

# EPIDEMICS IN THE VILAYET OF KOSOVO (1877–1912)

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**Abstract:** With the increase in activities and interaction between societies, the rate of spread of epidemics has also increased. Given that the physical structure and location of the Vilayet of Kosovo during the Ottoman period was in the middle of the Balkan Peninsula, connecting the land routes with the Central Europe, it had become a destination where epidemics spread easily. The main purpose of this paper is to analyse and evaluate epidemiological diseases in the Vilayet of Kosovo such as cholera, smallpox, dysentery, rubella. The main objective of this work is to cover the years 1877–1912. This paper, which deals with the epidemic in the Vilayet of Kosovo, investigates the historical background of the conduct of the central and local authorities as far as health policies and public health were concerned in the face of deadly infectious diseases. At this point, administrative and sanitary measures taken by the relevant institutions in the Vilayet of Kosovo had been identified, such as the employment of health personnel, the distribution of vaccines, border blockage, the restriction of the movement of people and putting them in quarantine. In addition, attention has been paid to the assessment and analysis of health services and hospital infrastructure in the

Vilayet of Kosovo. This study, which contributes to the knowledge of the history of epidemiology and public health in the Vilayet of Kosovo, is mainly supported by documents from the Ottoman Archives of the Presidency in Istanbul. In addition, studies, theses and research papers on epidemiology and public health in the Ottoman Empire were used.

**Keywords:** Vilayet of Kosovo, epidemics, health services, health management, hospitals

## Introduction

The years 1877–1912 constitute the most important period of economic-social, cultural, ethno-cultural and political development of the population of this area (the Vilayet of Kosovo) from the time of its inclusion in the Ottoman Empire until its separation from the Ottoman rule. During this period, the Vilayet of Kosovo saw development of capitalistic commercial-monetary relations, which brought to the surface a bourgeois stratum of Albanian citizenry, and at the same time raised Albanian national consciousness, which culminated with the Albanian League of Prizren in 1878. During this period, a small stratum of intelligentsia educated in foreign schools also appeared, which then began to raise the issue of recognising the Albanian nation and the Albanian language. (Rrahimi 1969: 3, 191) For the first time the name of the Vilayet of Kosovo is mentioned in the Ottoman State Yearbook, in the year 1295 Hijri, i.e. 1878 according to the Gregorian calendar. (Salname-i Devlet-i Aliye-i Osmaniye 1878: 334) While the first Yearbook of the Vilayet of Kosovo dates to 1296 Hijri, i.e. 1879 according to the Gregorian calendar. (Kosova Vilayeti Salnamesi, 1879) There are many interpretations of the founding of the Vilayet of Kosovo. Shemseddin Sami has mentioned the name of the Vilayet of Kosovo in the minutes of the Assembly of 1877. (Sami 1896: 3748) The researcher Skender Rizaj also agrees with the same date marking the establishment of the Vilayet of Kosovo, while emphasising that the first centre of the Vilayet of Kosovo was Sofia. (Rizaj 1970: 666) The researcher Shukri Rrahimi points out that the Vilayet of Kosovo was founded in 1868 with Prizren as its centre. (Rrahimi 1969: 12), while according to the Turkish Encyclopaedia the Vilayet of Kosovo was founded in 1877. (Kosova Vilayeti 1975: 245) Since most researchers share the same consensus as to the year of establishment of the Vilayet of Kosovo, we are determined to start our study from 1877, when indeed the Vilayet of Kosovo was founded within

the Ottoman Empire, with our study ending in 1912, when the period of the Ottoman rule over these territories ends. During the 1877–1912 period, the administrative structure of the Vilayet of Kosovo underwent major changes. In 1878, the Vilayet of Kosovo consisted of the following sanjaks: the Sanjaks of Prishtina, Prizren, Skopje, Novi Pazar, Nis, Sehir Koy and Dibra. (Salname-i Devlet-i Aliye-i Osmaniye 1878: 336–339) In 1912, when the period of our study ends, the Vilayet of Kosovo consisted of the following sanjaks: the Sanjaks of Skopje, Prishtina, Senica, Peja, Taslica and Prizren. (Salname-i Devlet-i Aliye-i Osmaniye 1912: 742–756) According to the Yearbook of the Vilayet of Kosovo, in 1879 the Vilayet of Kosovo had a population of 960,156. Of these, 500,787 were Albanian, 145,786 were Serbian, 180,505 were Bulgarian and Macedonian, 43,156 were Turkish, 71,030 were Bosnian, 1,116 were Jewish, 17,776 were Roma. (Kosova Vilayeti Salnamesi 1879: 121–123) In 1893, the Vilayet of Kosovo had a population of 847,419. (Kosova Vilayet Salnamesi 1893: 220–223) In 1906–1907, the Vilayet of Kosovo had a population of 671,653, of which 423,393 were men, and 248,260 were women. (Karpal 2017: 179) Some of the most important events at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that had an impact on the political, social and economic life of the Vilayet of Kosovo are the Treaty of San Stefano<sup>1</sup>, the Congress of Berlin<sup>2</sup>, the Albanian League of Prizren<sup>3</sup> and the London Conference of Ambassadors.<sup>4</sup>

