

Urban Governance and Battling the “Evil of Contagion”

Measures Against the 1738–1739 Plague in Sibiu/Hermannstadt

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THE PRESENT analysis follows the evolution of plague ordinances between roughly June 1738 and late December 1739, based on protocols kept by the urban authorities in Hermannstadt/Sibiu, and on other related documentation, both civil and military in origin.¹ Building on the efforts to understand the complexities of plague-handling institutions in the urban Transylvanian milieu,² and complementing recent works dealing with the direct economic costs incurred at the community, household, and individual level following the early eighteenth-century plague outbreaks in Sibiu,³ the study examines the main spheres of action envisaged as a means to contain the spread of the epidemic and root it out from the urban landscape. It provides a chronological and topical overview of isolation and quarantine measures and procedures; limitations imposed on commercial activity, certain trades, or the circulation of individuals; ordinances concerning the recording and reporting of plague occurrences; finally, measures pertaining to upholding public hygiene and carrying out the disinfection of urban spaces. In chronicling the complex ways of tackling the epidemic, the paper emphasizes the interactions between levels of government in matters of healthcare management, as a window into the subsidiary interests of each public authority, and into how these interests meshed with the higher need to ensure that the plague was contained and the community survived.

AN ILL-ADMINISTERED city meant that contagious illnesses such as the plague could find the opportunity to wreak havoc on the urban population. By the beginning of August 1738, a little over a month since the first symptomatic plague death had been reported, the sickness had entrenched itself in the freshly minted capital of Transylvania. Over 80 lives had been claimed in July, with 12 deaths reported on the day of July 31 alone. Although more than half of the deceased had been ascribed to the category comprising “young individuals and children of male and female sex,” which included both the offspring of city inhabitants and employees, such as house servants or apprentices, the

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plague had already claimed 17 members of the corps of full-rights, propertied citizens.⁴ This was an especially terrible omen, as from the mercantile perspective of the Habsburg state as well as that of the Transylvanian Saxon authorities, the plague's most important casualty were the provincial taxpayers; with the passing of each propertied individual, the community's potential to cover the remaining fiscal burden diminished, as minor heirs or widows could hardly replace an abled craftsman in terms of generated income.⁵

Around mid-July 1738, a mixed commission *ex militari, camerali, politico, civili und medico zusammen*, presided over by Graf von Formentini as commander of the city garrison, began to formulate a clearer response to the challenge presented by the plague, based on earlier policies. The outlined measures drew on the notion that one should, if possible, flee from the plague, even after its presence had been confirmed within the city walls. Flight had been a traditional response to plague epidemics, advocated widely in plague treatises and by Transylvanian medical and political authorities. During the 1709–1710 and 1717–1720 pestilential outbreaks, the urban leadership and the citizens of Sibiu had retreated from the path of disease. The military sought refuge in the county's villages that had not yet been afflicted.⁶ At this point, the “biopolitics of movement” that underscored the administration of public health began to be increasingly visible at the intersection of urban and provincial plague policies.⁷ The military authorities emphasized the need to control the circulation of individuals, even while advocating the relocation of those who had the opportunity to do so. Certain groups of individuals were not merely advised but compelled to leave the city. While Sibiu began to close itself off to the county in July 1738, the military authorities also ordered that “all masterless individuals, who do not have a settled (*hausseßige*) craft or trade, [who] are not in someone's employ must betake themselves outside the city or expect to be subject to severe expulsion.” Any citizen who had such an individual living in their home was likewise bound to report their presence to the authorities or face “serious reprimand.” Likewise, no *gepfügte* Wallachians were to be admitted into the city, reinforcing the notion that they were highly likely to bear the contagion.⁸

While one could flee from the plague, the issue needed to be approached in an orderly, controlled manner. In mid-July 1738, citizens who wished to “retire” from the path of the plague could still do pending an inspection of their health status by the appropriate authority and obtaining a “certificate” to that effect. Those who owned gardens outside the city could choose to relocate there; the other option were villages in the seat which the infection had not yet reached.⁹ Such measures paralleled those regulating cross-border population movement: health passes had to be issued by the proper authorities and presented at the city gates; temporary closure of half of the city's entryways likewise mirrored the closure of provincial borders. Though it was not as heavily militarized as the Transylvanian or Banat borders, the boundary between the city and the territory that laid outside it was nevertheless subject to the joint control of both military and civil authorities. Compared to the earlier bout of sickness, the measures prescribed in 1738 are informed by a more impersonal, military-like perspective on the urban inhabitants, which betrays the emergence of the plague prevention system at the province's borders under Charles VI.¹⁰ Flight continued to be strongly advocated until the middle of August, when citizens were notified “repeatedly and for the last time” that those who were found to be in good health “should depart,” as no one else would be provided with passes afterwards. The flow

of people through the city gates would thereafter be restricted to those fulfilling military service or to "reliable citizens."¹¹

