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From Crisis Management towards a Mediterranean Model?

Maritime Quarantine in the Austrian Netherlands, c. 1720-1795

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Most historians agree that quarantine practices in the Mediterranean Sea played a pivotal role in the disappearance of plague from Western Europe. Although maritime quarantine originated in the Middle Ages, its importance increased during the seventeenth and eighteenth century when centralising states, guided by 'populationist' ideas of statecraft doctrines like mercantilism, began to develop and enforce isolation periods more elaborately. While extensive scholarship has explored maritime quarantine in Mediterranean port cities, little attention has been paid to the harbours of northwestern Europe. This study aims to fill this gap by examining maritime quarantine practices in the Austrian Netherlands during the eighteenth century. I survey measures taken in the region's coastal area between 1715 and 1795 and examine if these precautions were influenced by theories of statecraft or prophylactic policy evolutions in the Mediterranean world. I argue that central involvement in maritime quarantine increased during the eighteenth century, driven by the growing influence of populationism in government circles as well as a heightened focus on commercial development.

De meeste historici zijn het erover eens dat ziektewerende maatregelen in de havensteden rond de Middellandse Zee een belangrijke rol speelden in het verdwijnen van de pest uit West-Europa. Hoewel maritieme quarantaine zijn oorsprong had in de middeleeuwen, werd de praktijk belangrijker tijdens de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw. In die periode begonnen centraliserende staten, geïnspireerd door de ideeën van het populationisme in staatstheorieën, zoals het mercantilisme, isolatieperiodes in havensteden steeds beter te organiseren en af te dwingen. Hoewel maritieme quarantaine in het Middellandse Zeegebied al grondig werd onderzocht, is dat niet het geval voor de havens van noordwestelijk

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Europa. In deze studie wil ik dit bijstellen door maritieme quarantaine in de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden tijdens de achttiende eeuw te onderzoeken. Ik geef een overzicht van de maatregelen die genomen werden in de kuststreek van de Zuidelijke Nederlanden tussen 1715 en 1795 en onderzoek of die voorzorgen beïnvloed werden door staatkundige theorieën of evoluties in ziektewerende maatregelen in het Middellandse Zeegebied. Ik suggereer dat de betrokkenheid van de centrale overheid toenam gedurende de achttiende eeuw, zowel als gevolg van de toenemende invloed van populationisme in regeringskringen als van de groeiende aandacht voor commerciële ontwikkeling.

Introduction

On 5 October 1779, captain Gerrit Claassen left the port of Ostend in the Austrian Netherlands in order to deliver a cargo of wool and tobacco in Genoa and Livorno. After a strenuous journey, he finally arrived in Genoa on 26 November. In a letter sent back to Ostend, Claassen reported on what happened to him and his crew:

> At *Lizard* Point I was robbed by a Dover Privateer, who broke the Hatches and emptied and took with him three Cases and two Bales; on 28 October, at Cape *Finisterre*, I was visited by an American Privateer who treated me well; on the 29th I was boarded by two French Men-of-war; on the 30th, two Spanish Royal Frigates have opened a Barrel of Tobacco and stole a large part of it, together with the silver Buckles of the Mate; on 13 November two other Spanish Men-of-war have taken an amount of Tobacco; and on the 18th, I was visited by an Ottoman [privateer], which is the reason why I have to hold *Quarantine* for 21 days.[1]

The numerous encounters with privateers and warships mentioned by Claassen were a result of the international turmoil caused by the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), and were quite exceptional. The forced detention in Genoa after contact with Ottoman subjects, however, was not (see Figure 1). Although ports in the Mediterranean Sea had been developing

1 *Gazette van Gendt*, 20 December 1779: "Aen de Kap *Lezard* ben ik bestolen geworden door eenen Douverschen Kaper, die met geweld de Luyken opengebroken hebbende, dry Kassen en twee Baelen ledig gemaekt en mede-genomen heeft; den 28. October hebbe ik ontrent de Kap *Finis-Terrae* door eenen Americaenschen Kaper bezocht en wel behandeld geweest; den 29 hebbe ik aen boord gehad twee Fransche Oorlogs-Schepen; den 30. hebben twee Spaensche Koninglyke Fregatten een Vat Tabak opengeslagen en een groot deel daer uyt gestolen, benevens de zilvere Gespen van den Stierman; den 13. November hebben twee Spaensche Oorlog-Schepen ook een deel Tabak mede-genomen; en den 18. hebbe ik bezocht geweest door eenen Turk, het welk de oorzaeke is, dat ik gedurende 21. dagen moet *Quarantaine* houden".

▲

Figure 1. Drawing of the Genoa lazaretto published in John Howard's book *An account of the principal lazarettos in Europe* (Warrington 1789). © Wellcome Collection, Public domain, GM 1601, ESTC T115289.

health institutions and infrastructure to combat outbreaks of bubonic plague since the Middle Ages, quarantine became more strictly enforced during the seventeenth and eighteenth century.[2] This latter century marked the evolution towards what Alex Chase-Levenson has called a system of 'universal quarantine', aimed at the Ottoman Empire, where plague had become endemic. Regardless of whether there was an actual epidemic going on, every ship coming from northern Africa or the Middle East was forced to perform quarantine.[3] A similar *cordon sanitaire* was gradually established on the 1,600-kilometer-long border of the Ottoman Empire with the Austrian Empire after 1728.[4] Therefore, scholars have often deemed the expansion of centrally directed quarantine measures (both maritime and ashore) and other institutional action crucial to the disappearance of plague from western Europe during the eighteenth century.[5]

Even if Claassen had never been in the Mediterranean prior to his journey to Genoa, the concept of quarantine would not have been alien to him. After all, in North Sea and Channel ports as well, maritime quarantine was frequently imposed by port authorities in case of news of an epidemic. Despite this, historians have devoted less attention to prophylactic measures in northwestern European ports and coastal regions than those in Mediterranean ports. The limited studies at hand on northern precautions against plague have generally assessed that they were implemented more slowly than in southern Europe, and if installed at all, were temporary, ad

2 George Rosen, *A History of Public Health* (JHU Press 1993 [1958]) 85-87. DOI: https://doi.org/10.56021/9780801846458; Michael Flinn, 'Plague in Europe and the Mediterranean Countries', *Journal of European Economic History* 8 (1979) 143-144; Dorothy Porter, 'Introduction', in: Dorothy Porter (ed.), *The History of Public Health and the Modern State* (Rodopi 1994) 5-8. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004418363; Dorothy Porter, *Health, Civilization and the State. A History of Public Health from Ancient to Modern Times* (Routledge 1999) 48-53; Mark Harrison, *Contagion. How Commerce has Spread Disease* (Yale University Press 2012) 11-15.

3 Daniel Panzac, *Quarantaines et Lazarets. L'Europe et la peste d'Orient (XVII^e-XX^e siècles)* (Edisud 1986); Alex Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag. Quarantine and the British Mediterranean World, 1780-1860* (Cambridge University Press 2020) 1-24. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108751773.

4 Gunther Rothenberg, 'The Austrian Sanitary Cordon and the Control of the Bubonic Plague, 1710-1871', *Journal of the History of Medicine* 28:1 (1973) 15-23. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/XXVIII.1.15.