Until now, scholars from south-eastern Europe have focused their research on the study of political, diplomatic and economic history, as opposed to the history of science and medicine, which has remained an unexplored field. This paper is the first step in the study and analysis of a segment of the history of medicine in the Vilayet of Kosovo in the scientific field. The researchers of this region consider such topics to be peripheral and not of interest for research and study, rather, they focus on dealing with topics of a political nature, as a result of great divergences and the historical memory accompanied by continuous conflicts and wars that had occurred by the end of the last century. Nationalism has had an immense effect on the way history has been written and interpreted by historians in the Balkan, often in a non-objective manner. In the Balkans, nationalism has promoted the ideology of national identities, thus guiding researchers to focus on topics of a national character, including wars, uprisings, assemblies, etc. Nationalist feeling has influenced historians in the interpretation of historical events, adapting them to national narratives and often the daily policies of their government institutions. As a result, national-

ism has used history for political purposes, while nationalist politicians and leaders have used historical narratives to justify their political actions. This is also proven by the recent wars in the Balkans. Consequently, the documents dealing with the history of medicine in this nationalist-political constellation went unnoticed or were even overlooked by researchers.

If we take Kosovo as a specific example, the lack of funds for research is a challenge faced by researchers in our country. Thus, as a result of limited projects and scarce funds, such topics have not received proper attention. In addition, the lack of archival documents is another important factor in not studying the history of science and medicine in south-east Europe, and Kosovo in particular. The archives of Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia don't contain documents that deal with events of such historical character. Thus, this constitutes a great challenge for scientists, historians and researchers who are interested in studying a particular period, or specific topics like ours. For the purposes of dealing with this topic, we have focused on the Ottoman Archive of the Presidency in Istanbul, which is a rich treasure of information about the Ottoman period and the Albanians, and in particular about aspects of the research into medical history in Kosovo during this period. The Ottoman Archive serves as a fundamental resource for researchers investigating, analysing and assessing historical and cultural matters pertaining to the Ottoman period. Ottoman documents are a trustworthy source that connect historians, scholars and readers with the past and the present. All the documents we have analysed and evaluated in this paper are written in the Turkish-Ottoman language, which was the official and administrative language of the Ottoman Empire, a combination of today's Turkish, Arabic and Persian languages. Due to the complexity of the Ottoman language and its special alphabet which contains Arabic letters, translation, interpretation, study and research are among the serious challenges faced by those who know this language. Since these Turkish-Ottoman language speakers were and are few in our area, the study of topics such as 'epidemics in the Vilayet of Kosovo' has been difficult to accomplish. We came to the idea for such a topic after we found by chance documents from the Ottoman Archive. Upon conducting a meticulous evaluation and thorough investigation of these documents, which constituted a whole on its own, we realised that the data discovered provide valuable insights into health practices, infectious disease management, and the health care system of the Vilayet of Kosovo during the Ottoman period. We assessed that the study of epidemics in Vilayet of Kosovo

during the Ottoman era is extremely important in terms of public health, the effect of epidemiology on history, the prevention of diseases and research on the effects of disease.

This paper is of value to both public health researchers and those analysing health care performance and health policy. The study of epidemics in the Vilayet of Kosovo shall serve as a reflection of significant historical events, thus helping us to evaluate the influence of epidemiology on other historical events. If our study reveals successful disease prevention practices, this information can be applied practically in the field of public health. Furthermore, when evaluating the recent protocols and practices put in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, it could potentially serve as a benchmark for comparison. The study of this topic assists us in comprehending the changes in lifestyle and social practice that have influenced the development of epidemics. Epidemics have deeply affected the Vilayet of Kosovo, with substantial consequences on both the people and the economy. Consequently, the study of these effects within Kosovo contributes to understanding the social and economic changes of that era. Our research provides a new perspective, a fresh viewpoint and valuable insights into the history and culture of this period, potentially yielding important implications for both public health and historical research.

