



The Bukovina Society of the Americas NEWSLETTER

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SOCIETY NEWS & EVENTS

- The annual meeting of the Bukovina Society of the Americas, a non profit corporation in the State of Kansas will meet on Saturday, August 26, 2023 at the Society headquarters in Ellis, Kansas at 1:30 p.m. CDT
- Welcome to the new life member, #302, Kurt Leib
- Dr. William Keel, retired professor at the University of Kansas sent the following for BSA readers: Chris Johnson has placed all of their recordings on German dialects in Kansas and Missouri to KU SCHOLARWORKS. Among these are dissertations of graduate students produced over the years including Dr. Gabi Lunte's work on the German-Bohemians of the Ellis, Kansas area. See at: <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/32737>

BUKOVINA AND THE "HUMDINGER PLAGUE" OF THE 19TH CENTURY: CHOLERA

By Harieta MARECISABOL
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Introduction

The nineteenth century witnessed a series of major epidemics of influenza, typhus and typhoid fever. The smallpox and diphtheria, the most dismaying scourges of the eighteenth century, appeared to be "dispersed and isolated", controllable in part because of the vaccination. But the cholera was "something outlandish, unknown, monstrous; its tremendous ravages, so long foreseen and feared, so little to be explained, its insidious march over whole continents, its apparent defiance of all the known and conventional precautions against the spread of epidemic disease, invested it with a mystery and a terror which thoroughly took hold of the public mind, and seemed to recall the memory of the great epidemics of the Middle Ages".

Facing the disease. Historical preliminaries

Relapsing from India – the main endemic area – cholera was known in Europe during its five episodes of huge proportions, making the continent's population helpless in front of its aetiology. Severe and painful, the disease spread rapidly in communities lacking clean water supplies and sanitation. The acute symptoms of vomiting and severe abdominal cramps, followed by high or low-grade fever, dehydration, weak pulse and, ultimately, collapse by asphyxia, gave *cholera morbus* its fierce reputation. About cholera bacillus was said that produces a toxin that paralyses the circulatory system (hence the bluish-purple body's appearance of the patient).

HISTORY GROUP TOURS MUSEUM

By Guy Windholz

Thursday mornings at 10:00 AM the Kansas Room of the Hays Public Library is the scene of at least a dozen history and genealogy buffs exchanging stories and information. The coffee is fresh and hot, provided by Jeremy Gill the coordinator of the Kansas Room.

One of the first group tours was to the Ellis County Historical Society hosted by director Amanda Rupp. On May 25th, the group went to the Bukovina Society Headquarters and Museum in Ellis. The history of the Bukovina German emigration was presented in addition to time viewing artifacts. This made an opportunity for the group to also visit the other museums located in Ellis. The Railroad Museum has displays from the days when Ellis was a major rail stop for turning around the engines before the time of diesel powered locomotives. Also open for visitors was the Walter Chrysler boyhood home and museum.

scientists to identify the disease mechanism and its underlying causes. However, only toward the end of the century, in 1883, Koch was to discover the *Vibrio cholerae* and, respectively, the anti-choleric vaccine.

As the cholera's impact on human societies allows a historical overview on the characteristics of social responses to disease, the Romanian historians G. Brătescu and P. Cernovodeanu offered an analysis of the "epidemic's profile" recorded during the main crises in Romanian Principalities, based on data gathered from various sources. Several studies have also emphasized the demographic consequences, as well as the behavioural responses of Transylvania's inhabitants who were faced with the assault of this destructive disease. For Bukovina, the history of epidemics is still in its infancy. At the moment, such research is geared to long-term and meticulous research, as the information is scattered through archives, journals, parish records, memories etc. Nevertheless, this information is important to complete the province's history, reflecting not only the health matters of Bukovina, but also the impact of disease on daily routine, family life and social relations.

"Cholera riot of 1831"

Since 1831, the "Humdinger plague" – as it was called by Emanoil Grigorovitză – affected Bukovina's population, leaving an imprint in the collective mentality, quite strongly if we consider the very popular expression "*May the cholera take you!*". In fact, cholera is chronologically linked by the nineteenth century, as one of the last major outbreaks with an important demographic effect. It inspired terrifying legends, tales and stories, capturing people's imagination in various apocalyptic scenarios.