5 Paul Slack, 'The Disappearance of Plague: An Alternative View', *The Economic History Review* 34:3 (1981) 469-476. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0289.1981.tb02081.x; Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag*, 278-281; Jean-Noël Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste en France et dans les pays européens et méditerranéens. Tome II: les hommes face à la peste* (Mouton 1976) 174-175; Guido Alfani and Tommy Aurphy, 'Plague and Lethal Epidemics in the Pre-Industrial World', *The Journal of Economic History* 77:1 (2017) 327-329. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050717000092; Porter, *Health, Civilization and the State*, 41-42.

hoc, and had to make do without elaborate quarantine infrastructure. Only when northwestern administrations became increasingly interested in quarantine measures during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, studies have shown, discrepancies between northern and southern countermeasures diminished.[6]

The heightening attention for maritime quarantine in both northern and southern Europe went hand in hand with growing concerns over population levels among European governments. Scholars such as George Rosen have linked this development to the emergence of the modern centralised state and early modern statecraft theories like mercantilism, which aimed to enhance the power of the state. While mercantilism is famously associated with the promotion of trade surpluses as the basis of state power, it was also concerned about the general welfare of society. A large and healthy population was seen as a source of military and economic strength, so the sovereign should promote all factors that fostered population growth while combating those that curbed it, such as disease. In the Habsburg Empire, this 'populationism' was an important part of cameralism, the specific German form of mercantilism. It was also central to enlightened absolutism, which cast the monarch in the role of protecting parent of the people.[7] By imposing maritime quarantine and other sanitary cordons, the central administration could protect the enlightened state and its population from epidemic intrusion. Indeed, as quarantine was a way to ward off epidemics and consequently maintain population size, Dorothy Porter and Mark Harrison have identified a clear link between the populationist ideas of mercantilism and cameralism and the ever stricter

6 William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Oxford 1976) 171-172; Norbert Schneeloch, '"Praecautien tegens de Pest". Pestgefahr in Den Vereinigten Niederlanden 1720-1722', *Economisch- en Sociaal-Historisch Jaarboek* 40:1 (1977) 26-47; Françoise Hildesheimer, 'La protection sanitaire des côtes françaises au XVIII[e] siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 27:3 (1980) 466. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/rhmc.1980.1108; Danielle Bourgois, 'Les Provinces Unies, les mesures contre la peste et le commerce dans la région baltique, 1709-1715', in: W.G. Heeres and J.A. Faber (eds.), *From Dunkirk to Danzig. Shipping and Trade in the North Sea and the Baltic, 1350-1850. Essays in Honour of J.A. Faber: on the Occasion of his Retirement as professor of Economic and Social History at the University of Amsterdam* (Verloren 1988) 191-202; William Naphy and Andrew Spicer, *De pest. De Zwarte Dood in Europa* (Amsterdam 2000) 65-71; Peter Christensen, '"In These Perilous Times": Plague and Plague Policies in Early Modern Denmark', *Medical History* 47:1 (2003) 432-434. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300057331; John Booker, *Maritime Quarantine. The British Experience, c. 1650-1900* (Aldershot 2007); Harrison, *Contagion*, 11-15.

7 Rosen, 'Cameralism and the concept of medical police', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 27:1 (1953) 21-24; Rosen, *A History*, 85-87; Rosen, 'Mercantilism and health policy in eighteenth-century French thought', *Medical History* 3:4 (1959) 259-277. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300024789; Porter, *Health, Civilization and the State*, 48-60.

enforcement of maritime quarantine during the seventeenth and eighteenth century.[8]

In this article, I aim to bridge the gap in knowledge between northern and southern maritime quarantine by examining practices in the Austrian Netherlands during the eighteenth century. I re-evaluate the general image and evolution of northern precautions against plague and other epidemic diseases in port towns. As elsewhere in northwestern Europe, maritime quarantine in the Southern Netherlands has suffered from a lack of scholarly interest, with Muls' study of almost a century ago as a notable exception.[9] Nevertheless, the Austrian Netherlands presents a very interesting case study. On the one hand, it was a region geographically located in northern Europe with a strong tradition of urban particularism, and thus on paper prone to limited countermeasures. On the other hand, between 1715 and 1795, it was part of the Habsburg Empire, a polity which, through the ideas and policies of cameralism, attempted to pursue a politics of centralisation in its Lowland provinces and had centuries of experience with quarantine practices, both in its Adriatic and Mediterranean harbours and along the Habsburg-Ottoman border. Both characteristics would suggest a more elaborate quarantine policy in the Austrian Netherlands as well.

First, I survey the sanitary measures towards vessels that were imposed during epidemic crises in the country's two sea ports, Ostend and Nieuport, between 1720 and 1795. I additionally explore how disease prevention measures materialised in the wider coastal area of the Austrian Netherlands. Next, I examine if, how, and why quarantine practices and infrastructure in the Austrian Netherlands evolved towards a Mediterranean model during the latter half of the century. Then, I estimate the scale of quarantine measures in the Austrian Netherlands and assess its economic and sanitary impact on the region. Finally, I evaluate the agency and motivations of the central administration in organising sanitary cordons, and I assess relations with subaltern levels of government. I argue that eighteenth-century 'populationist' ideas as well as economic rationales underpinned quarantine measures in the coastal area of the Austrian Netherlands.

To do so, I employ a complementary set of legal sources, institutional sources, and newspaper reports. This approach was chosen for both pragmatic and strategic reasons. The loss of the city and admiralty archives of Ostend, the Austrian Netherlands' main (quarantine) port, during World War II

8 Porter, *Health, Civilization and the State*, 51-53; Harrison, *Contagion*, 36-37.

9 G. Muls, 'La prophylaxie de la peste en Belgique sous le gouvernement de Charles de Lorraine', *Mémoires couronnés et autres mémoires publiés par l'Académie royale de médecine de Belgique* 24:1 (1929) 3-35. This article aims to extend Muls' opening study by adopting a wider chronological scope, including more source material, and placing the Austrian Netherlands in an international context.

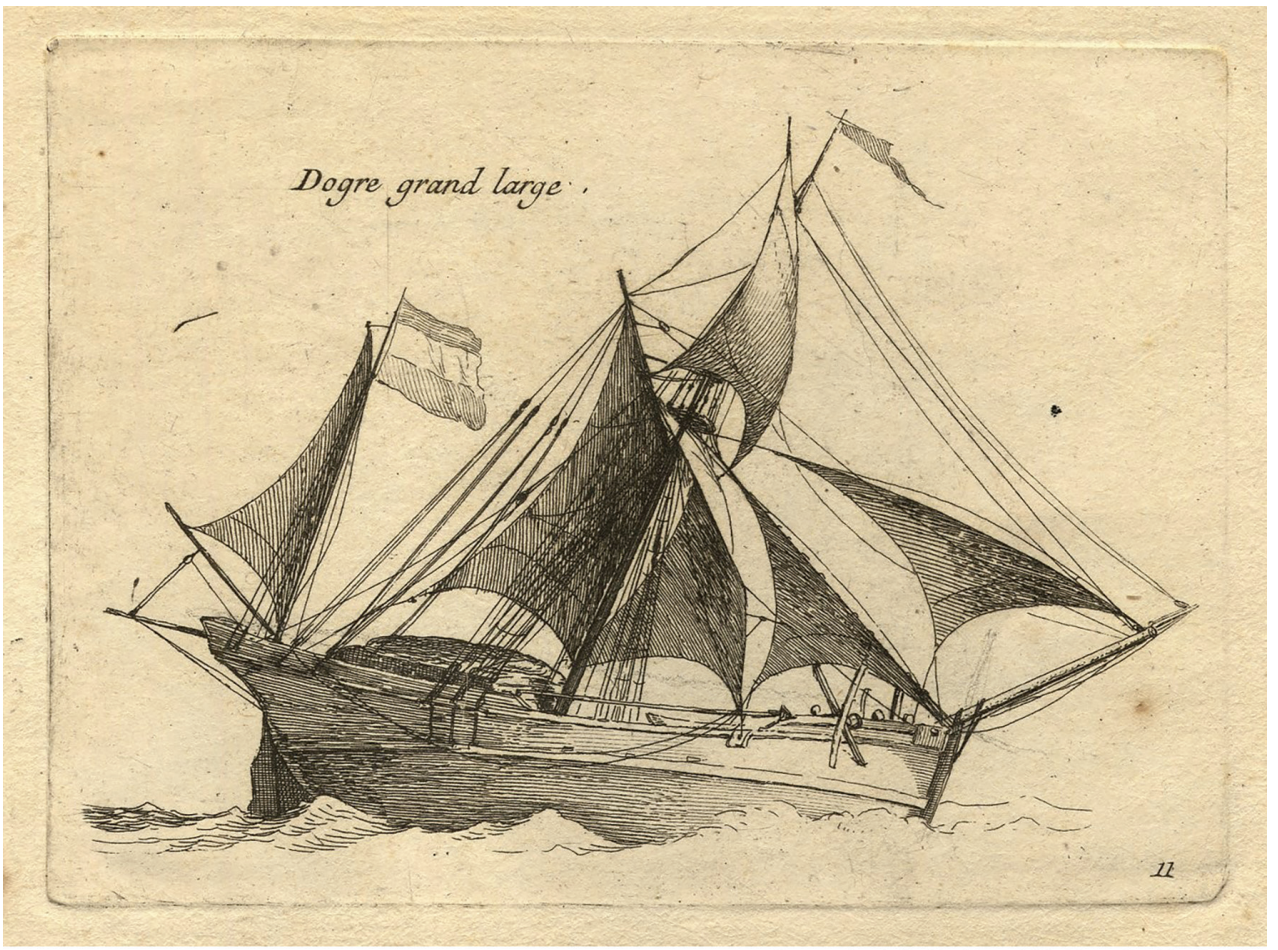

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Figure 2. A large dogger, the same type of ship as the *Two Brothers*. Drawn by Pierre Ozanne around 1813 © Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, ark:/12148/btv1b105682709.

necessitated the use of alternative sources. At the same time, the adoption of a varied and often overlapping set of material allows me to cross-check information and identify potential author biases.