## **A brief history of how health services were organised in the Vilayet of Kosovo**

Health services during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Vilayet of Kosovo were limited and poor compared to modern standards. Starting with the small number of hospitals, which meant limited health care with unadvanced medical techniques and a small number of doctors. According to the first statistics of the Ottoman Empire, in 1897, there were two hospitals in total in the Vilayet of Kosovo. (Güran 1997: 52) The cities where these two hospitals were located were not mentioned, and the number of hospitals for the Vilayet of Kosovo was small. Through the Ottoman documents, we note that the hospitals in the Vilayet of Kosovo were located in large cities and were part of the health care system. Between 1896 and 1900 the Vilayet of Kosovo had a total population of 989,698. (Prifti 2014: 506) Comparing the demographic data in the Vilayet of Kosovo with the small number of hospitals, we estimate

that access to health services was limited for many residents of the Vilayet of Kosovo, especially those in rural areas. In addition to the small number of hospitals, there were also very few health care staff in 1897, which constituted a great challenge to the provision of health services in the Vilayet of Kosovo. Health care staff consisted of four people including doctors, surgeons and 1 caregiver. (Güran 1997: 52) This lack of medical staff is also mentioned in Ottoman documents. Although, there was an attempt to appoint a doctor in some districts and sub-districts of Kosovo, it was not possible for this request to be fulfilled by the Ottoman authorities. The lack of doctors affected the health care of the population of the Vilayet of Kosovo and the ability of the empire to treat diseases in its vilayets. (BOA.DH.İD.136.5.)

The total number of beds in hospitals in the Vilayet of Kosovo was not mentioned in the statistics, although the number of beds reserved for patients with the most serious illnesses was mentioned, at two, with the number of other beds being three, making a total of five beds. (Güran 1997: 52) The small number of beds was in line with the limited and scarce number of hospital centres. In the Vilayet of Kosovo's hospitals, the number of patients was 11, all of whom were men, while the number of patients admitted during 1897 was 97, of whom seven were women and 90 men. (Güran 1997: 53) To make a small digression from these data we see that the largest number of patients who were hospitalised men, women did not go to public hospitals at the time as a result of the rules and social customs of the time, not only in the Vilayet of Kosovo but throughout the Ottoman Empire. From this small number of female patients we understand that health care in the Vilayet of Kosovo was rather oriented towards home-care doctors and traditional methods of healing. Based on the fact that the number of beds and hospitals was small, women were not supposed to have separate rooms. This approach at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is an expression of the traditional social structure in which health care for women had a private dimension. In 1897, 66 men and seven women were cured in the hospitals of the Vilayet of Kosovo, a total of 73 cured patients, while the number of patients who died was 23 men. (Güran 1997: 54)

During the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was no structured system of hospital expenses as we have today with modern health care systems. However, through a document dated June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1903, we recorded that one of the hospitals mentioned in the statistics of 1897 was located in Prishtina.<sup>5</sup> The document further states that the Accounting Office of

Prishtina was advised to allocate 9,500 kuruş to the authorities of Prishtina for the expenditures of the hospital. Hence, we understand that hospital expenditure in the Vilayet of Kosovo was not organised in a systematic and standardised way, as they are today, where allocated funds are distributed regularly directly to hospital centres, they were instead allocated in a hierarchical manner. (BOA.TFR.I.KV.228.22775.)

In addition to a hospital in Prishtina, at the beginning of the 20th century there was another hospital in the city of Peja.<sup>6</sup> According to correspondence we have from the Ottoman Archive, on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1903, the governor of Peja requested that the building used as a military hospital to be used as a flour factory due to the winter season and consequent shortages encountered. From this we understand that the conditions in these hospitals were not at a proper level in terms of providing health services. (BOA.TFR.I.KV.8.797.) After about a month, on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1903, the Peja weapons depot, the construction of which remained unfinished, was converted into a hospital and patients were transferred there. (BOA.DH.MKT.8.797.) Therefore, based on a series of documents from the Ottoman Archive, we understand that we had an improvised hospital in the city of Peja. However, after about 4 years, correspondence with the governor of Peja shows that costs for the reconstruction of the hospital, with 60 beds, were included in the budget for 1907/8. (BOA.TFR.I.KV.216.21523.) In the case of Peja hospital, we understand that despite existing structures, such as public buildings and the weapons depot, not being designed for health purposes, these structures were suitable. When improvised hospitals are mentioned, we immediately think of hygiene and health care, which under these conditions were limited and constituted a challenge in themselves.

A photograph from the collection of Abdülhamid II was found in the library of rare books at the University of Istanbul showing the first military hospital in Mitrovica district, with 230 beds, one of the largest hospitals in the Vilayet of Kosovo, where, in addition to soldiers, the citizens from that area also received health care services. The exact years of construction of this hospital are missing, but based on the general years given in this photo, and using the historical context, this hospital is thought to have been constructed around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (İstanbul Üniversitesi, Kütüphane ve Dokümantasyon Daire Başkanlığı 2022)

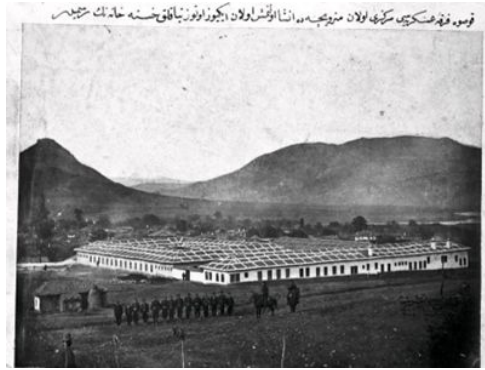


Figure 1. Military Hospital with 230 beds in Mitrovica, Kosovo. Collection II. Abdülhamid (1842–1918)