Within the Imperial Bukovina, 5 major cholera epidemic episodes could be identified; the first one was recorded in 1831, after the disease spread quickly from Russia, Galicia and Romanian Principalities. Since 1830, the imperial authorities imposed 20 days of quarantine for travellers and goods. Subsequently, the borders with the provinces of Transylvania and Moldova were closed, transforming Bukovina into a buffer zone between the Romanian Principalities and the rest of the Empire. According to Octavian Lupu, the quarantined persons could keep their bare necessities – clothing – but only after they had been disinfected. The suspected travellers had to do a warm bath, using dilute vinegar, and after some time spent in "special compartments of the hut" they could leave. If, however, the obvious signs of the disease appeared during those 20 days of quarantine, they had to repeat the usual treatment. The doctors were not allowed to touch the sick persons or their clothes; otherwise, they would have been "sentenced" to isolation. Even so, in a special publication dedicated to the centennial anniversary of the establishment of the Gymnasium of Czernowitz, the author – Professor Romuald Wurzer – stated that in 1830, the disease shortened the school year and "thanks to Almighty God", both the young students and teaching staff were spared.

In 1831 cholera broke out violently in Bukovina settlements. In Istensegits (Țibeni) the priest Kolbay János was noting that between July 26 and August 29, 71 people lost their lives due to relentless disease. The first victim was Miklós János, a 51 years old "homemaker". The communal register indicated that on the 6th of August eight people were killed by cholera. One of the families in the community lost their husband in July, and their wife and child in August. The Gergely family was decimated by cholera, and only one child – János – survived. Citing the oral tradition, Sántha Alajos writes that the persons "touched" by cholera morbus had suffered from spasms and fever, but were not allowed to consume liquids; even their "supervisors" forbade them to drink water. As "ten dead could be buried in a single day", two people from Istensegits were continuously digging graves. The deceased were carrying to the so-called "graveyard of cholera" by an ox-cart. There were no priest or relatives to accompany the dead in the cemetery; it was forbidden. The dead were placed in graves and liming. On the street, many people could be seen in mourning or bareheaded. The same author mentioned that "one, who was coming from the priest, after he announced a death in the family, was meeting a person who was going to announce another death".

An unusual feature of this epidemic was that it mostly killed adults. This explains the necrology's lyrics written by Antalfi Gergely, the cantor of Istensegits parish: "In every house there is a sick person, / Many children were left orphaned / Because their parents had died". In the study of Dr. Nandris on the "epidemiological past" of the village Anila on Cheremush, in Storojinetz County, 18 adults died during the 1831 cholera pandemic. The "maximum lethality" occurred among persons aged 41–50 years, and less among the children, typically considered the most vulnerable. One explanation may be the one that – according to researchers in medicine – the gastrointestinal disorders create a predisposition for this disease. Obviously, the provincial and local authorities imposed some restrictive health measures, such as the patient isolation in a lazaretto or a hut. Family and people who had come into contact with the contaminated person were also monitored. All citizens were required to pay attention to their own hygiene and housing, to be well dressed, and to be very careful about the meals. Indigestible foods, unripe fruits and vegetables or alcohol in excess were forbidden. In the absence of medicines, the rural world's healers used a brewage of thorn (*Xanthium Spinosum*), also called *holeră* (cholera). Children from the Bilca village wore an amulet around their neck made of a bond with pepper, garlic and brimstone. Those who did not respond to the treatment and lost their lives were buried in a hurry, in cemeteries located outside the towns/villages. In addition, the villagers had to give up to charity and habits such as "last kisses".

The second great wave of cholera epidemic broke out in Bukovina in the summer of 1848. About this episode, historian R. F. Kaindl has noted in his book *Die Bukowina in den Jahren*

1848 und 1849 the following: “Whether the situation in Bukovina could be called worrying because of the political events, it became desperate because of calamities that have befallen on the province: cholera, drought, the second great wave of cholera epidemic broke out in Bukovina in the crops destroyed by locusts”. In Ion Grămadă’s sketch, the natural disasters have been listed in reverse chronological order: locusts, drought/ famine, cholera. In the summer of 1848, large swarms of locusts were coming “along with the warm winds that blow from below” On that day, when the locusts arose “was a great heat, you could not walk barefoot on the road, for the dust was burning. Here, however, without warning, the sun became dark indeed, and people heard, through the air, crackles similar to the sound of a dry cane, trampled underfoot; above, heavy clouds of locusts passed toward Siret, Prut and Dniester valleys, where they destroyed, with the ground, the last remnants of crops ... Because of drought – it had not rained for a long time – and locusts, a famine erupted. Especially in Northern Bukovina people ate, for months, polenta with acorns, ground and mixed with sawdust. As a drink, they drank boiled water with corncobs. For days, they roamed the plains, looking for sorrel, and in forests, for acorns”. In addition to all these misfortunes, “cholera come to destroy what was left of the famine” times.