Measures focusing on the control of population movement and those that prescribed how isolation and quarantine were to unfold also reflected a wider tendency to achieve a so-called *Parzellierung* of the social body, which implied clearly framing a fluid population within a "tabular space."¹² This tendency underscored efforts to obtain a systematic view of the population remaining in the city, how and where it lived, and whether certain groups or households could pose a problem for further plague prevention efforts. Surveillance in the city increased over time, paralleling the rising number of plague cases, and mirroring the surveillance which occurred at border crossing points. As was the case for other urban milieus in early modern Europe, within the boundaries of the city itself, the main entity whose activity and movements were "policed" was the household, rather than the individual.¹³

The surveillance and monitoring of those who remained in the city began in earnest following the final wave of "withdrawal" (*Retirade*). The same mid-August ordinance prescribed that all remaining persons, be they *bürgerlich*, foreigners, or "individuals lacking employ" be conscribed, to ascertain to what extent they would be able to subsist on their provisions.¹⁴ This ensured that the city would not be overburdened with providing for high numbers of (especially foreign) individuals without means, in the event it had to lock itself down for an extended period of time.

Written records resulting from the urban authorities' surveillance of the city's population in Sibiu are abundant and detailed, compared to other Transylvanian cities. The importance of appropriately recording the occurrence of plague cases was underlined by the military and the government health commissions. On 19 August 1738, an ordinance issued to the urban Directorate outlined that a daily report on the progress of the disease needed to be submitted to both the Sanitary Commission and the Commander; every week, a general table—comprising presumably a list of all plague deaths, identified by name and neighborhood—was likewise to be submitted by the urban administration to the Commission.¹⁵ The difficulties in ensuring unitary and time-sensitive record-keeping can be clearly seen in the reports issued by the Government to other counties and cities in the province. Around mid-September 1738, the authorities of Cluj/Kolozsvár were censored for their lack of diligence in sending the weekly reports. The Government's representatives argued that the lack of proper reporting is imputed by the Viennese court to its Sanitary Commission, rather than to failings in local-level reporting. Urban and county-level authorities only needed to "conscribe how many are dead, dying, sick or infected" and "where there is still no plague, it will be enough to write this down." This task was not regarded as an especially cumbersome one, but rather mere "child's play" if it had not been left aside for too long.¹⁶

Maintaining the flow of information between institutional actors, while monitoring the flow of individuals inside and outside the city, was supported by measures designed to ensure the survival of those who had not yet fled their homes to seek refuge elsewhere. As the military authorities acknowledged, because providing the numerous persons in the city with their necessary victuals would be impossible to achieve *in privato*, market days still needed to be held despite the risk of contagion they presented. As in previous epidemics, both weekly and daily wood markets were originally envisaged to be held in a specially

designated area outside the Heltner Gate, which had been surrounded by palisades and thus made it easier to control the flow of people.¹⁷ Less than a week later, on August 23, further provisions concerning the organization of market days were formulated: the military command was to provide, if possible, two individuals to be of assistance to the citizens, “to defend them from all inconveniences,” during market hours; within the palisaded area, no cattle-drawn wagons were to be allowed due to the “uncleanliness” that they caused; finally, no individuals who had come from Wallachia nor any who lived in the nearby villages would be admitted to the market space, as the market was held “solely to the benefit of the local citizenry.”¹⁸

The next ordinance pertaining to holding markets was issued on 14 September 1738, likewise by the military authorities.¹⁹ It sparked a heated debate between the military and the urban sanitary Directorate, betraying different ways of understanding the common good that both were meant to serve. During the roughly three weeks that passed between August 23—when the prior ordinance had been passed—and September 14, a staggering number of 189 plague deaths were recorded, comprising almost 20% of the total number of souls taken by the plague. Two thirds of confirmed cases had died in their own homes, with only 42 having been relegated to the city’s *Lazareth*. Spreading from the neighborhoods of the Lower City, mainly inhabited by craftsmen, the plague had also started to engulf the Upper City, making victims among the elite households in the Great and Small Squares, the Sporer and Heltner streets.²⁰ The situation appeared increasingly dire.