Although Mitrovica<sup>7</sup> was not one of the main or largest centres in the Vilayet of Kosovo, hospitals during the Ottoman period were spread over different territories and there were differences as to their size and function. The hospital in Mirovica district was bigger than the hospital in the Sanjak of Skopje, which, according to Ottoman documents, initially served as a hospital with 120 beds, although the number of beds later increased to 150. Six physicians, one pharmacist, one head nurse and 22 nurses worked in the hospital at the time. (Türkmen 2004: 510) The construction of hospitals in certain locations, such as Mitrovica, had a strategic dimension since this city also constituted the north-eastern border of the administrative division of the Vilayet of Kosovo. Given that Mitrovica hospital was a military one, from a strategic point of view it ensured that Ottoman Empire soldiers who were wounded or sick were treated and returned to the army as quickly as possible. This made the Ottoman army more efficient and more flexible in action. At a social level Mitrovica hospital encouraged the loyalty of the population to the Ottoman authorities, which would have translated into stability and harmony in the Vilayet of Kosovo. Controlling pandemics during this period was one of the most important elements in the management of the spread of disease.



## Epidemic diseases and their management in the Vilayet of Kosovo

Epidemics and infectious diseases have appeared in many countries at different periods of time, thereby transforming the social, economic, political and military policies of those countries. Migration, wars and environmental and air pollution are the main causes of the spread of disease. For the Vilayet of Kosovo in particular, and the Ottoman Empire in general in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, overpopulation in certain areas, trade, poor hygienic conditions, endemic disease and the lack of developed health systems, as addressed earlier, were the main factors in the rapid and deadly spread of infectious diseases. (Bingül 2020: 78)

Historically, diseases and epidemics have had a significant impact on the history of the Ottoman Empire, during different periods. (Tiryakia 2022: 356) Diseases that cause mass deaths or permanent changes to the human body can be listed as follows: plague, smallpox (variola), scarlet fever, measles (rubeola), cholera, typhoid, malaria, dysentery, chickenpox (varicella), mumps (parotitis), and whooping cough (pertussis). (Bingül 2020: 78)

Some of the infectious or epidemic diseases documented by the Ottoman documents in Vilayet of Kosovo in the period under study are cholera, plague, typhus, smallpox and measles. (Çatal 2021: 7) In the Ottoman sources, plague was known by two names, plague and pestilence. Plague was called the plague of the glands, while pestilence included all contagious diseases. Epidemics and plagues broke out in overcrowded settlements and arterial trade routes. Because sanitary conditions in the settlements were poor, it hit the poor sections of the population hardest. Umbrella termin for this time plague was the black death. (Krasniqi 2015: 206, 211)<sup>8</sup> While some of the symptoms of these diseases are transmitted to adults, many were mainly seen in children, and so accordingly the relevant Ottoman literature of the period usually uses the heading 'paediatric diseases.' An example is smallpox,<sup>9</sup> which is a severe febrile disease in children causing reddening of the skin on the hands, face, arms and legs within two to four days and can be deadly. (Bingül 2020: 83)

The presence of contagious diseases, especially smallpox, in the Vilayet of Kosovo was an important medical and social phenomenon at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based on a document from the Ministry of the Interior dated November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1890, the presence of smallpox is

recorded in the Vilayet of Kosovo, in the city of Peja. The document states that as a result of smallpox, the number of deaths was high. (BOA.DH.MKT.1779.46.) Since over the years there was a high number of those affected and those who suffered fatal consequences, the authorities in the Vilayet of Kosovo underlined the need to take serious measures to prevent the outbreak and spread of smallpox. In addition to the large number of deaths in the Vilayet of Kosovo, the epidemic also affected the local economy and the social stability of the population. The occurrence of smallpox in a village in the Vilayet of Kosovo would have been a worrying and important event for the authorities concerned. Therefore, the Kosovo inspectorate took steps to address the occurrence of smallpox in the village of Iskorovishte (also known as Skorobishte) in the sanjak of Prizren. Through identification of this location, the inspectorate indirectly requested intervention and action to prevent the spread of the disease. (BOA.DH.MKT.308.12.)