According to the same author, the terrible disease “broke out first in Galicia, where it spread like lightning to Bukovina. The hot winds were carrying the disease germs all over the country”. In the story of István Fazekas’ grandmother, a Jewish traveling salesman was blamed for bringing cholera to the community. Coming from Czernowitz, he went around the village, “selling little things from door to door: needles, threads, coloured tape, peacock feathers, beads”. In the evenings he returned to shopkeeper Herskowitz’s stable to sleep, but after three days he moved on to Andrásfalva or Istensegits. Shortly, the shopkeeper’s only daughter, fell ill and a few days later, the girl died. Even the salesman was found dead near the neighbouring village of Fratautz, and “the people took him for the importer of the infection”. It seems that one of the Bukovinian cities most affected by cholera was Suceava, where “one in every two persons died, even children”. In his work about *Bukovina in 1848-1849*, Grămadă wrote: “the grave diggers walked through the town with their black carts, from house to house, asking if there are sick or dead in the family, to be removed from among the healthy members. To avoid contamination, some specific techniques were employed to avert the disease: the fumigation with beef manure or/and dried herbs, and the bucket with water, placed at the entrance of the house. The fumigation is also mentioned in the letter of Constantin Hurmuzaki addressed to his parents: “this is why I made a smokehouse for papers, and imposed quarantine in all villages. If the disease is not sticky, these will not hurt, but if it is sticky, they are useful”. The contagious nature of cholera has led some Moldavians to seek refuge in Bukovina. In his *Souvenirs*, George Sion recalled the image of a besieged Czernowitz, where “every night, the deceased were picked up by some carts approved by Police, and transported out of town to a place designed for the burial

of those who died of cholera”. Curiosity to see the cemetery had provided the eyewitness with a “tremendous and fierce scene! There were four holes. Each of them contained 20 to 25 bodies: men, women, young, old, children, all naked, tossed without any respect for their humanity, as the dirtiest garbage!” The city health service could not cope with the situation, as it is illustrated by the dialog between the author and the hotel’s owner. He was “worried because of those travellers who have died in his hotel, attacked by cholera. Even yesterday – he added – a lady came from Moldova, and cholera hit her last night... - But, have you brought any doctor? – Here goes! Where can you find doctors? I have sent three times to Dr. X, and I could not find him anywhere!”

Fear of contamination made the two heroes of the story, Sion and his comrade – Epureanu, to leave the town in a hurry, hoping to reach Cernauca by “a cart with a horse hitched to the drawbar, after the Galician manner”. Only that the ordinary conversation between the Jew cart-man and passengers increased the panic: “My companion asked the Jew about his daily earning. He said that since the cholera, he earns more, for carrying the dead to the cemetery and getting on each body 25 creițari (crowns) from *Magistrate* (City Hall). On this occasion, he said that he loaded 10-12 corpses; then he showed us the blood that bemired the cart’s crowbar. Then, my friend Epureanu began to roar asking to stop the cart, and jumping from it he shouted at me to come down quickly: for cart being caught [contaminated], we could find ourselves with cholera.” Unfortunately, the Moldavian refugees who spent several hours in a village quarantine – being fumigated with dung smoke “just like hams” – couldn’t escape the danger, because “after about ten days, cholera came in Cernauca”. Guests and hosts – Hurmuzaki family – decided to leave the domain and head “toward the Dorna Mountains”, from there some went to Vienna or Paris, and other (such as Sion and Carol Mikuli) to Lăpușna. The oral tradition and information from the article of Stefania Riedl Ruczkowski bring to mind the Reichardt family drama. Coming to Bukovina from the Bohemian Forest in 1835 along with other 29 families, this family “was hit particularly hard, losing many of its members”. Even the immigrant couple, Christoph and Magdalena – the co-founders of village Bori – lost their lives during the cholera epidemic in 1848.