At this point, the Obrist Graf von Formentini proposed a complex plan that would reduce the potential of contagion during market days, when individuals invariably gathered in greater numbers. This involved both temporal limitations as well as specific accommodation for different categories of citizens. Sundays were to be spent in “prayer and supplication,” and no one would be allowed to leave the city; excepted were those citizens who had retreated to the gardens and the *Mayerhoffen*, who would be allowed to move freely in order to procure their own necessary foodstuff and fuel, for two hours during the afternoon. Likewise, those citizens who owned gardens but had remained in the city would also, in case of great need, be allowed to collect their harvests, even if it meant leaving the city.²¹ Mondays and Thursdays would be established as market days for purchasing kindling and wood; mornings were reserved for those who had remained in the city proper, while afternoons were limited again to citizens who had relocated to the gardens.²² Tuesdays and Fridays were designated as market days for foodstuffs and fruit; each “German” (*Teütsche*) family—likely meaning both those who held the burgher franchise, as well as individuals who were only living as settlers (*Inwohmer, Sedler*) or tenants—was to dispatch a “reliable man” to purchase provisions. On Wednesdays and Saturdays, citizens who had fled the city and were located “in the countryside” were allowed back into the city, and, depending on their passes, could go back to their homes to obtain provisions, under the careful watch of the military. Excepted from all these limitations were members of the clergy, the members of the city Directorate, the city physician, and any member of the Small Council, all of whom could pass through the city gates and travel to their own gardens and return at will. Those who had fled to their gardens could also dispatch one of their “people or *Mayrer*” to fetch them provisions from the markets. Penalties were instated for individuals who misused or exceeded these timeframes or had spent the time slots they had been allocated for “congregating and cackling” (*Zusammenkünffte oder Gelach*).²³

Formentini's ambitiously detailed plans would not, however, materialize as quickly as one could have expected. The city Directorate had sought advice—and approval—from the Sanitary Commission, and proposed several changes to the original ordinance. Firstly, markets would be held in two separate locations just outside the city—near Heyden Mill and across from the garden owned by the Abraham family—, spaces in which only 50 persons would be allowed at a time, thus preventing “that a too great mixing might arise.” Plans to hold separate market days for victuals vs. burning wood were scraped, “as this might give rise to confusion.” Finally, the members of the urban sanitary council argued that they be allowed an extra day to handle their own affairs.²⁴

Despite the provincial government's intervention through its Health Commission, the arguments of the urban authorities for a somewhat laxer regulation for population movement did not produce substantial results in their favor. A reply from the local military commander cites orders from General Commander Prince von Lobkowitz “that in the future no one, without exception, be allowed to enter the city, or worse, leave it.” While the weekly markets were to be held as previously outlined, traffic to and from the gardens surrounding the city would only be permitted in strict moderation, as provisions relating to this circulation had not been properly observed. Rather than the “heaps” of people “coming in and out” of the city, only one person from each household would be allowed to travel to the gardens, and all precautions had to be taken to ensure that the city's inhabitants did not use this occasion “to take a stroll.” Anyone travelling to their garden to stock up on provisions was advised that no spontaneous gatherings should take place, and that they were compelled to return to their homes “without tarrying.”²⁵ Only the Franciscan friars in Sibiu were allowed greater leeway in terms of circulation, as they “were bound by necessity to seek most of their provisions outside” and thus were permitted “a moderate entry and return” to the city, provided that “they or their underlings did not travel to suspicious places.”²⁶ By the final autumn months, the circulation between city and its outlying gardens would be firmly prohibited; citizens would be given one week to bring any “greens” from their gardens or *Mayerhoffen*, after which they would no longer be allowed travel to this intermediary space, outside the proper control of the authorities. All purchases of firewood, grains, and hay would be done by a specially-appointed commissioner, who would at first settle the purchase from the urban treasury, and then re-sell these as needed, for a “low price” and “payment in cash.”²⁷

