103-104.

However, European countries and the Ottoman Empire continued to argue over the issue. The Ottomans complained about the expense of the procedure, and a conference of the International Sanitary Commission granted them the right to raise their charges for ships traveling through Ottoman waters. Europeans complained that the Ottomans were too lenient in enforcing quarantines or, conversely, that they were too strict and that their enforcement slowed down trade and troop movements through the Turkish Straits. Then, European powers, possibly to further their control of Egypt and other Mediterranean territories, claimed that contagious diseases were not the real problem; rather, Ottoman lack of hygiene (polluted water, overcrowded conditions) caused infections. The issues were twofold: (a) how to balance free movement of goods and people with a need to protect public health and (b) the issue of which countries would control key trade zones in the Middle East. (Note: The first border checkpoints were to control disease, not to keep people in or out.)