Crisis management in the sea ports

On the early morning of 4 November 1757, the *Two Brothers*, an Austrian Netherlands' ship, arrived just outside the port of Locmaria on the small French island of Belle-Île-en-Mer (see Figure 2). The ship had left Ostend on 17 October to deliver fish, flax, and yeast to Nantes. Entering the Bay of Biscay, however, the *Two Brothers* had encountered fierce winds which had sent the vessel off-course all the way to Spain before the crew could finally regain their original path. At Belle-Île, Pieter Feliers, the 28-year old captain, intended to hire a pilot to navigate his ship safely into the Loire River. As was customary, the *Two Brothers* hoisted a flag indicating their need for a pilot. Hours passed, and soon a whole day, but no pilot appeared. Out of desperation, Feliers and two of his men finally decided to row to shore in order to fetch a pilot themselves – an attempt which they only barely survived, as violent waves shattered the sloop on Belle-Île's rocky shores. After reaching Locmaria, the three men learnt that a plague epidemic in Lisbon had caused the town to ignore them. To safeguard the country from contagion, the French government had swiftly banned all contact with foreign vessels.[10]

If Feliers had set sail from Ostend scarcely ten days later, he would not have been surprised (and almost killed) by the staunch health measures put in place by the French government. In the Austrian Netherlands' port cities, too, policies to curb the import of epidemic disease similar to those in France were installed in 1757. As Table 1 shows, they were repeated at least one time every decade during the eighteenth century.

What were these specific measures implemented in Ostend and Nieuport to prevent the spread of epidemic diseases? First of all, as described above, Austrian Netherlands' pilots and fishermen were prohibited from boarding foreign vessels, even in emergency situations.[11] Additionally, a vessel was stationed in front of Ostend and Nieuport, manned with pilots or unemployed fishermen who would interrogate incoming merchant vessels day and night.[12] This practice was also customary in the Channel ports of

10 The National Archives (UK), High Court of Admiralty, nr. 32/247/2.

11 *Gazette van Gendt*, 26.11.1770; National Archives Belgium (henceforth NAB), Privy Council (henceforth PC), nr. 1231, Letter from deputy John Porter (6 January 1771); NAB, PC, nr. 1231, Letter from the Ostend city council (11 December 1770); State Archives Bruges (henceforth SAB), Franc of Bruges: Bundles (henceforth FOB:B), nr. 755, Letter from governor-general Charles Alexander of Lorraine (23 December 1752).

12 State Archives Ghent (henceforth SAG), States of Flanders (henceforth SOF), nr. 11080, Letter from the Nieuport city council (16 December 1793).

Location of epidemic	Year
Ottoman Empire	1731, 1751-52, 1770-72, 1780-82, 1787-88, 1789
Southern France	1720-21
Messina/Naples	1743, 1751-52, 1764
Portugal	1757
Greece	1754
Eastern Europe	1770-72
North America	1783-84, 1793-94

Table 1. Adoption of quarantine measures in the Austrian Netherlands, 1720-1795.

Source: Paul Verhaegen, Louis Prosper Gachard and Jules de le Court, *Recueil des ordonnances des Pays-Bas autrichiens* (Brussels 1860-1942) (henceforth ROPBA) 17 October 1720, 1 August 1743, 28 September 1751, 2 August 1752, 18 November 1754, 27 October 1757, 4 October 1764, 13 August 1770, 19 September 1770, 27 October 1770, 19 November 1770, 13 December 1770, 2 November 1771, 12 October 1778, 29 January 1781, 29 June 1787; State Archives Ghent (SAG), States of Flanders (SOF), nr. 11080; National Archives Belgium (NAB), Privy Council (PC), nr. 1230/B.

France, but unknown to the port cities of the Mediterranean, making it the most notable difference in sanitary measures between northern and southern European ports, according to Françoise Hildesheimer.[13] When a merchantman approached, the pilots were ordered to question the captain about his place of origin, his past communications at sea, and the health status of his crew. As a proof of the latter, the crew were to appear on deck in full, to allow comparison with the official muster list. If the questionnaire produced any information that raised suspicion about the health of the ship, the pilots were ordered to hoist a red flag, while an imperial flag was raised if the vessel was deemed safe to enter the port.[14] Understandably so, the interviews at sea did not always go seamlessly. In October 1780, for instance, the *Galleon of Amsterdam* attempted to enter Ostend during a heavy storm. Due to the severe weather, the pilots misunderstood that the *Galleon* was coming from 'Salou', a small port town near Barcelona, instead of the actual 'Salonique' (Thessaloniki), which was a possibly contaminated region. Only when the ship was already in port, the authorities realised their mistake and sent the *Galleon* into quarantine still.[15]

Usually the deciding factor was the perceived 'infected' origin of an arriving ship. Vessels hailing from the epicentre of an epidemic were usually banned outright, such as the *Ambitious* in 1720, which came from

13 Hildesheimer, 'Protection', 467.

14 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 316, Letter from the Nieuport city council (25 September 1720); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 316, Letter from the Ostend city council (25 September 1720); SAG, SOF, nr. 11079, Instructions for the ship guarding the port of Nieuport (8 November 1788).

15 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter from the Ostend city council (9 November 1780).

plague-ridden Marseille. Those coming from neighbouring territories were often subject to quarantine. This contaminated region was often very broadly interpreted in legal regulations. For example, during a plague epidemic on Sicily in 1764, every ship coming from the Mediterranean was obliged to quarantine.[16] Sometimes targeted regions had no relation to the site of infection whatsoever, but presented a risk because insufficient sanitary measures had been taken there (i.e. retaliatory quarantines, cf. infra). When a captain received the judgement of the red flag, he was asked to agree to a quarantine. If he did, an additional blue flag was hoisted to communicate the decision to the shore, and the ship was led to an isolated part of the port.[17] If red flag vessels attempted to reach the regular docks, they would be sunk immediately. This was no empty threat: when in 1720 the aforementioned *Ambitious* tried to enter the harbour of Ostend, the vessel was fired upon by cannons on the city walls and forced to retreat.[18] In 1781, Ostend had to deal with a recalcitrant ship, the Venetian *Nostra Signora del Rosario*. The ship was liable to quarantine, but refused to do so, nor to leave the port. Violence was discouraged by the Ostend authorities, however, as the ship would render the port inaccessible if sunk.[19]

In Ostend, vessels suspected of being infected were directed to the Gouweloze Creek (see Figure 3).[20] There the crews were guarded on both sides by soldiers, often disabled veterans of the local regiment.[21] While far from an ideal location, the Gouweloze Creek was the best available option for most of the century. The creek was relatively isolated from the regular docks and the local population, and shipping traffic towards Bruges did not have to pass through it. On the other hand, ships condemned to quarantine first had to pass through the entire port before they could reach the creek. Additionally, the shallow depth of the Gouweloze Creek meant that potentially infected vessels arriving during low tide inevitably mixed with regular ships while waiting to enter the creek.[22] Larger vessels were unable to enter it safely at all, and had to quarantine at the salt docks (see Figure 3) – dangerous still, as

16 *Gazette van Gendt*, 20 September 1764.

17 SAG, SOF, nr. 11079, Instructions for the ship guarding the port of Nieuport (8 November 1788).

18 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 713, Letter from the Ostend city council (16 October 1720).

19 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter from the Ostend city council (8 October 1781).

20 *Gazette van Gendt*, 4 October 1770; SAG, SOF, nr. 11077, Precautions taken by the Privy Council regarding the plague (17 December 1770); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter from the States of Flanders (18 November 1743). In 1793, one ship was detained at 'De Ham', near the entrance of the port, SAG, SOF, nr. 11080, Letter from the Ostend city council (15 December 1793). As no traces of quarantined ships were found for Nieuport before 1785, it is unclear where these performed quarantine, if at all.

21 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 349/1, Letter from deputy John Porter (5 October 1770).

22 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter from the Ostend city council (31 January 1782).

