

## MEASURES TO PREVENT CONTAGIOUS DISEASES IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

The epidemics of plague and cholera, mainly due to the poor conditions in which the inhabitants lived, marked the evolution of the Romanian Principalities at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Under these circumstances, the authorities had to take measures as quickly as possible to stop this scourge. One of these measures consisted in the establishment of customs quarantine and sanitary controls, which were in most cases at the border. Among those quarantines was the one organized at Sculeni, whose development deserves to be highlighted.

**Keywords:** quarantine, doctor, Sculeni, lazaret, smoking.

At the beginning of the 19th century, due to the outbreak of plague and cholera epidemics in Moldavia, the Russian Minderer military doctor organized the first quarantine in Moldavia and added a guard cord as an additional measure of prophylaxis. In general, most of the quarantines were located in urban areas, where the population was most affected by these epidemics. In the case of the cities and fairs of the Iasi County, besides the quarantine set up in Nicolina (1), another was organized in Sculeni.

The Sculeni quarantine, which probably was built after the Russian-Turkish war of 1812, was part of the border quarantine, being surveyed by the Russian authorities with a double role: closer scrutiny of those wishing to cross Moldavia to Bassarabia, and to stop the spread of diseases in the Russian Empire. One thing is certain, in 1815 that the quarantine existed. Thus, in February 1815, Iordachi Donici wrote to his brother-in-law to come to see him in the Sculeni quarantine and bring him "four rods of a thousand gibe, two good red hoops and a pair of German black cubes." (2) Therefore, we consider that the quarantine was established

between 1812 and 1815. In the immediate period, a small market town was inhabited by a Jewish majority. (3)

From a historical point of view, the Sculeni quarantine has not received any study so far. To bring more insights into this subject, we are especially at the disposal of the original documentary sources, in which we discover step by step, details about its appearance and its evolution from the first part of the nineteenth century.

Also after a Russian-Turkish war, which took place in 1828-1829, there were new outbreaks of plague and cholera in the immediate aftermath. The latter ravaged the Prut (4), so to stop it Kiseleff ordered the installation of some quarantine along the river, with military lines. Unfortunately, they could not stop spreading the epidemic, the first cases of cholera being reported on the bank of the Prut River in February 1831(5). The scourge has decimated the population of Moldova and a part of the medical team (6).

With regard to quarantine in Sculeni, similar to the quarantines created around the city of Iași (7), and this one did not have the proper conditions for

carrying out the activities. This stems from documentary sources that highlighted the authorities' concern to remedy this problem. As a measure against the eradication of the plague epidemic of 1829, the fair's captain wanted to take up new space, regardless of the means at which it was used. Thus, in the winter of 1829, it attempted to make quarantine in the homes of a Jew and the Jewish school. This results from the complaint to the Divorce of Moldova in July 1830 made by Avram Diiamant, an Austrian subjugated Jew who asked him to return his two houses, taken by the fair's captain as a settlement for the future quarantine against the plague: "they took my eight-room home and the Jewish school, taken me out of the house in winter time" (8). By marrying a local woman, Abraham could become the owner of the houses mentioned in the 1830 document. From the subsequent documents, it results that the quarantine was abolished, so the Divan decided to return the buildings to Diiamant. (9)

Therefore, in the same year (1830), the existing quarantine was repaired. From the documents we find: 100 fir boards with the price of 45 lei, 400 breaks with 10 lei, 66 sacks of lime with 18 lei. In total, 73 lei was spent "in the quarantine at Sculeni fair". (10)

It seems that this was not enough, because the quarantine commissioner, Mihail Hoban, repeated requested to the "Estimate Quarantine Commission of Ees" in September 1831 that he needed people to guard the quarantine, brick and lime for repairs needed for quarantine and day laborers to do these things. The documents show the delay of the quarantine commission to send them. (11)

This happened three months later, when we find out that "in the past year 1831, the month of December was spent in the need of the Sculeni quarantine, 618 lei," according to the

commandments of the divan. (12) Most likely, that money was spent on some quarantine repairs and for the day laborers who participated in this, as well as for the quarantine guards. From "Vidomostie for those who entered quarantine" in 1831 there are 24 Moldavians, 84 Lipovans and 54 Jews. (13)

Despite the applied measures, often with a lot of delay, we are depicted state authorities that were not yet prepared both as a system of organization and by means of endowment, many of them being rudimentary, far behind those in the western and central countries of Europe.