Beside market days and the circulation to and from the suburban gardens, other avenues of potential contagion were opened by the need to secure the appropriate provisioning of the city's inhabitants. In their proposal for a comprehensive plague response of September 26, the military authorities urged the City Directorate to have more ovens (presumably public bakeries) built in the city, so that the inhabitants “might bake their bread more conveniently” and put an end to all the congregating which took place under the “pretext that they must gather for the purpose of baking.”²⁸ In 1720, according to an earlier conscription of all taxpaying households, some 96 privately owned ovens existed in the city already, most which belonged to the full citizens. In addition, at least two public bakeries—the *pistrina civitatis*, and the *pistrina Lutsiana* (belonging to the Lutsch family)—covered the baking needs of the city population. This meant that fewer than 5% of households were prepared to bake their own bread in the event they were not allowed to leave their homes.²⁹ The Small Council was quick to reply, arguing that the process of

bread baking was thusly arranged “that the most able individuals know how to prepare the bread, and to direct the fires burning in the ovens.” In addition, “the smallest part of the houses in the city is thus situated, so as to be able to build baking ovens”; should more be built, then the danger of fire would be much greater, not to mention that “double the amount of wood would be needed.” Citizens would be urged to take great care to avoid “mingling” in the city’s bakeries.³⁰

Various kinds of victuals were also regarded with suspicion by the military authorities, feeding into the miasmatic understanding of disease transmission. According to Formentini’s own observations, fruit from the gardens in the suburbs was often carried into the city or sold during market days. This practice had to be halted immediately.³¹ Selling fruits in the city had already been addressed in late August, when the city garrison commander had argued against selling watermelons because “this fruit, as is well known, can cause many other diseases.”³² In its reply of late September—early October, the Directorate would acknowledge that “the noxious fruit, such as melons” had fallen out of season, but that “the current winter fruit is needed for subsistence and provides a much needed refreshment to the sick,” and it would therefore be necessary to keep gathering it.³³

It was likely not the fruit itself that elicited such great suspicions, but rather its tendency to befoul the environment and leave behind various residues. Within the same framework of understanding the sources of disease, cattle were likewise regarded as a potential vector of plague. Both the cattle themselves and the meat resulting from butchering posed a problem for the maintenance of the city’s cleanliness. As the military authorities proposed in late September 1738, enough cattle were to be slaughtered outside the city walls, and only what was necessary to provide the daily consumption of the urban population was to be delivered inside. Herding the cattle in and out of the city every day only served to increase the “stench and foulness, through which the *Malum* (plague) could only gain in strength.” The city was already suffering from an excess of muck and filth (*Mist und Unflath*), which needed to be collected and carried out as soon as possible, by means of “clean wagons” requisitioned from the nearby villages.³⁴ The urban authorities were quick to reply to the issues signaled by the military: “his Excellency the Obrist supposes that outside the gates, there are cattle from the city grazing about [...]; the cattle were counted today in the early morning when they passed through the gate: all in all there were 2 bulls, 57 cows, and 5 goats.” These contributed very little to the stench in the city, as they were mainly kept for milking; there was nary one head of cattle for every 20 households in the city, which surely caused very little damage. The cleanliness in the city was “for the time being, good,” and could be improved upon quite quickly; in 8 days, a few wagons could ensure that the entire city was cleaned anew.³⁵

Butchering and the resulting trade in meat had a high potential of transmitting the disease. As in other European cities, restrictions were placed on this trade and attempts were made to ensure that provisioning the city with meat did not contribute to the spread of contagion.³⁶ In this respect, both the urban and the military authorities were in agreement: slaughtering and selling meat had to follow pre-set guidelines, and any cross-contamination, for instance between blood and the money used for payment, was to be avoided. In September, Formentini proposed that butchers’ stalls—relocated outside the city—make use of a plate filled with vinegar, placed at an appropriate distance, into which money would be placed and thus disinfected. The same procedure could also be