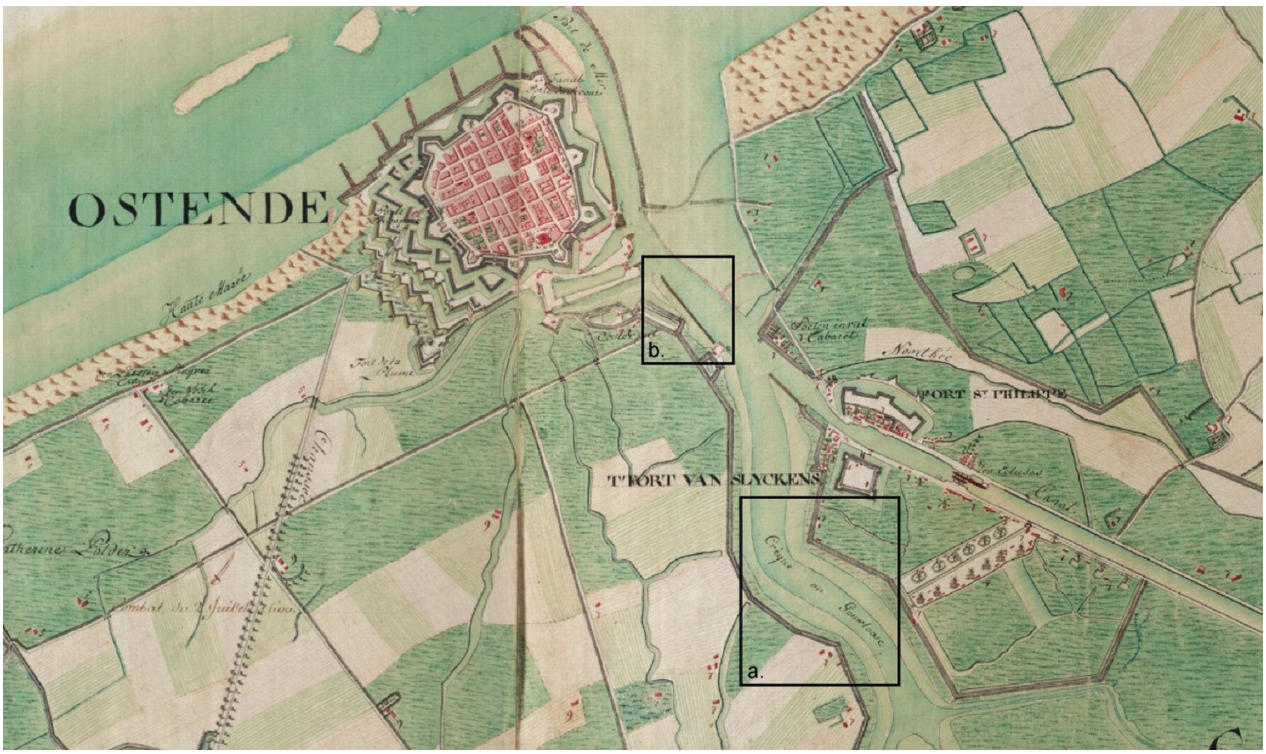

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Figure 3. The city of Ostend as depicted on the Ferraris map, c. 1773. Visible are the Gouweloze Creek (a.) and the salt docks (b.), where ships performed quarantine. © Royal Library of Belgium (KBR). Manuscript IV 5.627.

'healthy' ships from southern Europe delivered their cargoes of salt there.[23] The lack of docks in the creek meant that ships were exposed to the elements and risked collision with the banks during storms. Finally, the area was swarmed by local fishermen, whose activities could be restricted only to a limited extent without harming their livelihoods.[24]

At the quarantine site, the town officials collected crew, passenger, and cargo lists, as well as bills of health. Conceived and since long used in the Mediterranean, bills of health were official certificates issued at the port of embarkation to declare that the city was free from infection. Although previous ordinances mentioned bills of health, they were vital to the sanitary measures of 1770-1772 issued by the central government following the outbreak of plague in both Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire, and elaborated in a separate ordinance.[25] All these documents could only be accepted if they were first soaked in vinegar or 'perfumed', although, as was the case in the ports of northern France, the former was more customary.[26]

Upon completion of the necessary paperwork, no one was allowed to enter or leave the ship for 40 days, under threat of death penalty for violators.[27] In practice, this international standard period could be prolonged or reduced based on various factors. If a ship came from a suspicious region but could present a 'clean' bill of health and a visibly healthy crew, the quarantine period might be shortened. Additionally, as was the case in the Channel ports of France, the distance traveled (without intermediate communication or stops) was taken into account, a longer journey making it more likely the incubation period was over and plague, if present, would have manifested itself. The considerable time that had elapsed since the visit of Ottoman privateers in the Mediterranean, for example, seems to have been the main reason for prematurely discharging numerous vessels from quarantine in 1779-1780 (see Annex). A deputy of the Franc of Bruges gave an appropriate summary of the importance of distance on the occasion of the stranding of the *Orient*: 'I have no doubt the Government will soon release this Ship, because, in

23 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 349/1, Letter from deputy John Porter (18 November 1770); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter from the States of Flanders (18 November 1743).

24 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 349/1, Letter from deputy John Porter (4 October 1770).

25 ROPBA, 13 December 1770.

26 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter from deputy John Porter (10 December 1771); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Interrogation of François du Corroy, captain of the *Lion of Bruges* (4 December 1783); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 755, Letter from the Ostend city council (14 December 1752). Hildesheimer, 'Protection', 467. The attribution of disinfectant properties to vinegar goes back to Antiquity, see for example Hubert Conner and Rudolph Allgeier, 'Vinegar: Its History and Development', *Advances in Applied Microbiology* 20:1 (1976) 87-89. See also Karl Meyer, *Disinfected Mail* (Holton 1962) 23-30.

27 For its origins, see McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 170-171.

fairness, it has done more than one Quarantine while at sea'.[28] Journey length was of lesser importance in the Mediterranean, where crossings from northern Africa took only a few days.[29]

Quarantine length, however, was ultimately primarily determined by the ship's cargo. As was the case throughout Europe, commodities such as wood, iron, stone, and salt were considered unlikely to contract infection. The Swedish crew of the *Orient*, for example, was discharged after only one week, partly because of the length of their journey, but also because their cargo consisted of timber, iron, tiles, and whetstones (see Annex). By contrast, textiles such as wool and cotton were considered extremely dangerous, as these so-called 'enumerated goods' were thought capable of retaining infection for a long period.[30] Even after isolation, these commodities could not be imported into the Austrian Netherlands, as neither Ostend nor Nieuport had the necessary facilities to air or fumigate them, as was common practice in other countries.[31] For example, when the *King George* arrived in 1752 from Smyrna (today's Izmir) with a cargo of wool, it was immediately detained, despite having already undergone quarantine in the Italian town of Civitavecchia.[32] The *Galley of Amsterdam*, arriving in 1780 with cotton and wool, was handled with similar caution and isolated for 55 days. The *Four Brothers*, carrying wool, spent over 60 days in the Gouweloze Creek in 1770. Merchants interested in the latter ship desperately argued that the crew had slept on the bales during the voyage without incident, but to no avail.[33]

Said plea is telling of the tensions that arose between commercial interests and public health due to quarantine measures. During isolation, it was as much forbidden for commodities as for crew members to leave the ship. Merchants were fearful of such disruptions of schedule and potential delays, especially for perishable cargo. In addition, the expenses of additional salaries, victuals, and port fees during quarantine were detrimental to the profits of the enterprise.[34] Not surprisingly, merchants eagerly petitioned local and central authorities to obtain a (premature) discharge of their ships or cargoes. If the commodities were considered unable to contract infection, these petitions were sometimes successful. For example, in 1770, the *Emperor*

28 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter from deputy John Porter (10 December 1770).

29 Claire Rioult, 'Le Havre, le contrôle sanitaire maritime et le problème méditerranéen, années 1750-1780', *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine* 66:1 (2019) 22-24. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3917/rhmc.664.0007.

30 Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag*, 106-107; Booker, *Maritime Quarantine*, 199-200; Harrison, *Contagion*, 38.

31 e.g. ROPBA, 27 October 1770. Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag*, 107; NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter from the Ostend city council (31 January 1782).

32 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 755, Letter to minister plenipotentiary Botta-Adorno (16 December 1752).

33 NAB, PC, nr. 1231, Letter from merchant M. Mertens (20 December 1770).

34 e.g. NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter from merchant François Carpentier (26 November 1770).