Despite these small investments, it seems that the place where the quarantine was located was not a safe one, and one year later it was even wanted to be relocated "because the Prut has high measures there" asking "to change them to another more appropriate place". (14)

With all the efforts, this seems to have never been achieved. Anatolij Demitrov in 1838 made a detailed description of the Sculeni quarantine "The Sculeni sanitary facility occupies a rather large area on a low and wet ground that is slightly higher than that of the Prut's water that flows not far from the fences ". The same writer adds, "nine small houses make up this lazarette. Each house has a separate yard and enclosed by a plank fence. "Another account of the Sculeny quarantine, "the houses, which have only ground floor, have no floor other than the damp and sandy soil; each of them has two or three small rooms and is under the watch of a guard, an old retired soldier." (15)

From this description it can be seen that the quarantine site remained the same as in 1830, at a short distance from the Prut River, thus presenting a risk of flooding and contamination. It is also worth noting the lethargic appearance of the houses in Sculeni, and their location close to the Prut riverbed shows some uncertainty. At the same time it is revealed that the same care is not exercised in the

1830s. An image of the Sculeni quarry courtyard in 1837 and the portrayal of the boyars who passed there can be found in the paintings of the Frenchman Auguste Raffet. (16) (fig. 1)

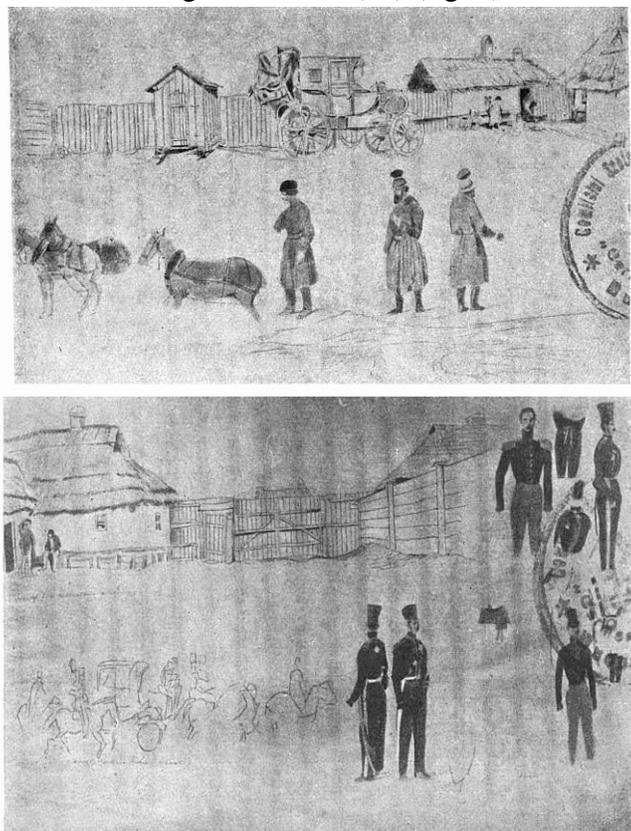


Fig. 1 *The Sculeni quarantine court*  
After Auguste Raffet

With the adoption of the Organic Regulations in the Romanian Principalities, the sanitary service and the role of quarantines underwent important transformations. Thus, a health committee, chaired by the Minister of the Interior, composed of: the great inspector, a second quarantine inspector and the great doctor (promedic), was set up in Bucharest, having the main role of supervising the state of health in the Principality and the way of organizing quarantines. Such a committee with the same attributions was also organized in Iasi, made up of the Minister of the Interior, Hatman and Protomedic. At local level,

the state of health of any country was in the prefect's care (17). The high quarantine supervision had a "chief inspector" that depended on the interior minister (18).

It must be said that during the statutory period, the importance of quarantines and the fight against epidemics has been increasing. The arrival of Mihail Sturza (1834-1848) on the throne of Moldova meant an increase of the annual budget for quarantines from 100,000 lei in 1833 (19) to 120,000 a year later. (20)

As far as the staff was concerned, if the big quarantines had two directors and a doctor, the second hand had a director and a doctor. Militia was in charge of keeping the health cord on the left of the Danube. (21) Quarantine from Sculeni was part of the second category with a director and a doctor. In August 1831 was appointed as the commissioner of the Sculeni quarantine, Mihail Hoban by the quarantine commission. (22) The quarantine doctor, whose monthly remuneration was 500 lei, had to make a considerable effort, having as its main tasks the smoking of quarantine and the checking of the patients twice a day. Failure to do so required the sanction of the direct quarantine, under whose obedience he was. (23) Likewise, the protomedic was the one who overcame the activity of doctors from all quarantines as "always being full of good remedies". (24)

In 1829, we found Dr. Ioan Zuker as doctor of quarantine at Sculeni, "doctor of medicine, older man with a lot of bending to metaphysics, good observer, righteous and right spirit" who worked in order to prevent plague. In 1834 he became a member of the e medical-naturalists' society in Iasi. (25)