Beside memories mentioned above, the statistics show the size of the epidemic outbreak in 1848. During that summer, the Siret district was severely affected by cholera; in Vășcăuți village, 195 lost their lives. It is estimated that in just one month, the population of Siret decreased from 3,640 to 3,329 inhabitants, the city losing one in four people infected with *Vibrio cholerae*. In a note inserted in the pages of the oldest regional Australian newspaper “The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser” (obviously, the information had been taken from other sources, similar reference being found in the Irish newspaper “*Cork Harbour examiner*”) it is mentioned that, according to the official medical reports, from the 18th to the 20th August 1848, “115 new cases have occurred, while of the

123 under treatment, 72 recovered, 11 died, and 42 were still under treatment. At Czernowitz there have been 25 cases, 8 died, only one recovered, and 17 are still under treatment. In very many other towns, the cholera has appeared, and is carrying off numerous victims". According to Christian Geier chronology, in Czernowitz, nearly 1,200 inhabitants of almost 20,000 lost their lives during the 1848 pandemic. The next epidemic assault occurred in Bukovina in 1853, but the information is poorer compared to that of 1848. It is known, however, that outbreaks of cholera recorded in the autumn of 1853 in Galicia – as "Gazeta de Moldavia" announced, citing a newspaper from Lvov – favoured the spread of plague in Bukovina, at Sadagura, Cuciurman (probably Cuciurul Mare) and Costăpa (probably Costâna), near Suceava. This time, the Austrian authorities have identified the origin of the disease in the "major dietary mistakes".

The epidemic episodes of 1865-1866 were more dramatic; then, the pandemic spread from the ports at Danube to Fălticeni and Dorohoi, passing the "Cordon" to Bukovina. In 1865, for example, a new cemetery was consecrated at Istensegits, under the "Kopacz hill", called later "the graveyard of those with cholera". Citing the Presl's statistics, Friedrich Prinzing wrote that 11,656 of 522,481 inhabitants of Bukovina, at 31 December 1866, had died from cholera. Bukovina itself was considered by Weichselbaum as a "gateway" for the "killing disease", soldiers carrying it with them to the western provinces of the Austrian Empire.

In Mitocul Dragomirnei, the cholera epidemic of 1866 claimed 12 victims, causing panic and fear among locals; in Ilisesti were affected both villagers and Russian soldiers from an army, marching toward Hungary; the bodies were buried between the garden of Forgaci and that of Sauer. Of approximately 34,000 inhabitants of Czernowitz, 1,182 died in 1866 from cholera. In his work, Grigorovitză remembered that in the province's capital, all schools had their classes suspended "from Pentecost until the end of June", while in the city "scary things" were happening: "The carts, filled with dead bodies were passing through the hospital's gates, heading to an empty place, where today stands the government palace [...] father Leon Popescu getting out of his cottage [...] with the stole around his neck and the cross in his hand, was saying a quick prayer, sprinkling the deceased with holy water". Shortly after that, carts hurried to the cemetery. Like in the Sion's *Souvenir*, Grigorovitză described the sinister rite practiced by grave diggers, those who, in a common grave, "quickly threw men, women, one above the other, inwards, as a layer. Then, from some large cauldrons, they poured boiling lime over the bodies, until no more black faces, nor shaggy hair of dead could be seen. And there was another row of bodies and another layer of lime. On witnesses' cheeks, as well as on the grave-diggers' could not be seen any evidence of pity or sorrow. It seemed that everyone was accustomed to death and anyone was expecting its turn..." It is interesting to observe that, while some funerals were done in a hurry, keeping the rules established by the imperial officials, the

wealthy persons, such as Ilincu, arranged large public funeral services. Their family and friends of the deceased ignored the danger of contamination, and the "absence of someone from neighbours would have been the biggest shame". So, nobody believed that one could catch the "humdinger and inextricable disease that lurked in those who were accompanying the dead to the cemetery, as well as those who were returning from there".