Joseph was allowed to unload its cargo of timber prior to the end of its three-week quarantine.[35]

The relationship between public health, economy, and politics was more tense still because most members of the city council of port cities like Ostend were also merchants, and possibly had to decide on the fate of ships in which they had private interests.[36] This was exactly what had caused the devastating Marseille outbreak of 1720, where merchants on the city council had pushed for the premature release of their cargoes from quarantine.[37] Concerned about this 'revolving door' between commerce and politics, minister plenipotentiary Georg Adam von Starhemberg – after governor Charles of Lorraine, the highest representative of the Habsburg monarchy in the Austrian Netherlands, and the *de facto* head of the Brussels government – urged the Ostend authorities to ensure that those responsible for discharging a ship had no personal stake in its cargo whatsoever.[38] Because we have no detailed overview of the quarantined ships' cargoes, it is unclear whether conflicts of interest actually occurred. It is certainly not true that the Ostend authorities invariably prioritised the city's commercial interests over public health. On one hand, the city council did indeed protest when they felt health measures imposed by Brussels were excessive and when the quarantine net was cast too wide. For example, during the Sicilian plague of 1764, Ostend successfully argued that indiscriminate quarantines for Italian and Spanish ships were needlessly harming the salt traffic from Spain.[39] On the other hand, during the early 1780s, health concerns prompted the city to strongly oppose the establishment of a lazaretto (as proposed by the Brussels government), which would have allowed for lucrative direct trade with the Levant (cf. infra).[40]

35 NAB, PC, nr. 1231, Letter from the Ostend city council (18 December 1770).

36 Jan Parmentier, *Het gezicht van de Oostendse handelaar. Studie van de Oostendse kooplieden, reders en ondernemers actief in de internationale maritieme handel en visserij tijdens de 18de eeuw* (Ostend 2004) 22.

37 Roger Duchêne and Jean Contrucci, *Marseille: 2600 ans d'histoire* (Fayard 1998) 362-363.

38 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter from Secretary of State and War Henri-Herman de Crumpipen (15 October 1770); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter to the Ostend and Nieuport city councils (17 October 1770).

39 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter from the Ostend city council (2 October 1764); ROPBA, 4 October 1764.

40 One example of how the local authorities (seemingly in agreement with the Privy Council) did favour local commerce, however, was the treatment of the ships of the local saw mill company: although these had to quarantine like all other vessels, private adventures of sailing cloth aboard these ships were not re-exported, but allowed into port after passing them in huge bags through the salty sea water – a purification practice not once encountered elsewhere, NAB, PC, nr. 1231, Letter from the Ostend city council (31 December 1770).

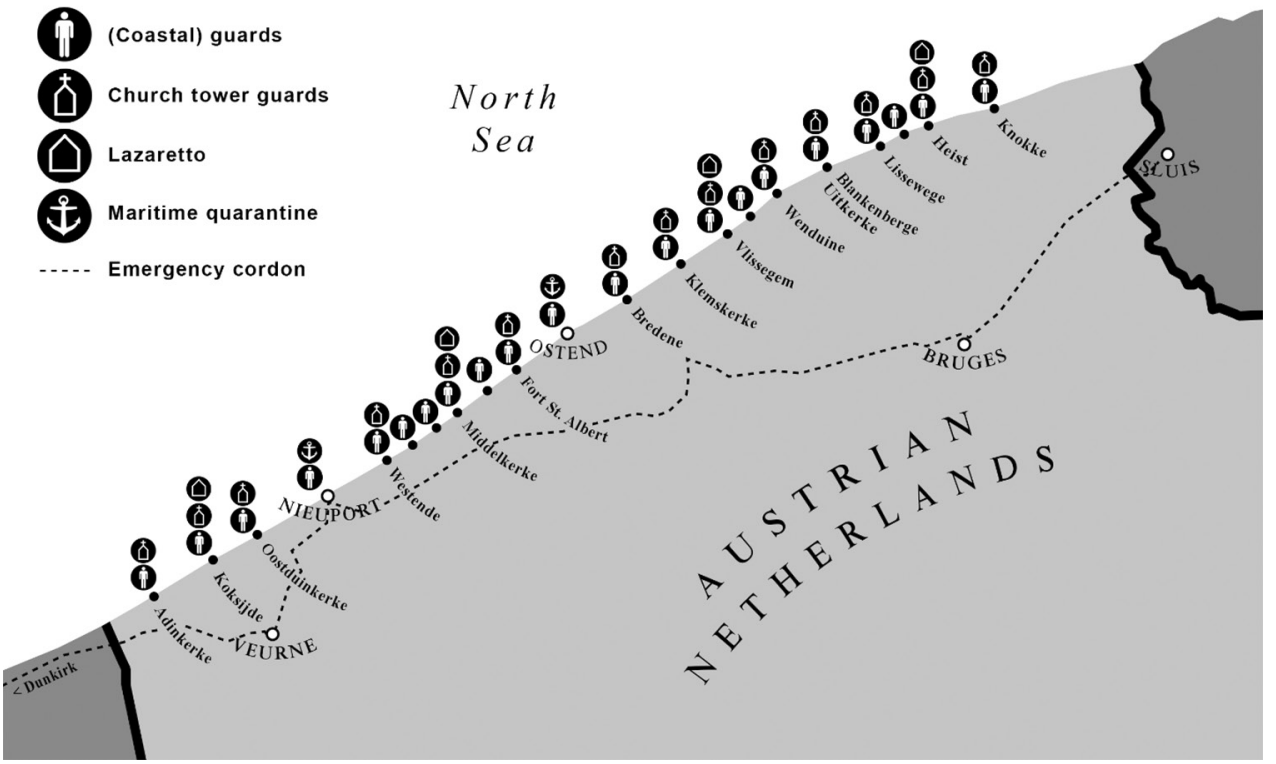

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Figure 4. Sanitary measures taken in the coastal region, 1770-1772. © Created by Stan Pannier. *Source:* NAB (Privy Council), SAG (States of Flanders), SAB (Franc of Bruges).

Crisis management in the wider coastal area

Unlike many other countries, the coast of the Austrian Netherlands was almost exclusively comprised of dunes. Land merged into sea without radical demarcations such as cliffs. Thus, the region's 65-kilometer shoreline did not constitute a natural barrier for those who sought to reach land by boat, for example in order to flout the prohibitions issued in the port cities. Also presenting communicable disease risks were the merchandise and sailors (alive or dead) which frequently washed up on the beach after a shipwreck, especially during storms when the Flemish banks invariably caused casualties. As a result, local authorities did not only have to keep an eye on the sea ports; thorough measures had to be taken in the dune region and the coastal towns as well to prevent the import of epidemics.

When news of an epidemic outbreak reached the Austrian Netherlands, both military and civilian sentries were stationed along the coast to prevent contact between possibly infected persons and goods, and the interior of the country.[41] The same measures were taken in northern France and the coastal provinces of the Dutch Republic, where beaches were mostly similar in topography to those of the Austrian Netherlands.[42] Additionally, in 1770-1772, citizens were posted in the coastal towns' church towers to keep a watchful eye on the beach (see Figure 4) and alert the rest of the village if anything suspicious occurred.[43] These coastal defenses were put to work, for example, during the Marseille plague outbreak. In October 1720, after being denied entry into the port of Ostend, the crew of the *Ambitious* tried to reach the beach by sloop. Interpreting this as a sign that plague was on board and that healthy seamen were escaping from the sick, the sentries opened fire and chased them back into the sea.[44] Likewise, in 1743, a sloop was shot near Blankenberghe which held eight men looking for victuals.[45] In 1770, citizens of Adinkerke drove a French crew back into the sea which had come ashore to hunt for rabbits in the dunes.[46]

41 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter to the Privy Council (1 May 1731); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter from deputy De Doncquer (6 September 1743); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter from minister plenipotentiary Königsegg-Erps (1 August 1743); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Register extract (2 November 1754).

42 Schneeloch, 'Praecautien', 32; Hildesheimer, 'Protection', 458.

43 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 713, Letter to the marquis of Prié (20 May 1720); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter from the Franc of Bruges (11 October 1770).

44 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 713, Letter from the Ostend city council (16 October 1720).

45 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter from deputy De Doncquer (6 September 1743).

46 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter from counsellor De Grysperre to minister plenipotentiary Starhemberg (26 September 1770); SAG, SOF, nr. 11077, Letter from the Franc of Bruges (19 September 1770).

