



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Writing Prompt and Discussion Questions

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Ideally, students should respond to both writing prompts. Then, a class discussion should allow students to share their ideas (especially as there are 2 different possibilities – and sets of documents – for writing prompt #2). This time would also allow the class to reflect on big issues in public health, past and present.

Writing Prompt #1: Using the “hospitals and treatments” resources (H&T documents 1-6), answer the following question: What were some of the advances (positive aspects) in the treatment of disease in the Ottoman Empire?

Writing Prompt #2. Answer ONE of the following questions, using either the resources under “infectious diseases and official responses” (D&R documents 1-7) or those under “war equals disease” (War documents 1-6).

a. What were some of the health threats from infectious diseases facing the Ottoman Empire, and why was it difficult for the Ottoman leadership to meet these challenges?

b. What health challenges did the Balkan Wars and World War I create for the Ottoman Empire? What is the relationship between war and the spread of disease?

Discussion after writing the essays:

- Which issues of hospital care – and health care in general – were debated in medieval times that are still debated today?

(Students may raise issues such as free/government-funded health care, non-medicinal factors in the treatment of disease – use of music as a relaxation technique, the relationship of religious beliefs and medical treatment, and the incorporation of traditional treatments within a modern medical system.)

- What factors lead to the spread of disease across large areas?

(Be sure the students consider issues like international trade, travel – for pleasure or pilgrimage, and troop or population movements during wartime.)

- Why does the spread of disease become a public health issue affecting the government and society as a whole rather than a purely personal issue affecting individuals and their families?

(Be sure the students consider issues of maintaining public order, economic productivity, border security – with people entering the empire, and military preparedness.)

- By the late 19th century, public health was recognized to be an *international* issue.

(a) Why? Why at this point in time?

(b) By this time, powerful European countries were accusing the Ottoman Empire of not doing enough to prevent the spread of epidemic diseases and their transmission across borders. Do you consider this to be fair? Why or why not?

(Be sure that students recognize that preventing epidemics and controlling the spread of disease cannot be accomplished on a state-by-state basis but requires international cooperation. Also, be sure they consider why some diseases spread from Asia to Europe through the Ottoman Empire – for example cholera outbreaks brought by Muslim pilgrims traveling from India to the Islamic holy places in Arabia – and why the Ottoman leaders had to balance the health threat with allowing free travel through their territory.)

- What are some public health challenges today? In what ways are international attempts to handle them similar to and different from efforts in Ottoman times?

(Our greater technology means that we can cure some illnesses – for example, antibiotics can treat bacterial infections like the plague. However, modern transportation also means that diseases for which there are no cures – viruses or mosquito-borne illnesses – can spread very rapidly. For example, ebola outbreaks now spread throughout – and even outside of – West and Central Africa; the Zika virus has spread throughout many countries. It is still challenging for countries to work together to solve problems caused the spread of disease – and countries still have to balance the need for trade, travel, and warfare with the risk of transmitting illnesses in the course of those endeavors.)