employed during market days, to limit direct contact between individuals.³⁷ Later on, this measure would be supplemented by the building of a special "cupboard" into which the meat would be deposited by the butchers, and then claimed by the customers, without any contact.³⁸ It was not only beef that was regarded as a potential carrier of disease; pigs and pork were likewise deemed suspect. Suggesting the persistence of humoral beliefs, a late military ordinance issued in November deplored the fact that citizens of Sibiu traveled to the *Mayerhoffen* (under false pretenses), where they contacted peasants from nearby villages, from whom they would purchase pig's meat. Because of this great "mixing" of individuals and the "excessive" consumption of pig's meat, the plague persisted. Thus, the urban population was reminded that the purchase and sale of pig's meat were strictly prohibited, and that any who were found with such victuals in their possession would be subject to severe penalties, as well as having their meat confiscated. Even purchasing beef from the butchers' stalls was to be heavily regulated: individuals needed to form an orderly line, where they would wait separately and distanced from one another for the butchers to prepare their purchases.³⁹ In addition, other trades that involved working with "porous wares,"⁴⁰ such as wool or animal hides, were temporarily prohibited; no wool was to be spread out or left to dry on the streets, while wool dyers and tawers were not allowed to ply their trades within the city walls, because the wool "increasingly spreads the evil of contagion."⁴¹

Despite the proposal of overarching measures to combat the spread of the plague, and the military authorities' emphasis on a unitary policy to ward off contagion, differences in enforcing anti-plague policies persisted. Different groups, even apart from the greatly suspected Wallachians or the inhabitants of the suburbs, required special treatment and became a thorn in the relationship between the Habsburg and Transylvanian Saxon authorities. The records of those individuals who had remained in the city as well as the reports of the urban council betray the unease felt by the city leadership in managing a confessionally and politically diverse population during the stages of the epidemic. In August, soon after the plague had begun to ravage the city, urban authorities expressed their distrust towards the local inhabitants who were not under its control and had not properly settled in the city. The Directorate required that no one be allowed to linger outside the city walls, "roaming about here and there," but rather that everyone be compelled to go to their respective quarters, so that their health status might be investigated and properly observed. The assistance of the military was explicitly requested to deal with any "German individuals among this group who resist" the implementation of quarantine and isolation measures.⁴² A later reply from the Directorate underlined that the same categories of individuals "insist on remaining here by force and have declared themselves one by one to be well-provisioned" although that was not the case. The town council feared that the first shortages would be felt during late autumn, when fuel would no longer be readily available once the city closed its gates. What is more, the Directorate repeatedly complained that the same foreign persons were blatantly disregarding market regulations, rushing to purchase everything of good quality before the allotted timeframe, thus depriving respectable citizens of their due.⁴³

Confessional adherence also created a fault line in plague policies, especially in terms of caring for individuals of Catholic denomination, who were largely in the minority in the city itself, but whose fates were under the attentive gaze of the Habsburg military. Al-

ready in mid-August, the Sanitary Commission included on the list of “points to be jointly observed by the interims-Commander and the city Directorate” the need to ensure that if the contagion should reach any Catholics, these would be relocated to the Lazareth but treated separately from their Protestant counterparts. The urban authorities, who bore the costs of this enterprise, were assured that everything spent on the Catholic subjects’ medical care and food would be covered from dedicated funds, which the Commission itself would make sure to secure from the Court. What is more, Catholic citizens’ goods should be appropriately cared for and securely returned, should they recover from the sickness, or if they should perish, all personal items that did not require disinfection by fire would be kept “bona fide” for any surviving heirs. However, if these individuals did not behave as it was requested of them in the best interest of the entire urban community, then the military assistance provided by the interims-Commander would be necessary.⁴⁴

By the time the epidemic had made its way through the city, the focus of the authorities seemed to shift again to one of unease in the matter of the poor inhabitants in the city, suggesting the conceptual salience of the notion of “civic pride” as part of the moral economy of urban plagues.⁴⁵ Already in refuge in late September to the nearby village of Cislădie/Heltau, the town council ordered that the poor remaining in the city be provided with firewood, money, and victuals, to be covered from the city’s chest, “so that they would not be compelled to seek accommodation in the houses of rich citizens or infected persons”; likewise, “should any needful Germans exist, they would also be provided with money or other necessities.” In the latter case, such short-term grants were to be paid back to the city treasury.⁴⁶