To protect the guards from the elements, cabins were constructed on the beach on several occasions during the eighteenth century. Such was the case in 1743 and 1751, and during the sanitary emergency of 1770-1772, the line of barracks built during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) to prevent a British invasion was recommissioned and expanded (see Figure 4). As Patrice-François de Nény, the director of the Austrian Netherlands' Privy Council, put it, if the danger of a British invasion had been somewhat imaginary, that of the plague was all the more real.[47] Yet, even such an imposing line of guards had its loopholes. In December 1770, the French sailor Pierre Le Febvre was found floating on a piece of driftwood at sea, and put ashore by a British ship. Le Febvre was able to walk the beach unnoticed towards Blankenberghe, which was kilometres away from his place of landing.[48] Nonetheless, the Le Febvre case seems to have been an exception; in most cases, stranded sailors were intercepted by the guards. In the extreme event that a plague-infected person did manage to wander inland, a plan was ready to establish a second emergency cordon using the series of canals that traversed the countryside between Veurne and Sluis (see Figure 4).[49]

In 1770-1772, the central government issued detailed instructions to the two coastal castellanies, Veurne-Ambacht and the Franc of Bruges, on the dune guards' equipment. Each sentry was required to have a lantern, a speaking-trumpet, binoculars, a jug of vinegar, a spade, a long stick with a hook and a blue cap against the cold. The speaking-horn was used to question individuals on the beach about their origins from a safe distance. If the guards found any washed-up goods – again, especially fabrics – or bodies, they were to be buried on the spot; the hook served as a way to pull goods or persons in a pit without touching.[50] The sentries near Adinkerke buried as many as 146 pieces of cloth in April 1771.[51] Remnants of ships or cargoes that were too large to bury were burned.[52] Drowned persons, whose clothes were deemed at least as dangerous as the person itself[53], washed up frequently as well: between

47 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter from the Franc of Bruges to the States of Flanders (29 October 1743); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter from the States of Flanders (16 October 1751); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter from Patrice-François de Nény to Thomas De Grysperre (30 September 1770).

48 NAB, PC, nr. 1231, Letter from the Ostend city council (12 December 1770).

49 NAB, PC, nr. 1231, Letter from commander-in-chief Count Murray (12 November 1771).

50 SAG, Council of Flanders (henceforth COF), nr. 21574, Instructions of the Privy Council for Veurne-Ambacht (25 September 1770).

51 NAB, PC, nr. 1231.

52 *Gazette van Gendt*, 21 November 1771; NAB, PC, nr. 1231, Letter from Veurne-Ambacht (20 November 1771); NAB, Financial Council (henceforth FC), nr. 4354, Letter from minister plenipotentiary Königsegg-Erps to Charles Coppieters (13 August 1743); *Gazette van Gendt*, 19.03.1744.

53 Biraben, *Les Hommes et la peste II*, 21-22. In 1772, several people on Texel fell ill and died, as did the surgeons who treated them, reportedly after touching stranded clothes, see Jan Bremer and Henk Schoorl, *Varensgasten en ander volk* (Schoorl 1987) 61.

September and December 1770, three bodies were reported.[54] For the same reason, central authorities prohibited beachcombing and the undressing of washed-up corpses – as Thomas De Grysperre, councilor of the Privy Council, wrote to the Franc of Bruges: '[Y]ou know all too well, Gentlemen, how eager the Coastal Residents are to appropriate these kinds of Commodities'.[55] Indeed, in November 1771, three beachcombers were briefly detained in the Koksijde lazaretto after handling a washed-up cargo of stockfish.[56]

What happened if castaways arrived on the beach alive? It was an event which, when it first happened in 1720, took the coastal authorities off guard. On 18 October of that year, the aforementioned *Ambitious*, after having been chased away from both port and beach, finally ran aground between Ostend and Bredene. To prevent the 27 sailors from walking inland, they were surrounded by 260 soldiers. When the Frenchmen nonetheless tried to escape their vessel, the soldiers fired upon them, causing the crew to retreat 'crying and lamenting continuously while praying and begging for their life'. After an emergency meeting, the city council of Ostend decided to spare the Frenchmen, and ordered them to perform a quarantine in an abandoned barrack in the dunes (see Figure 5).[57]

In contrast to the improvised onshore quarantine of 1720, the central government demonstrated more foresight in 1770. Next to the aforementioned expansion of the series of guard cabins, wooden lazarettos were constructed in the dunes near Koksijde, Middelkerke, Vlissegem, and Heist.[58] When the Swedish vessel the *Orient* stranded near Lombardsijde, its fourteen sailors effectively occupied the lazaretto of Middelkerke. Provisions for the crew were left twelve to fifteen meters from the building, thereafter the Swedes could come out and collect them.[59] At the end of the quarantine period, the inhabitants' clothes and the lazaretto itself were to be burned.[60] Lastly, before their discharge, the sailors were provided with new clothes and scissors to cut their possibly infected hair.[61]

54 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 349/1, Letter from deputy John Porter (29 September 1770); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter from deputy John Porter (24 December 1770).

55 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 713, Letter from Veurne-Ambacht (25 October 1720); SAG, COF, nr. 21574, Instructions from the Privy Council for Veurne-Ambacht (25 September 1770); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 349/1, Letter from the Privy Council (6 October 1770).

56 NAB, PC, nr. 1231, Letter from Veurne-Ambacht (20 November 1771).

57 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 713, Record (19 October 1720); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 321, Letter from the States of Flanders (20 October 1720); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 713, Interrogation of Henry du Peuse, captain of the *Ambitious* (19 October 1720).

58 SAG, SOF, nr. 11077, Precautions taken by the Privy Council regarding the plague (17 December 1770); SAG, COF, nr. 21574, Instructions of the Privy Council for Veurne-Ambacht (25 September 1770); SAG, COF, nr. 21574, Expenses of Veurne-Ambacht regarding the plague (1770-72).

59 SAG, COF, nr. 21574, Instructions of the Privy Council for Veurne-Ambacht (25 September 1770).

60 SAG, SOF, nr. 11077, Letter from deputy John Porter to director of public works Hendrik Pulinx jr. (24 October 1770).

61 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 349/1, Instructions to safeguard the coast against the plague (20 September 1770).

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Figure 5. View on the Ostend harbour, around 1781. Maker unknown © Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, RP-P-AO-18-62, http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.collect.692974.

Despite the central government's order for the coastal towns to maintain the lazarettos constructed in 1770, these buildings seemingly did not last long.[62] The Ferraris map, which depicts the coastal region around 1773, shows only the lazaretto of Koksijde.[63] It is likely that this building also disappeared soon after, as the crew of the Danish vessel the *Rose* was forced to quarantine aboard the ship after running aground near neighbouring Nieuport.[64] Hence, we may conclude that the buildings constructed in 1770-1772 more closely resembled temporary pest-houses than the permanent lazarettos commonly found in the Mediterranean region.

To summarise, the public health policy in the ports and the coastal region of the Austrian Netherlands during the first half of the eighteenth century was primarily one of crisis management, characterised by ad hoc measures that were only implemented in response to epidemic outbreaks or news of plague-ridden ships. However, as we will see in the next section, more permanent quarantine measures and institutions did come into view during the latter half of the century.

'Resembling those he had seen […] in Italy': from crisis management towards a Mediterranean model?

Throughout the early modern period, port quarantines in the Mediterranean basin became progressively more strict, especially for ships hailing from the Ottoman Empire. According to Chase-Levenson, quarantine measures, once adopted unsystematically according to epidemic outbreaks, evolved towards a system of 'universal quarantine' during the eighteenth century. This expansion of maritime quarantine was accompanied by a construction boom of lazarettos. Although these measures served primarily to shield Europe from the real danger of plague, which had become endemic in the Ottoman Empire, the presumed threat of infection was increasingly inflated by Orientalist tropes of the East being 'exotic' or 'in decline', notions which were easily connected with diseases such as plague. Enhanced sanitary measures thus also served to create a psychological barrier between a 'healthy' Europe and a 'contagious' Ottoman Empire.[65]

In the North Sea and Channel ports, there was a similar evolution towards universal quarantine during the eighteenth century. In Great Britain, various 'Quarantine Acts' imposed restrictions on ships arriving from the

62 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Records (29 September 1771 and 22 October 1772).

63 Soetkin Vervust, *Deconstructing the Ferraris Maps (1770-1778). A Study of the Map Production Process and its Implications for Geometric Accuracy* (Ghent University 2016) 279.