Due to the spread of various epidemics in the Ottoman Empire in general, and in the Vilayet of Kosovo in particular, vaccination<sup>10</sup> was an important tool for preventing contagious diseases. Since smallpox spread more among young people, the vaccination of students in schools was necessary and vaccination regulations were put in place that excluded those who were not vaccinated from schools and government services. The reason that these two institutions were designated related to the fact that a larger number of people gravitated here, which meant the faster spread of the disease. (Bingül 2020: 83) Vaccinating officials had a big role in combating epidemic diseases, especially when society came up against smallpox epidemics. (Çatal 2021: 9)

Vaccination was not a common practice in the Vilayet of Kosovo in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although by the end of the century local authorities had adopted various health care measures to fight epidemic disease. Therefore, the first document in the Ottoman Archive we come across on this issue dates to November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1890. In this document, the local authorities registered an urgent request with the Ottoman Empire Ministry of Health to treat the spread of smallpox in the city of Peja. Several letters were sent by medical practices to the authorities talking about the spread of the disease and mentioning the demand for vaccination in the city of Peja. (BOA.DH.MKT.1779.132.) Since smallpox had broken out in different centres in the Vilayet of Kosovo, there was a demand for vaccines from other areas as well. This is recorded in a document dated April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1896, when there were urgent requests from the city of

Prishtina for the distribution of vaccines to prevent smallpox from spreading. The demand for vaccination tells us not only about vaccines, it was also tells us about the medical practices of the time for the treatment and prevention of smallpox. (BOA.DH.TMİK.M.5.20.) Although the demand for vaccines in the Vilayet of Kosovo was huge, the Ottoman authorities had said that just 150 vaccines would be sent to Kosovo every week. (BOA.DH.MKT.2193.2) The Ottoman Empire's Ministry of Internal Affairs had published statistics on the vaccination of children in the Vilayet of Kosovo. According to a document dated 1901, 1,486 children were vaccinated within a period of three months. (BOA.DH.MKT.2524.34.) However, there was reluctance about vaccination, and it was thought that only children should receive it. There was prejudice against the vaccine, with some thinking it brought disease to society, something that related a lack of information, and also to disinformation. This is something that we can also observe today in relation to vaccination against Covid-19, although generally speaking scientific information has dominated over such beliefs (Bingül 2020: 85).

Dysentery or infectious diarrhoea was one of the other common diseases that was very widespread in the Vilayet of Kosovo. This is also supported by Ottoman documents, such as one dated September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1893, where presence of this disease is recorded in the village of Raçë in the Kaza (District) of Gjakova, an important town in the Vilayet of Kosovo. Furthermore, this document from the Ottoman Archive tells of the sending of a doctor to this village where dysentery appeared, as well as talking about the necessary sanitary measures that were taken to prevent the spread of dysentery to the population of the area. (BOA.DH.MKT.130.37.)

Diphtheria was another serious disease that spread easily and was present in the Vilayet of Kosovo. This rapidly spreading and deadly disease was a serious concern for local and central authorities. Therefore, the government was forced to engage personnel from the non-medical field in the Vilayet of Kosovo to manage the situation. The engagement of these non-medical personnel had a positive effect on the management of diseases and the functioning of the health system. Of course, this extended to the aspect of health education and communication aimed at educating people about the risk of diseases such as diphtheria and about the practices of due care for these contagious diseases. (BOA.DH.MKT.2328 44.)

That the epidemic situation in the Vilayet of Kosovo was difficult is shown by Ottoman documents such as that of April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1900. The sanitary inspectorate as an important institution, whose task was to monitor public health and prevent the spread of diseases in the Vilayet Kosovo, says that diseases spread differently in different areas of the Vilayet. Based on analysis and trends related to the spread of epidemic infections, the worst affected areas were the sanjaks of Prishtina, Prizren and Peja, and the districts of Gjilan and Mitrovica, including towns that are today part of Serbia and North Macedonia. This report, compiled by the Vilayet of Kosovo's sanitary inspectorate, included the dispatch of medical personnel to those places that lacked those personnel. (BOA.BEO.1468.110036.)

Cholera – a severe and rapidly spreading bacterial disease – was present in the Vilayet of Kosovo in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Government officials were cautious in taking measures to prevent the spread of diseases such as cholera. One of the measures taken in the Vilayet of Kosovo in November 1886 was the restriction of movement. The local and central authorities stopped movement in the border regions in order to prevent the spread of cholera to other vilayets. (BOA.MV.13.14.) In addition, Ottoman documents show that the Ottoman Empire also banned the passage of people from the Vilayet of Kosovo and other areas to Serbia, although an agreement was reached between Ottoman and Serbian authorities to facilitate movement between the Vilayet of Kosovo and Serbia when the disease situation did not constitute a danger at worrying levels. However, in case of suspected epidemics, the institutions were alerted and special measures were adopted for border control. (BOA.HR.İD.60.65.) Managing cholera was a serious health concern for the Ottoman Empire, in response to which regulations were introduced both to prevent, and to treat patients with, this deadly disease. A document from 1892 states that a copy of the regulations for the treatment of cholera would be published in the provincial newspaper of the Vilayet of Kosovo. (BOA.BEO.89.6605.)

