

JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY HISTORY OF IDEAS



2020

Volume 9 Issue 18
Item 1

– Section 1: Editorials –

Introduction: Pandemics, Regulations, and
History

by
Manuela Albertone, Enrico Pasini



JIHI 2020

Volume 9 Issue 18

Section 1: Editorials

1. *Introduction: Pandemics, Regulations, and History* (JIHI)

Section 2: Articles

2. *Epidémies et société. Le Sénégal à l'épreuve de la fièvre jaune, 1750 à 1960* (A. A. Pam)
3. *Discrimination, Othering, and the Political Instrumentalizing of Pandemic Disease: Two Case Studies* (M. Baradel, E. Costa)
4. *Epidemics, Regulations, and Aristotle's Physics of Motion: A Ballistic Perspective on a Current Debate* (A. Pannese)
5. *Pathologizing Poverty: The Metaphor of Contagion from the New Poor Law to Public Health* (D. Dey)
6. *Pauline de Noirfontaine's Un regard écrit: Algérie: Unveiling Human Nature in Times of Crises* (A. Larbi Yourcef)

Section 3: Notes

7. *N'est-il d'histoire que d'historiens ? Pratiques et institutionnalisations de la recherche sur le passé menée par des non-historiens* (V. Barrusse, M. Bessone, P. Bonin, P. Brunet, L. Cadiet, P. Comte, D. Couzinet, S. Débarre, A. Duploux, A. Mardirossian, J. Morsel, N. Sigot, G. Simiand, M. Tsikounas et J.-Ph. Garric)

Section 4: Reviews

8. *Book Reviews* (F. Ammannati, L. Coccoli, S. Sermini)
-

Introduction: Pandemics, Regulations, and History

Manuela Albertone, Enrico Pasini



THIS issue is the product of a common effort to give a timely contribution, coming from the fields of the history of ideas and intellectual history, to the current debates on the exceptional situation the world is living in. It is uncommon that a historical journal decides to tackle matters of the present time; yet in Spring 2020 the JIHI launched a Call for papers on *Epidemics and Regulations in the History of Ideas and Intellectual History*. The Call had a quite short deadline (it was presented as an ‘instant CFP’), and represented a challenge to both sides of the collaboration: the JIHI editorial staff and the authors.

Some aspects of the present situation have indeed well-known precedents. The widespread intellectual efforts directed in times of plague to the analyses of causes, identification of prognostic signs, and devising means of prevision and prevention, have been studied at length—often with a focus on “recreational and hygienic arguments” (Olson 1986, 164)—and are at present again the object of historiographic interest, in what is conceivably perceived as a response to an urgent necessity. Such efforts often originate from different disciplinary fields in close interaction, and in many cases from individual scholars with a cross-disciplinary profile.

The feature that we wanted to specifically address was also not entirely new: in different strands of research, the issue of how in times of plague authorities—both political and medical—tended to formulate and enforce regulations among widespread frenzied responses has also been scrutinized. We know that, in order to check the pestilence, nations, small states, and cities would often resort to “elaborate police regulations” (Thorndike 1927, 465). Such responses on the

part of authorities mainly insisted on regulation and surveillance: on ‘rigorous policing’ concerning movement and isolation, and on ‘interventionist policies’ and ‘drastic actions’ that at times were also related to the enforcing, or the insufficiency, of ‘centralization’.¹ These aspects resonate strongly—as it is evident—with current public debates and practical discussions.



Such phenomena characterized in particular the Early Modern and Modern age. New priorities for individuals, social groups, intellectuals and intellectual networks, institutions and political powers—as well as the recommendation or instauration of new regimes—were reflected in the intellectual production and in the public sphere, but also in the elaboration of ‘official’ communication, which in many instances involved “inconsistency between official and unofficial perspectives” (Newman 2012, 810); more or less delusional constructs and hidden meanings; “double standards” and the rhetorics of “hard choices” (Slack 1988, 451). Just like today, on the one hand the outbreaks of often unpredictable epidemics brought about sudden shifts in social, legal, and medical regulations. On the other hand, epidemics were practically and metaphorically mobilized to push various social, political, and cultural agendas in favor or against individuals, parties, groups.

Thus, the governance of epidemics, as well as the related debates and narratives, entailed relevant sets of ideas and important intellectual dynamics, that mostly broke through disciplinary borders. The Call mainly referred to the intersection of political, legal, and social history and the history of medicine, but the theme had strong connections also to the history of moral thought, as well as to the history of political thought and institutions.

Along these multifaceted lines, our call for papers intended to address such aspects from the simultaneous points of view of the history of ideas and of the intersection of disciplines. The selected contributions—that come from authors

¹See Watts 1997; see also Porter 1993, Hays 2009, Snowden 2020.

in different continents, writing about the history of different continents—offer different approaches and interpretations, which pay attention to epidemics from the political, legal, philosophical, sanitary, and literary perspectives. The global and interdisciplinary dimensions characterize the present issue more than ever in the history of this journal—a result that makes us proud.

The relationship between epidemics and State policies mark two articles. *Discrimination, Othering, and the Political Instrumentalizing of Pandemic Disease* by Martina Baradel and Emanuele Costa makes use of so-called Italian Thought's conceptual armoury to historically pinpoint a common ground of discrimination and exercise of power over the private sphere in the European discourse of 'public health' and the treatment of the *burakumin* minority in Japan, highlighting the 'opportunistic' reasons of securitization through a comparative analysis ranging 'from Europe to Asia, from the 11th to the 18th century'.