64 NAB, PC, nr. 12310/B, Letter from the Nieuport city council (13 November 1781).

65 Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag*, 1-10, 124-125, 157-160.

Ottoman Empire or Mediterranean.[66] In the Dutch Republic, all cargoes arriving from the Levant were aired before importation.[67] Additionally, as in the Mediterranean, there was a growing commitment to permanent quarantine facilities. In Le Havre, plans of expanding the lazaretto built in 1714 were proposed in 1791.[68] On Texel, in the Dutch Republic, a lazaretto was erected in 1729, which functioned until it was swallowed up by the sea in 1751; minute plans for a new building were made in 1780, though delayed by the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784) and eventually abandoned.[69] In Great Britain, the establishment of a permanent quarantine site was frequently discussed throughout the century, but parliamentary approval was not granted until 1800.[70]

Did these evolutions from crisis management towards more elaborate quarantine infrastructure and institutions materialise in the Austrian Netherlands as well? Levantine commodities generally reached the region through intermediary ports such as Trieste. One of the major reasons for this absence of a direct trade route with the Ottoman Empire was the lack of adequate quarantine facilities in the ports of Ostend and Nieuport. Due to the increasingly endemic nature of plague in the Ottoman Empire, measures against shipping from the Levant or northern Africa proliferated during the latter half of the century. Not only did ad hoc ordinances continue to appear, restrictions issued during a particular epidemic persisted long after the outbreak had ceased – in synchronicity with aforementioned policies elsewhere in Europe.[71] Still relying on the 1752 ban against ships from northern Africa, for example, the Ostend authorities chased away two ships from Essaouira (in modern-day Morocco) in July 1767.[72] Likewise, an ordinance issued in 1770 against ships from the Levant regarding quarantine and forced re-exportation of textiles was being upheld during the 1780s. Comments made by the Ostend city council in 1793 that all ships from the Levant 'are visited by Members of the city Council to examine if they have clean or foul bills of health; in case of the former they are set at full liberty, in case of the latter an adequate quarantine period is ordered' reveal slightly more relaxed, but still permanent restrictions.[73]

66 Harrison, *Contagion*, 44-45; Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag*, 16.

67 John Howard, *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos of Europe* (Warrington 1789) 27-28.

68 Claire Etienne-Steiner, 'Quatre générations de lazarets au Havre', *In Situ. Revue des patrimoines* 2 (2002) 4-5. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/insitu.1237.

69 Bremer and Schoorl, *Varensgasten*, 59-64.

70 Peter Froggatt, 'The Lazaret on Chetney Hill', *Medical History* 8:1 (1964) 44-62. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300029082; Booker, *Maritime Quarantine*, 217-225, 234-51, 279.

71 e.g. ROPBA 29 January 1781, 29 June 1787.

72 *Gazette van Gendt*, 27 July 1767; NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter from the Ostend city council (14 September 1776).

73 NAB, FC, nr. 4358, Letter from the Ostend city council (9 March 1782); SAG, SOF, nr. 11080, Letter from the Ostend city council (15 December 1793). These regulations seemingly extended

Thus, merchants who wished to participate in Levantine trade first had to quarantine their goods in a better-equipped (i.e. Mediterranean) or more favourably located (e.g. Dutch) port. Import duties and other bothersome fees that came with this foreign quarantine, however, significantly impacted profits.[74] This intermediate stop, just like in Great Britain, was increasingly criticised during the early 1780s, when Ostend's trade was flourishing. In June 1781, Joseph II, eager to economically improve his Lowland possessions, had granted free port status to Ostend. In a few years' time, shipping became increasingly international and the amount of incoming vessels quadrupled, rising from around 500 in 1778 to more than 2000 ships in 1781.[75] Within this context of economic uptick, several merchants petitioned the central government for the establishment of a permanent lazaretto to set up a direct trade route with the Levant. Ostend, however, rejected every plan to turn the Gouweloze Creek into a permanent quarantine station, because of the aforementioned unfavourable characteristics of the site. These were even exacerbated by the city's prosperity: in 1782, the port was so crowded that reaching the creek took four days.[76] According to the city council, the site did suffice in times of crisis, but turning it into a permanent quarantine station was bound to end in disaster.[77] The Maritime Trade Committee, established in 1781, too, argued that the coastal topography of the Austrian Netherlands simply was not suited for a fixed quarantine location. The ports of Ostend and Nieuport were too narrow, and the country did not have any wide river estuaries like Great Britain and the Dutch Republic did – not to mention the bays, lagoons, and islands that dotted the coastline of the Mediterranean. In the Channel ports of Brittany and Normandy, too, ships were invariably detained at small islands or remote peninsulas.[78]

to ships from all over the Mediterranean: both the *Magdalen* (1785, hailing from Alicante) and the *Duke Ferdinand* (1790, Genoa) were visited by quarantine officials. See SAB, Notary Public Anthony Rycx, 41/123, nr. 481 and 41/129, nr. 202.

74 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter from the Ostend city council (31 January 1782); NAB, FC, nr. 4358, Letter from the Ostend city council (9 March 1782); NAB, FC, nr. 4358, Letter from merchant Balthazar Cosijn (s.d.); NAB, Secretary of State and War (henceforth SSW), nr. 2160, Letter from merchant Victor Van Poppelen jr. to the Ghent Chamber of Commerce (7 July 1784).

75 John Everaert, 'Commerce d'Afrique et traite négrière dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 62:1 (1975) 177-185. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.1975.1824; Everaert, 'Le pavillon impérial aux Indes occidentales. Contrebande de guerre et trafic neutre depuis les ports Flamands (1778-1785)', *Bijdragen tot de internationale maritieme geschiedenis* (Brussels 1988); Daniël Farasyn, *1769-1794: de 18de-eeuwse bloeiperiode van Oostende* (Ostend 1998); Parmentier, *De maritieme handel en visserij in Oostende tijdens de achttiende eeuw: een prosopografische analyse van de internationale Oostendse handelswereld, 1700-1794* (Ghent University 2001).

76 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter from the Ostend city council (31 January 1782).

77 NAB, FC, nr. 4358, Letter from the Ostend city council (9 March 1782).

78 NAB, SSW, nr. 2160, Report of the Maritime Trade Committee concerning the establishment of a lazaretto (11 February 1782); Hildesheimer, 'Protection', 446-467.

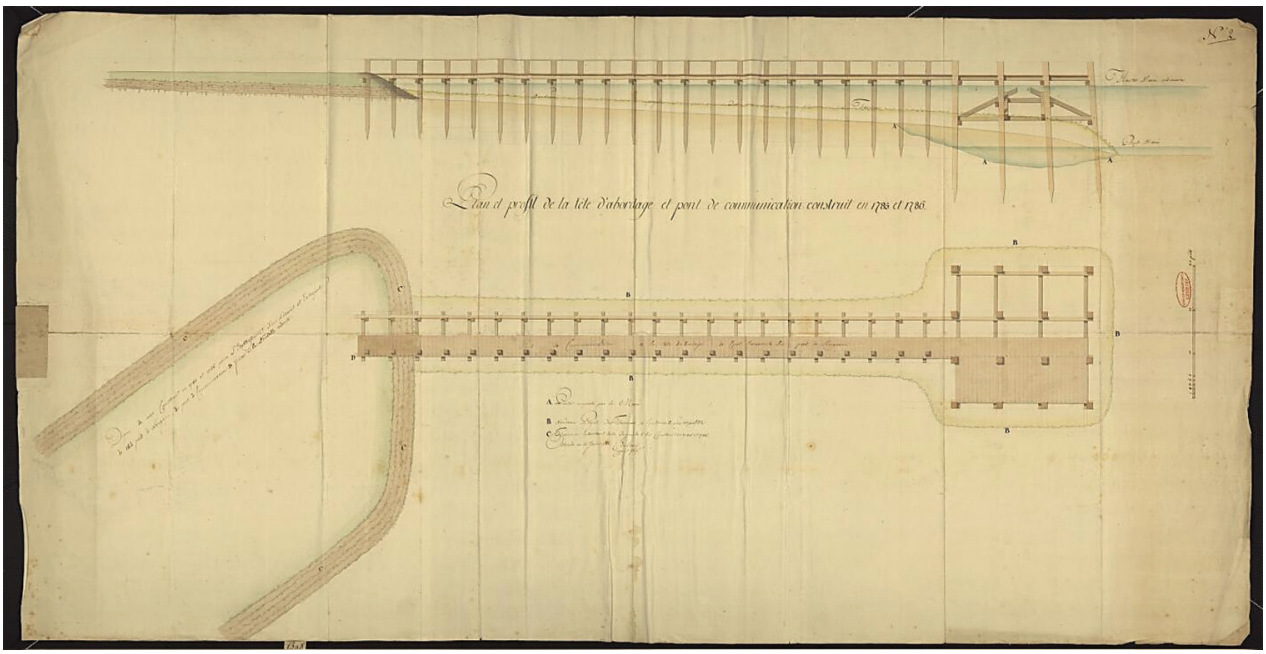

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Figure 6. The Hazegras lazaretto, with its 45-meter-long mooring quay (right) and a 50-meter-long area for the actual lazaretto and warehouses (left), c. 1785-86. © NAB. Collection of maps and charts (First series), nr. 1398.