On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1908, the Inspectorate of the Vilayet of Kosovo sent a letter to the governor of Kosovo, stating that travellers coming from Bulgaria had reported occurrence of cholera there, and that therefore sanitary laws must be implemented immediately. However, the inspectorate was of the opinion that applying such measures to Bulgarian travellers could be interpreted otherwise by the Bulgarian government, and so to avoid any misunderstanding the Ottoman Empire's Minister of Internal Affairs should be consulted and the issue be handled in accordance with his reply. (BOA.TFR.I.KV.210.20944.) Ottoman

documents show that the Montenegrin government was not so careful in relation to its neighbours. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the institutions of Montenegro had claimed that in the Vilayet of Kosovo, in the districts of Gucia and Berane, smallpox and cowpox in animals had spread, and so they had decided to quarantine the borders of these districts. However, the Vilayet of Kosovo had reported that smallpox was not at a worrying enough level as to require quarantine. (BOA. HR.TH.313.61.)

One of the other measures that the Ottoman authorities had taken when managing the spread of cholera in the Vilayet of Kosovo was dispatching medical personnel to areas where there was an outbreak of the disease. Ottoman documents point out the presence of Cholera in the city of Peja, resulting in a doctor named Fejzullah Bey being appointed to manage the spread of cholera in this area. Doctor Fejzullah had the task of identifying those affected, isolating the cases, treating the sick, and informing and educating the public about the disease, disease prevention and health practices. This would have an effect on the community and on the prevention of epidemics in the Vilayet of Kosovo. The sending of funds and financial resources was another attempt by the central Ottoman authorities to manage epidemic disease in the Vilayet of Kosovo. The same document points out that a lot of money was sent to help with the protection of public health and fight against the spread of dangerous diseases in Peja. (BOA.DH.ID.50.25.) We have a copy of a telegram received in 1912 by the Governor of Peja regarding the allocation of funds to prevent the outbreak of cholera and about the supply of drugs and other necessary things in case of a cholera outbreak, while the Vilayet of Kosovo had also requested the Ministry of Internal Affairs delivered 500 kuruş as soon as possible. (BOA. DH.MUİ.156.158.)

Through the Ottoman documents, we have understood that the central and local authorities implemented a series of measures to prevent epidemics in the Vilayet of Kosovo. But as to how effective these measures were is another important horizon highlighted by Ottoman documents. Measures taken by the Ottoman institutions for the prevention and management of epidemics in the Vilayet of Kosovo had been effective. An Ottoman document dated October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1911, pointed out that an outbreak of cholera in the Vilayet of Kosovo had been prevented as a result of the measures taken by government authorities. This report from the Ottoman Archive came as a result of the rejection of the need for help by the Bulgarian Association because the

epidemic was under control, and there was no need for help from foreigners. (BOA.HR.SFR.04.857.78.) In order to understand further the positive effect of the measures taken by the institutions of the time, I will dwell on some other measures taken in the Vilayet of Kosovo. Ottoman documents indicate that significant approach and due care was obvious with the aim of preventing deadly diseases in the Vilayet of Kosovo. To illustrate this better, I will refer to a document from the Ottoman Archive that says that a lady who had travelled by train and stopped in the district of Prishtina (Zibifçe), was supposedly a carrier of an infectious disease, and that therefore the relevant authorities had sent her for further examination; after evaluation by a doctor, the lady concerned had returned home. (BOA.BEO.76.5646.)

Apart from cholera, the central and local authorities also took measures against other diseases such as bacterial scarlet fever. According to an Ottoman document, this disease was present in the city of Prizren and for this, adequate measures were taken to manage and prevent its spread. (BOA.DH.MKT.770.44.)

Rubeola, also known as measles, is an infectious viral diseases that was present in 1895 in the Vilayet of Kosovo, as Ottoman documents show. Meanwhile, the Ottoman army deployed there made a great contribution to the management and prevention of rubeola. Ottoman documents, such as the one from 1895, show the contribution of an army pharmacist from the fourth battalion, Ali Efendi, in the treatment of rubeola in the town of Plava and in the district of Gucia. For his service in the treatment of rubeola he was given an award. (BOA. DH.MKT.339.11.)