Proceeding from a similar focus on the political implications of the health policies, Debolina Dey's *Pathologizing Poverty* looks at Great Britain in the context of the New Poor Law (1834) and its aftermath. The article examines how the Poor Law Commissioners' Report in 1834 and Edwin Chadwick's *Sanitary Report* in 1842, that led to the establishment of the Public Health Act in 1848, reformulated the traditional relationship of health and poverty. In Dey's analysis, this reformulation—contrasted with the similar treatment in Defoe's *Journal of the Plague*—makes 'disease' a rhetorical trope, and 'contagion' a metaphor of social danger coming from the more destitute 'population' that the new 'public health' intends to regiment.

Two other articles pay attention to different epidemic settings in the frame of African colonial states and European domination. A neglected literary episode is at the heart of Abdeldjalil Larbi Yourcef's article on Pauline de Noirfontaine's *Un regard écrit: Algérie*, that he sees as an original reflection on the nature of crisis—at the same time of French colonialism and of the sanitary management of the cholera epidemic of 1840 in Oran. De Noirfontaine's letters from Algeria become 'a golden opportunity for a look in the mirror of a colonial society', and in the way its segments reacted to the disease.

West Africa and the transformation of colonial society is investigated through the sequence of yellow fever epidemic in Senegal, with a quasi *longue durée* methodology, in Adama Aly's *Épidémies et société*. Focusing particularly on transformations induced in social groups and geographical space by the epi-

demics, this article follows attentively the evolution of ideas about disease, but also the ruptures in scientific views and health policies in the colonies.

Alessia Pannese's *Epidemics, Regulations, and Aristotle's Physics of Motion* offers an unusual, both historical and theoretic approach to the present conflicts between individual freedom and state control in relation to the epidemic emergency. Elements of the Aristotelian physics of natural motion, that the author finds still active in Hobbes's mechanistic physics and physiology of human cognition and emotions, provide a frame of reference for a goal-oriented, physically recasted intellectual outlook from which 'the current debate on restrictions enforced through governmental regulations in response to the Covid-19 pandemic acquires historical depth and moral urgency'.

Consistently with the monographic character of this issue, also the Book Reviews section is devoted to three works on the cultural history of epidemics.

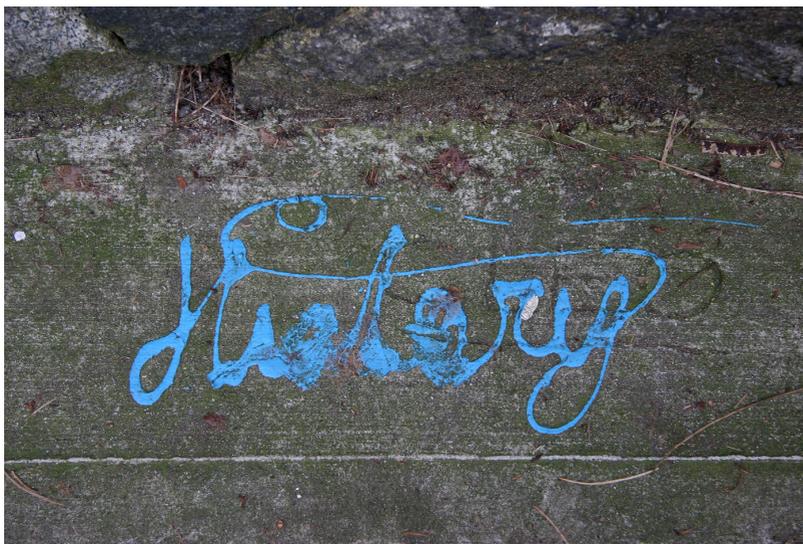


Finally, and on a different note, we are exceedingly happy to host, in the "Notes" section, the faithful transcription of a round table on the research on the past done by non-historians (*N'est-il d'histoire que d'historiens?*), organized by Pierre Bonin at the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne in 2018. Questioning the meaning of 'doing history', a historian and fourteen scholars-non-historians—legal theorists, philosophers, archeologists, geographers, economists, historians of arts, literature, and law—discuss together the place of history and of the relationship with the past in their fields. The frankness, boldness, and richness of their conversation represents at best the spirit of our journal and the kind of methodological debates we have been fostering.

Reference List

Hays, J.N. *The Burdens of Disease: Epidemics and Human Response in Western History*, rev. ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP.

- Newman, Kira L.S. 2012. "Shutt up: Bubonic Plague and Quarantine in Early Modern England". *Journal of Social History* 45(3): 809-34.
- Olson, Glending. 1986. "From Plague to Pleasure". Chap. 5 in *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages, 164-204*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.
- Porter, Roy. 1993. *Disease, medicine and society in England, 1550-1860*, 2nd ed. London: Macmillan [repr. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 1995].
- Slack, Paul. 1988. "Responses to Plague in Early Modern Europe: The Implications of Public Health", *Social Research* 55(3): 433-53.
- Snowden, Frank M. 2020. *Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP.
- Thorndike, Lynn. 1927. "The Blight of Pestilence on Early Modern Civilization". *The American Historical Review* 32(3): 455-74.
- Watts, Sheldon. 1997. *Epidemics and History*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP.



Bill Stilwell, "History" (Vancouver 2006) (<https://flic.kr/p/a1t3a>).