The Organic Regulation of Moldova provided some measures to be followed by quarantine travelers. After the travelers arrived at the quarantine home, they were taken the

documents they had on them for check-up, after which they were asked, under vow, about the state of health and the places where they had passed. Thus, after submitting the documents to the authorities, they were subject to the doctor's visit there, and if they were healthy, a register of all the things, money and other documents that had to be sanitized, according to the quarantine rules, had to stay for several days there and "the one who will be healthy until the fourth day's seclusion, will be free, in the course of the fifth day, to take all his things and to get out of quarantine." (26)

The treatment of cholera was based on herbs and often did not work, although in a medical manuscript of 1836, besides chamomile, St. John's wort and lime teas, another remedy was "a weltd thistle infusion, also called cholera, and drink, and thou shalt be satisfied " (27)

As regards cholera, against the spread of this disease, the instructions of the Doctors' House in Iași indicated: "the dispersion, that is, the dispersal of the inhabitants through fairs and this even by police measures, the removal of the wealthy in clean air, and the poor to make barracks at places to be able to sit two or three families in each." (28)

Particular attention is paid to the materials used for smoking (disinfection). Annually, large amounts of vitriol, magnesium and salt were purchased. The latter is mixed with magnesium. (29) The quarantine committee was required to buy the materials needed for smoking, quarantines being required to periodically communicate available stocks. (30)

The Sculeni quarantine had little advantage in purchasing salt, the Sculeni fair being one of the main crossing points for exporting salt from Moldova abroad. The salt that they sent to the Sculeni scaffolding in the account of the house. Thus, on November 30, 1827, there were a total of

18 chariots; 139 drobi; 13324 ocals that were sent to the Sculeni scaffolding at the cost of 434 lei. (31)

For those who were quarantined, the hygiene rules were very strict. They had to wash their hands with a "chemical mix, called super-oxygenated mud gas." Also, the quarantine rooms were disinfected daily with a mixture of magnesium and salt dissolved in water. (32) Sometimes, a teaspoon of brimstone was added to this mixture, and then it was carried through the house, the mixture emitting a gas so that it could smell it. (33) The smokers' rooms had to be well insulated with "good doors with locks and windows with good locks". (34)

More extensive information about "smokers" at the Sculeni quarantine, we find out from an outbreak in March 1830. Thus, apart from the substances listed above, we find out that they were necessary: "salty, bran, 25 pots, 25 bowls, one bowl, 2 storks, one pair of pliers, 4 bowls, 3 locks." (35) The patients were investigated by a doctor three times a day, the latter communicating to the quarantine director the diagnostic. They were not allowed to get in touch with those outside, in order to prevent the propagation of the illness they were suffering. (36) Also, after disinfection, the clothes were kept aside for 14 days. (37) At their exit, they were released by the Sculeni quarantine office proof that they have quarantined and that they are healthy. (38) (fig 2)

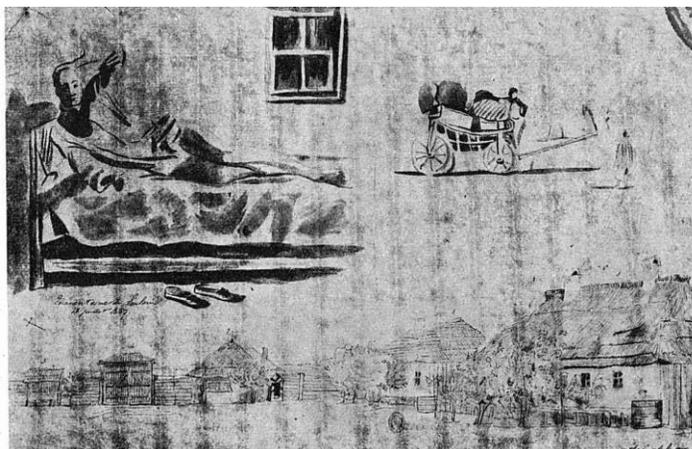


Fig. 2 *The inside of the quarantine Sculeni*  
After Auguste Raffet

In spite of these preventive measures taken by the authorities, there were cases of illnesses detected by Sculeni quarantine doctors. One of these was detected in December 1836, which "after the doctors' research and the measures used, according to the health committee's advice, untied." (39) A new case of plague was registered in June 1837, a case of plague "to an individual who was

not from our country", then isolated in a "lonely island". (40)

In 1844, Russia abolished all its quarantines on the Prut and the Danube. (41) These will be reopened in 1847 to prevent the cholera epidemic threatening Moldavia, among which the quarantine was also the one from Sculeni. (42) At that time the Sculeni quarantine had a director, a doctor and two servants. (43)

The image of the Sculeni quarantine at the beginning of the nineteenth century, made especially by the information found in the original documents, is presented to us as having a difficult evolution because of the conditions it shows, but so interesting because of the role that this was at the border of Moldavia with the Russian Empire. Also from a political point of view, we were able to notice the often delayed measures of the authorities in the management of epidemics of plague and cholera in the first part of the nineteenth century, aspect that also influenced the activity of quarantines.

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