The expectation that the city would care for its own during such an epidemic buttressed the inhabitants’ faith in the resilience of community, and in the notion that urban authorities were ready to assume a non-negligible and wide array of costs in relation to the protection of its inhabitants’ health status. Early on during the epidemic, “the beloved citizenry which is in good health” was “amicably reminded of the poor sick persons in the Lazareth and in the city, as well as of those in need of help and nourishment,” namely, asked to “spring to their aid” and have their servants bring necessary victuals or items to two commissioners who had been especially appointed for this purpose.⁴⁷ The overall costs of caring for the sick population who had been relocated to the Lazareth reached high sums, of over 138 Hungarian florins for medical care, 164 Hungarian florins for their burial, as well as other communal expenses related to this category of individuals.⁴⁸ Plague costs were so high in 1738–1739 that the urban community needed to borrow significant sums of money, not in the least because the quartering of the army required a steady and regular inflow of cash. Thus, loans were secured by the urban administration, mainly from some of the Transylvanian Saxon leading political families (von Baussnern, von Vieland), as well from various great Hungarian nobles. More significant in this sense and an exceptional example of how quickly civic pride caught roots among the non-Transylvanian Saxons who lived in the city were the significant donations made by an emigrant German widow, who lent the city the sum of 1200 Hfl; two Austrian exiles to the province also managed to collect the sum of 500 Hfl, which they then donated *als ein pium opus pro publico*.⁴⁹

Finally, the most vivid display of civic pride likely came from the scribe of the Sanitary Directorate, Samuel Dobosi, who offered to leave the generous sum of 6000 Hfl to the city as a temporary loan in capital, which could become a legate should he or all his

surviving his relatives perish, and their name die out completely within the next decade.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, in 1748, the urban authorities decided against maintaining this legate to the benefit of the common good (*lößlichen Publico*).

Conclusions

THE QUARANTINE at the province’s borders was very strict, and all those who wished to enter Transylvania had to submit to the same cumbersome procedures regardless of status or provenance.⁵¹ In the city, things stood somewhat differently. Groups that were regarded as suspicious due to their weak ties to the urban milieu—and the Transylvanian Saxon political realm—were under stricter monitoring, their lives during the epidemic depending much on the willingness of the Habsburg military to ensure their protection. Moreover, the need to monitor the population intersected with a tendency to create exceptions for elite members of the urban leadership, or for special economic or commercial activities. While far from mirroring the strong debates concerning the economic effects of the quarantine line at the provincial borders, some contrary opinions arose as to the other urban based economic activity, such as market days. Both military and civil authorities, regardless of their background, vacillated between the potential pathways of contagion, attempting to identify avenues of “uncleanliness” while at the same time wishing to retain various leisure activities, such as strolling through the gardens outside the city. Despite the apparently contrary attitude displayed by the urban authorities in their exchanges with the interims-Commander, the limited number of cases in the city, as well as the highly detailed sources that resulted from monitoring the occurrence of plague within the city walls suggest that a preoccupation for keeping the city alive—covering tenants, Germans, and Catholics alike—was nevertheless evident. □

Notes

1. Another wave of plague had hit Hermannstadt in 1710–1711 but was less extensively documented by the urban authorities. See Heinrich Herbert, “Der Haushalt Hermannstadts zur Zeit Karls VI. Die Bürgermeisterrechnungen. Mittheilungen aus den Hermannstädter Magistratsprotocollen” *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde* Neue Folge 24, no. 1 (1892): 226.
2. Oana Sorescu-Iudean, “Keeping the City Alive: Managing Public Health Crises in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century in Sibiu,” in *Towns between Empires: Good Governance and “Police” in Case Studies from Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia, 1500s–1800s*, edited by Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, Julia Derzsi (Amsterdam: CEU Press, 2025), 227–46.
3. Oana Sorescu-Iudean, “Bearing the costs of epidemic: remaining households in Hermannstadt/Sibiu during the 1719-1720 and 1738-1739 plague outbreaks,” *The History of the Family*, forthcoming.

