

CHAPTER 7

SANITARY PRECAUTIONS AGAINST THE PLAGUE IN PORTUGUESE PORTS (14TH-19TH CENTURIES)

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Abstract

The human plague is an epidemic disease of great lethality, caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* which was identified in 1884. From Antiquity onwards, the disease was recognized by large ganglionic engorgements that, when appearing in affected individuals, characterized bubonic plague. The development of commercial exchange, wars and human migrations, among other factors, boosted the development of the three pandemics that affected humanity between 540/541 and the 1960s. The second plague pandemic, which started with the devastating Black Death (between 1347 and 1351) and continued with recurrent outbreaks in Europe, the Near and Middle East, North Africa and Asia up until the beginning of the 19th century, caused serious demographic, socio-economic and political consequences on the populations of the most affected regions. In a bid to spare the Kingdom from the contagion and damage caused by *Yersinia pestis*, Portuguese monarchs sought information about possible plague epidemics in the countries from which the ships heading for Lisbon and other coastal ports of the Kingdom had come. Based on the health situation in the places of origin of these ships, Portuguese governments were empowered to authorize the docking and unloading of goods, as well as the free passage ashore of the crew and passengers or, alternatively, when infected or suspected of being infected, imposing on them a mandatory ban on entry into the ports or compliance with regulated sanitary measures.

Key words: Plague; Ports; Provenance; Prevention; Sanitary Measures