From a public health point of view, quarantine was the first important step taken by the Ottoman Empire to limit the spread of infectious diseases. (Yilmaz 2017: 175) When epidemic diseases such as cholera, plague, smallpox and typhus appeared, first a city was quarantined, and then the sick were taken under observation by the municipal physicians and were treated. (Çatal 2021: 9) According to documents from the Ottoman Archive in Istanbul this measure took place in the Vilayet of Kosovo. In the Vilayet of Kosovo on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1893, people coming from the Austro–Hungarian Empire had to undergo a medical check-up for no less than twelve hours and were quarantined in Kosovo for 48 hours in quarantine centres. (BOA.DH.MKT.2050.12.) Ottoman administration had determined the location of the quarantine was to be in Zibfçe in Kosovo (Ayar 2014: 21) as a consequence of the outbreak of cholera in Romania. A doctor at the quarantine centre in the Vilayet of Kosovo, Robert

Mayer Efendi, was appointed quarantine doctor in Thessaloniki. Robert Mayer served as a doctor in a health institution built on the coast near the main port in Thessaloniki, with the aim of allowing passengers and staff who were infected with contagious diseases during the cruise to pass the quarantine period and receive medical treatment. (BOA. BEO. 258.19331.) We recently experienced the practice of enforced quarantine with the Covid-19 pandemic, where quarantine and full restriction on movement at borders served as key tools in curbing the spread of the virus. Although there are significant differences between the quarantine of the Ottoman period and quarantine of the current period, today's quarantine has been a hard measure for the community that has had an impact on the social, economic and psychological dimensions of people's lives. To better illustrate the impact on the economic dimension I will dwell on a document from 1911 that highlights a ban on the export of food products. The ban, in this case on grapes, prohibited their movement from Thessaloniki to Bulgaria and was related to the outbreak of cholera in Thessaloniki and Kosovo. (BOA.HR.SFR.04.682.76.) The ban had consequences for producers because of the lack of a foreign market, while it would also have had an impact on the domestic economy, for example such bans were followed by increases in the prices of certain products.

An interesting practice introduced by central Ottoman institutions was the pardoning of incarcerated people who suffered from serious or incurable diseases. Pardoning prisoners due to serious illnesses in the Vilayet of Kosovo is recorded through archival documents. On January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1888, Mehmed Fuadi, who had been sentenced to three years for murder by the Vilayet of Kosovo's Criminal Chamber of the Court of Appeal was pardoned for the sentence in the amount of six months due to his illness. (BOA. Y.A.RES.41.16.) Such practices were followed by relevant institutions in the Vilayet of Kosovo in different periods. For example on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1912, three prisoners received pardons because they were suffering from incurable diseases and they were released from prison. (BOA.MV.227.48.) This practice is evidence of a flexible, practical and humane judicial system that, for the time concerned, I consider to be in contrast to legal systems outside the Ottoman Empire.

## Conclusion

Epidemic diseases have threatened societies in almost every period of history. Between 1877 and 1912 the Vilayet of Kosovo faced a serious challenge in the field of public health. Epidemics, as in every country, brought political, social and economic problems to Kosovo as well. In this context, infectious diseases such as cholera, leprosy, dysentery and rubeola shaped behaviour and political-social relations in the Vilayet of Kosovo. Based on a general evaluation of the data from Ottoman documents, we estimate that in the face of infectious disease the Vilayet of Kosovo had limited and insufficient infrastructure, and therefore health care services, as a result of the lack of primary, secondary and tertiary health care resources. The medical infrastructure in the Vilayet of Kosovo during this 35-year period is characterised by a small number of public hospitals and a small number of medical personnel in proportion to the population and their health needs. The limited number of resources and medical infrastructure in the Vilayet of Kosovo resulted in low access to health care services. Thus, in most cases, the sick were not treated in health institutions. Rather, there was a focused on traditional home medicine, including the use of plant, meaning that the majority did not receive adequate medical treatment. Based on analysis of the data from the documents from the Ottoman Archive, we noted delays as to organisation, administration and funding of the health care system in the Vilayet of Kosovo. The local authorities faced a hierarchical system and delays from Istanbul in responding to their requests for financial assistance or even for doses of vaccine. The lack of equality, access and efficiency was typical for the health services in Kosovo. Thus, financial difficulties, lack of medical personnel, lack of development of methods and modern medicine, low awareness of health education, the unhealthy life of the population and uncontrolled foods were some of the factors that gave rise to outbreaks of infectious disease in the Vilayet of Kosovo. However, the central authorities, in cooperation with local authorities, took some general measures to manage the spread of deadly diseases in the Vilayet of Kosovo, for example increasing the capacity of health services, increasing the number of health personnel, building new and improvised hospitals, vaccination, limiting the movement of people and quarantine. Although the epidemiological situation is a clear indication that the measures taken to prevent the epidemic were often insuf-



ficient, the Sanitary Inspectorate of Kosovo tried to play a constructive role by making recommendations for adequate health care education on vaccination, quarantine and cordon sanitaire. Although epidemic diseases had negative consequences for the Vilayet of Kosovo, we should not overlook the fact that some measures taken against them were positively reflected in the construction of health infrastructure no matter how modest this was in the field of health.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Treaty of San Stefano, signed on March 3rd, 1878. According to Article 3 of the Treaty, Serbia would receive an expanded territory and annex the northern and north-eastern parts of Kosovo up to Mitrovica, where the Albanian majority lived. The Vilayet of Kosovo, according to Article 15 of the Treaty, would be governed by special commissions, mainly composed of locals. The decisions of these commissions would be submitted to the Ottoman state before implementation, and would enter into force after the meeting of the Ottoman Empire with Russia. (Gençer 1991: 225); (Preliminary Treaty of Peace between Russia and Turkey 1891: 2672–2674); (Buda 2006: 344); (Aktepe 2002: 218).