4. Figures drawn from a dataset compiled by the author, based on the 1738-1739 register of plague deaths for Hermannstadt, Sibiu County Branch of the Romanian State Archives (hereafter abbreviated as SJAN SB), Colecția de acte fasciculare (hereinafter AF), H-Sănătate, doc. no. 54.
5. Herbert, "Haushalt Hermannstadts," 167-168. On the Habsburg concern with maintaining a stable taxpaying population and the resulting impulse to prevent the spread of plague, see Sabine Jesner, "Habsburg border quarantines until 1837: an epidemiological 'iron curtain'?", in *Medicalising Borders: Selection, Containment and Quarantine since 1800*, edited by Sevasti Trubeta, Christian Promitzer, Paul Weindling (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 31-55, here 32.
6. Paul Binder, "Epidemiile de ciumă din Transilvania în secolul al XVIII-lea (1709-1795)" [Plague epidemics in Transylvania during the eighteenth century], in *Retrospective medicale: Studii, note și documente*, ed. Gheorghe Brătescu (Bucharest: Editura Medicală, 1985), 174-175, 179.
7. Janna Coomans, *Community, Urban Health and Environment in the Late Medieval Low Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 219.
8. SJAN SB, AF, H-Sănătate, folder 50, unnumbered document dated 19 July 1738, fol. 21v.
9. SJAN SB, AF, H-Sănătate, folder 50, unnumbered document dated 19 July 1738, fol. 21v.
10. Jesner, "Quarantine," 37.
11. SJAN SB, AF, H-Sănătate, folder 50, "Pest Ordnung den 14ten August Anno 1738 von der Kayl. Commission und Stadt Directorio entworfen," fol. 25v.
12. Ramon Reichert, "Auf die Pest antwortet die Ordnung. Zur Genealogie der Regierungsmentalität 1700:1800," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*, 7(3), 1996, 327-357.
13. Coomans, *Community, Urban Health and Environment*, 225.
14. SJAN SB, AF, H-Sănătate, folder 50, "Pest Ordnung den 14ten August Anno 1738 von der Kayl. Commission und Stadt Directorio entworfen," fol. 25r.
15. SJAN SB, AF, H-Sănătate, folder 50, unnumbered document, "Puncta welche der Interims Commandant mit dem löbl. Stadt Sanitäts Directorio gemeinschaftlich zu observieren haben," 19 August, fol. 29r.
16. Order issued by the Government (located in Mediaș) on 18 September 1738, to the leadership of the city Klausenburg/Kolosvár, published in Alexandru Lenghel, *Istoricul ciumei la Cluj la 1738/39* (Cluj: Tipografia "Corvin," 1930), 98-99. [*The History of Plague in Cluj during 1738/39*]
17. SJAN SB, AF, H-Sănătate, folder 50, "Pest Ordnung den 14ten August Anno 1738....," fol. 25v.
18. SJAN SB, AF, H-Sănătate, folder 50, "Gemäßliche Verzeichnüß ein und anderer Puncten was so wohl bey den mehreren praecautio[n] der eingeschlichenen leidigen Soiche ferner zu beobachten seyn mögte," fol. 32r-32v.
19. SJAN S, AF, H-Sănătate, folder 50, unnumbered document entitled "Unvorgreifliche Gedencken zu beßeren Einschrenckung des häufigen zusammenlauff und alzugroßen Communication der Leütte, auf denen Marcktagen," fol. 39r-40v.
20. Figures drawn from a dataset compiled by the author, based on the 1738-1739 register of plague deaths for Hermannstadt, SJAN SB, AF, H-Sănătate, doc. no. 54.