As far as the treatment, the same author mentioned the "Russian doctors" or "malaburnicii" – some "clothing sellers from Russian Nouasulita" – who were trying to heal the sick persons by "rubbing their naked bodies. Many were healed in this way; especially the Jews paid fifty coins (sorocoveți), if the patient gets out alive". Obviously, such a therapy was not always successful, as happened in the case of one poor old man" who died, although being "rubbed (...) until the skin was removed completely off his body. In Măneuți (Andrăsfalva) village, "in vain, they chose two people to give a massage to those affected by spasms, in vain they gave them salty garlic salt to eat; cholera took with it many un-lived lives". In the case of Grigorovitză's grandmother – touched by the deadly disease immediately after her returning from the neighbour's funeral – the family didn't call the Russian healers (*malaburnicii*), but "all the physicians in town", who "rescued the poor old woman from certain death". According to the same source, in Czernowitz, in 1866 a new graveyard was opened "because of increasing numbers of deceased". Out of town, "in a distant place, at night, all that could be seen were the fierce redness of the torches, fidgeting on the black sky". A similar situation is recorded in Mitocul Dragomirnei, where the dead of cholera were buried "in a separate cemetery, outside the village. Today the place is not precisely known, although it was marked by the *Cholera Cross*". Even if in Dornești the number of victims was not as high as in other villages or towns, the tradition recalls the "Cholera Graveyard". Later on, that site was ploughed, but the locals keep its memory alive.

In the fifth cholera pandemic (1881-1896), the 1892-1895 part of the epidemic costs more lives in Bukovina. Starting with 1892, "Gazeta Bucovinei" warned that the "destructive and deadly enemy, Asiatic cholera" was coming "from Russia", threatening both the "country and kingdom". In the first instance, the solution for preventing the disease from being spread was the establishment of quarantine. Nevertheless, in his *Treaty of public hygiene and health police*, Dr. Iacob Felix mentioned that: "while at the Conference of the International Health, in Constantinople, in 1866, the quarantines have been considered as primary prophylactic measures, at the Conference in Vienna in 1874, the simple health observation equalized the quarantine, and at the conference in Rome in 1885, the health observation became more important than the quarantine".

However, the quarantine establishment was considered not just a social imperative, but also a civic and political duty: "From the Eastern edge of the kingdom, we are called and ought, in

the first line, to protect ourselves from this enemy, to stop and reject it to exempt the people of the country and monarchy. The Government and autonomous dignities have staged all those measures which give us the results of scientific research and experiments that have been made to forbid the entrance, contamination and extension of the epidemic and to combat and eradicate it”.

Although in his study, for 1893, Dr. Iacob Felix declared that “no cases of cholera have been announced in Bukovina”, in August, the disease “occurred in Herța and in other four villages in the vicinity of town, imported from Bukovina”; some infected persons from the “contaminated village Hliboca” have crossed frontiers between pickets, stealthily, by night. Despite the fact that provincial authorities had not established the quarantine or “the health inspection for travellers coming from Galitia”, the Romanian state closed the “Austrian-Hungarian border entry point, from Mamornița to Vârciorova, excepting the health inspection and disinfection resorts from Mamornița, Michăileni, Burdujeni, Predeal, Vârciorova”.

According to the map of Basil Kluczenko and Ludwig Kamen, in 1893, the Bukovina’s settlements affected by cholera have been divided into three categories: 1) localities where cholera was found (Herța, Boian, Horecea, Orăseni, and Dorosăuți); 2) localities where cholera was brought from outside the settlements (Hliboca); 3) localities where cholera was not reported, but some causes of death being marked as *cholera* (Fântâna Albă). The sanitary authorities have concluded that they are dealing with “an ambulatory cholera”, and its transmission does not attract the attention of doctors in charge of epidemiological surveillance of the territory. It was emphasized the role of drinking water, as a vehicle of germs, and it was decided that the transport infection occurred through food, shoes or contaminated laundry and even through dirty hands”. Some editors sought medical glory by publishing papers on alleged therapies. In the *Calendar for year 1884*, published by Calistrat Coca, it was recommended, as a miracle-remedy, a powder made from the boiled crayfish eyes. In addition, the famous “water cure” of the Viennese professor Winternitz has mainly consisted of “water drinking, two or three spoonfuls of soup every two to three minutes, application of wet compresses and rubbing with a bed sheet, soaked in cold water”. Obviously, after 1900 (especially during First World War) a number of cases of cholera were reported in Bukovina’s villages. However, the measures of “health observation”, of improvement and prevention started to show their positive effects and benefits.

Conclusions

The measures against cholera, used by Austrian Empire to implement the sanitary regulations and to prevent the spread of epidemic, led to organizing a better control over Bukovina. By the end of the century, the health policy becomes an embodiment of the provincial authorities’ agenda. While the Austrian Court played the role of initiators, “constructors” and

supervisors of health policy in Bukovina, the local elite had to shape and adapt it to the local realities, affecting, more or less, some of the aspects of private life.

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