<sup>2</sup> The Berlin Conference Treaty was signed on July 13th, 1878. According to Article 25 of the Berlin Treaty, the administration of the Yeni Pazar sanjak of the Vilayet of Kosovo was left to the Ottoman Empire. However, Austria had the authority to have soldiers and to build military and trade routes throughout the sanjak of Yeni Pazar. The Gucia area, which were part of the Vilayet of Kosovo, were left to Montenegro. This concession, which allowed the delivery of an area inhabited by Albanians to a Slavic state, caused widespread and deep dissatisfaction among the Albanians of Kosovo. (Gencer, 1992, s. 516; Treaty between Great Britain, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Russia, and Turkey for the Settlement of Affairs in the East: Signed at Berlin, July 13, 1878, 1908: 412–413; Malcolm 2011: 268–269)

<sup>3</sup> One of the most important events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for Albanians was the establishment of the Albanian League of Prizren. The Albanians, opposing the provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano, united for the creation of a General Albanian National League, regardless of vilayets, social status, political views or religion. The plenary meeting opened in Prizren on June 10th, 1878, three days before the Congress of Berlin convened. The League of Prizren was a political-military organisation that essentially ensured the national rights, autonomy and territorial integrity of the Albanian nation. With the League of Prizren, the Albanian National Renaissance reached its highest peak of development between 1878 and 1881 and spread to all political, international, diplomatic and cultural areas of society. (Frashëri 2008: 197; Shqipërisë 2002: 130)

<sup>4</sup> During the Balkan Wars, the Serbs occupied almost all of Kosovo. The Ottoman army retreated south. This invasion finally separated the field of Kosovo and its Vilayet from the Ottoman Empire. After the separation from the Ottoman rule, the Vilayet of Kosovo was not included within Albania. With the Treaty of London on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1913, it came under the rule of the Serbian Kingdom. (Aktepe 2002: 218; Ünlü 2015: 41)

<sup>5</sup> Prishtina was an important centre in the Vilayet of Kosovo. Between 1878 and 1888 it was the home of the governor of Kosovo. In the last periods of the empire, it continued to be the administrative centre of the sanjak, with five kazas and 866 villages. In 1895, the Sanjak of Prishtina had a population of 56,291. Today, Prishtina has a rich cultural and architectural heritage from the Ottoman period, characterised by mosques, hammams, fountains, residential houses, clock towers, the museum of Kosovo, the tomb of Sultan Murad, etc. (Kiel 2007: 346–347)

<sup>6</sup> Peja was one of the important sanjaks in the Vilayet of Kosovo. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Peja as an administrative and economic centre had 500 shops in different parts of the city, in addition to 10 inns, a state mansion, a hammam, 12 mosques, two madrassas, 12 primary schools, a secondary school, over 20 factories, a barracks, two churches and two clock towers. (Ramadani 2018: 138–139) (Kiel 2000: 367)

<sup>7</sup> Mitrovica was one of the northern cities in Kosovo Province. Mitrovica was situated on the border between the Vilayet of Bosnia and the Vilayet of Kosovo. After the annexation of Bosnia by Austria–Hungary, Mitrovica remained within the framework of the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, and was known as a place of export. A Russian Consulate was opened in Mitrovica in 1902. Today, Mitrovica has a rich cultural and architectural heritage from the Ottoman period, characterised by mosques, hammams, residential houses, tekkes, etc. (Ejupi 2018: 174–177)

<sup>8</sup> Black death refers specifically to the plague of the 1340s in Europe.

<sup>9</sup> The word variola was commonly used for smallpox and was introduced by Bishop Marius of Avenches (near Lausanne, Switzerland) in 570. It derives from the Latin word *varius*, meaning ‘stained’ or from *varus*, meaning ‘mark on the skin’.

<sup>10</sup> Vaccination with the variolation method was conducted for a long time in the Ottoman Empire, which meant the transmission of the smallpox virus from one person to another through skin. This method of vaccination is shown in a letter sent from Edirne by Wortley Montagu, the wife of the British ambassador at the time, to her friend Miss Chiswell in England in 1717. This method saw the beginning of an important and effective period in the history of vaccination against smallpox. In her letter, Montagu wrote that smallpox vaccination had long been done in the Ottoman Empire and that she had vaccinated her child. This letter was important as it explained in detail how human-to-human smallpox vaccination was administered in Anatolia, 81 years before

Edward Jenner discovered the modern smallpox vaccine and brought the practice to Europe. (Wharnccliffe 1855: 308)

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