21. SJAN SB, Acte fasciculare, H-Sänätate, folder 50, “Unvorgreiffliche Gedencken zu beßeren Einschrenckung...,” fol. 39r.
22. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, “Unvorgreiffliche Gedencken zu beßeren Einschrenckung...,” fol. 39r-39v.
23. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, “Unvorgreiffliche Gedencken zu beßeren Einschrenckung...,” fol. 39r-40r.
24. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered and untitled document, fol. 49r.
25. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered and undated document, likely issued in the second half of September 1738, fol. 50r-51v.
26. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered and undated document, likely issued in the second half of September 1738, fol. 50r.
27. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Verhaltensordnung von der vorzunehmenden Sperr entworfen von dero Kayl. Sanitaets Commission, d 29ten 9ber 1739,” issued on 29 November 1738, fol. 59r.
28. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Puncta worüber der Herrmannstädter Löbl. Magistrat ihre weitere Veranstaltung zu machen hat,” issued 26 September 1738, by Baron Obrist von Formentini, fol. 41r.
29. Figures drawn from a dataset compiled by the author based on the 1720–1721 conscription. See Oana Sorescu-Iudean, *Dividing society, dividing estates. Probate and will-making in Herrmannstadt, 1720-1800: a social, economic and administrative perspective*, PhD, University of Regensburg 2021, https://epub.uni-regensburg.de/52856/1/1_h_Dissertation_Sorescu-Iudean.pdf (accessed 24 March 2025).
30. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Unvorgreiffliche Gedanken des hiesigen Stadt Directorii, über die Puncta des Titl. Herren Obristen Baron von Formentini,” undated, fol. 44r.
31. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Puncta worüber der Herrmannstädter Löbl. Magistrat...,” fol. 41v.
32. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Gemäßliche Verzeichniß...,” fol. 32r.
33. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Unvorgreiffliche Gedanken des hiesigen Stadt Directorii, über die Puncta des Titl. Herren Obristen Baron von Formentini,” undated, fol. 43v.
34. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Puncta worüber der Herrmannstädter Löbl. Magistrat...,” fol. 41r-41v.
35. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Unvorgreiffliche Gedanken des hiesigen Stadt Directorii...,” fol. 43r.
36. Carole Rawcliffe, “‘Great Stenches, horrible sights, and deadly abominations’: butchery and the battle against plague in late medieval English towns,” in *Plague and the City*, ed. Lucas Engelmann, John Henderson, and Christos Lynteris (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 18-38.
37. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Puncta worüber der Herrmannstädter Löbl. Magistrat...,” fol. 42r.
38. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered and undated document, likely issued in the second half of September 1738, fol. 50v.
39. SJAN SB, AĒ, H-Sänätate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Verhaltensordnung von der vorzunehmenden Sperr entworfen von dero Kayl. Sanitaets Commission, d 29ten 9ber 1739, fol. 58r – 59v.

40. Erna Lesky, “Die Österreichische Pestfront an der k.k. Militärgrenze“, *Saeculum*, Vol. 8 (December 1957), 82-106, here 82.
41. SJAN SB, AF, H–Sănătate, folder 50, unnumbered and undated document, likely issued in the second half of September 1738, fol. 50r.
42. SJAN SB, AF, H–Sănătate, folder 50, unnumbered document, fol. 27r-27v.
43. SJAN SB, AF, H–Sănătate, folder 50, unnumbered document, “Unvorgreifliche Gedanken des hiesigen Stadt Directorii...,” fol. 46-47r.
44. SJAN SB, AF, H–Sănătate, folder 50, “Pest Ordnung den 14ten August Anno 1738 von der Kayl. Commission und Stadt Directorio entworfen,” fol. 26r.
45. Lorenzo Coccoli, “The Moral Economy of Epidemics: Emergency, Charitable Institutions and Poor Relief in Early Modern Italian Plague Regulations,” in *Reassessing the Moral Economy: Religion and Economic Ethics from Ancient Greece to the 20th Century*, edited by Tanja Skambraks, Martin Lutz (Springer International Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 137-154, here 143.
46. SJAN SB, AF, H–Sănătate, folder 50, unnumbered document dated 29 September 1738, issued by the Imperial Sanitary Commission in exile in Heltau, fol. 51r.
47. SJAN SB, AF, H–Sănătate, folder 50, unnumbered document dated 21 August 1738, fol. 21r.
48. Herbert, “Haushalt Hermannstadts,” 33-34.
49. Herbert, “Haushalt Hermannstadts,” 132-133.
50. Herbert, “Haushalt Hermannstadts,” 133.
51. Jesner, “Quarantine,” 37-38. The duration of quarantine depended on where the individuals in question were traveling from.

Abstract

Urban Governance and Battling the “Evil of Contagion”: Measures Against the 1738–1739 Plague in Sibiu/Hermannstadt

The present analysis looks at how plague ordinances evolved between roughly June 1738 and late December 1739, based on protocols kept by the urban authorities in Hermannstadt/Sibiu, and on other related documentation, both civil and military in origin. It examines the main spheres of action envisaged as a means to contain the spread of the epidemic and root it out from the urban landscape: measures and procedures for isolation and quarantine; limitations imposed on commercial activity, certain trades, or the circulation of individuals; ordinances concerning the recording and reporting of plague occurrences; finally, measures pertaining to upholding public hygiene and carrying out the disinfection of urban spaces. In chronicling the complex ways of tackling the epidemic, this section emphasizes the interactions between levels of government in matters of healthcare management.

Keywords

plague, eighteenth century, urban governance, Sibiu/Hermannstadt, epidemics