In 1784, however, the reclamation of the Hazegras polder in the Zwin added 319 acres to the existing coastal area.[79] This created a viable alternative to the Gouweloze Creek for the construction of a permanent quarantine site, because the Hazegras polder was as desolate a location as could be found along the Flemish coast.[80] The project was approved (see Figure 6), and shortly after an on-site surveyor of the Franc of Bruges found that the lazaretto was already 'resembling those he had seen in several places in Italy near the Port Cities trading with the Levant'.[81] Nevertheless, the lazaretto soon was found wanting, as it suffered from the continuing siltation of the Zwin. Barely a year after construction, the central government was forced to order a deepening of the location.[82] Additionally, Joseph II's aspirations to re-open the Scheldt were thwarted by the Treaty of Fontainebleau (1785), after which the entry of ships into the Zwin was prevented by the Dutch Republic. Following storm damage to the lazaretto in 1787, the Franc of Bruges deemed any further reparations to be futile, as no ships were able to reach the building.[83]

Around the same time as the Hazegras project, plans were rejuvenated for a lazaretto in Nieuport. From November 1786 onwards, vessels directly coming from Levantine ports would be able to quarantine at Fort Viervoet.[84] In February 1787, the cargo of the *Neptune*, from Smyrna, was successfully quarantined in Nieuport, although it was transferred onto two smaller vessels, as the *Neptune* was too large to enter the port.[85] Nevertheless, the quarantine infrastructure of Nieuport was not significant enough to be featured on a detailed map of the port in 1788, and by 1793, the site was described by town officials as 'too silted up to accept any vessels'.[86] Despite significant efforts, it is doubtful, therefore, whether a functioning permanent lazaretto was present in the Southern Netherlands by the close of the eighteenth century.

79 Lucien Dendooven, *Aantekeningen over de Nieuw-Hazegras-Polder te Knokke, 1784-1965* (Tielt 1968) 21-23; Danny Lannoy, 'Het indijken van de Hazegrasschorre te Knokke in 1784', *Cnocke is Hier* 49:2 (2012) 1.

80 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 645, Letter from De Preudhomme d'Hailly (6 February 1785).

81 SAG, SOF, nr. 11078, Record of the Franc of Bruges (24 September 1785).

82 NAB, SSW, nr. 2160, Letter from merchant Victor Van Poppelen jr. to minister plenipotentiary Belgiojoso (30 September 1785); NAB, FC, nr. 4358, Letter to the States of Flanders (26 June 1786).

83 Jos De Smet, 'Philippe-Francois Lippens te Knokke en elders – van 1784 tot 1790', *Rond de Poldertorens*, 10:3 (1968) 96; Maurits Coornaert, *Knokke en het Zwin* (Tielt 1974), 276-277.

84 According to a report made in the *Gazette van Gendt*, 9 November 1786. Other contemporary sources indeed mention the construction of a 'quarantine quay', SAG, SOF, nr. 11080, Letter from the Nieuport city council (29 November 1793).

85 *Gazette van Gendt*, 12 February 1787.

86 P. Brock, 'Plan du Port de Nieuport', 1788; SAG, SOF, nr. 11080, Letter from the Nieuport city council (29 November 1793). In 1793, plans were seemingly made to repair these facilities, but it is unclear if this actually happened.

The scale of quarantine

How many ships and people were subjected to the quarantine system of the Austrian Netherlands? Unlike southern Europe, where records of health boards provide a fairly comprehensive picture of the scale of quarantine measures, available sources only allow for an approximation (see footnote 3 to the Annex).[87]

Quarantine length (in days)	Period								
	1720-21	1743-45	1751-53	1764	1770-72	1779-83	1787	1793	Total
≤7					14	4			18
8<39	1	4			3	5		1	14
≥40	1	1			4	1			7
Unknown	10	3	2	1	2	2	1		21
Total	12	8	2	1	23	12	1	1	60

Table 2. Approximate number of maritime quarantines in the Austrian Netherlands, 1720-1795 (own calculations). For a more elaborate overview, see Annex. *Source*: GVG, NAB, SAG, SAB.

Nevertheless, I was able to identify at least 60 ships and crews that underwent quarantine during the period under consideration. As Table 2 and the Annex show, one-third of these vessels were detained for a week or less, the time necessary for the city council to report their arrival to the Privy Council and agree on an appropriate quarantine length. For these 18 cases, there were seemingly enough mitigating circumstances to warrant early discharge. Thus, the number of ships performing quarantine in Ostend or elsewhere was generally low.

Quarantines were most plentiful during the crisis of 1770-1772, when every ship returning from the Baltic Sea or the White Sea was suspicious of infection (see Figure 7 and Annex). Still, the amount of quarantined vessels was small, and negligible compared to the total volume of shipping traffic: the 6 detained ships in 1770, for example, constituted 1.5 per cent of all vessels (394) that entered Ostend that year.[88] Although merchants involved in these ships may have suffered a commercial blow, the macro-economic damage of the quarantine measures imposed in the Austrian Netherlands appears to have been limited.

Plague ships were quite a regular occurrence in the Mediterranean Sea. According to Daniel Panzac, between 1716 and 1795, 37 ships with actual stricken sailors on board arrived in southern European ports, half of them docking in Marseille.[89] Although news of plague ships allegedly roaming the

87 Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag*, 99.

88 *Gazette van Gendt*, 1770.

89 Panzac, *Quarantaines et Lazarets*, 85.

North Sea occasionally sparked panic in port cities, such incidents were much less frequent than in the Mediterranean. In any case, none of the vessels that were detained in Ostend or Nieuport during the eighteenth century were found to carry plague. Many ships could present clean bills of health, or had their crews described as healthy by town officials. Only two ships, the *King George* (1752) and the *Lion of Bruges* (1783), had crew members suffering from scurvy.[90] In the case of the *Ambitious*, one of its officers died at the start of the quarantine in October 1720. Yet again, no plague was involved: the French crew had been forced to wash in the sea, and then walk nakedly towards an abandoned cabin. The next morning, the mate was found frozen to death in the Ostend dunes. Although it might be argued that it was exactly this washing and disposing of clothes that had served as a sanitary barrier, the fact that the *Ambitious* had left Marseille as early as May makes this assertion unlikely.[91]

Thus, there is no evidence that quarantine measures directly prevented the re-entry of plague into the Southern Netherlands during the eighteenth century. If the Austrian Netherlands did benefit of maritime quarantine measures, it was of those adopted in southern European ports. Unlike these cities, Nieuport and Ostend were a great distance away from epicenters of disease, and generally conducted limited trade with such regions. Therefore, on most occasions, imposed health measures seemed overly cautious – an observation confirmed by the many vessels prematurely released from quarantine.

Austrian Netherlands' policy makers had little choice, however, but to follow the lead of neighbouring maritime powers when it came to taking public health precautions. Failing to do so could result in facing trade embargoes themselves. Retaliatory quarantines were a common occurrence in the Mediterranean world, and functioned as an incentive for states to take their public health measures seriously: no government wished to endure the economic damage caused by a merchant fleet being detained in every port it visited.[92] In the early modern mercantilist system, which viewed international trade as a zero-sum game, retaliatory quarantines were often abused to harm the commercial interests of competing states – 'war by other means', in the words of Mark Harrison.[93]

90 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 755, Letter from the Ostend city council (14 December 1752); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Interrogation of François du Corroy, captain of the *Lion of Bruges* (4 December 1783).

91 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 713, Record (19 October 1720); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 321, Letter to the States of Flanders (20 October 1720).

92 Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag*, 94, 123; Harrison, *Contagion*, 13-14, 24-49.

93 Harrison, *Contagion*, 24-27.

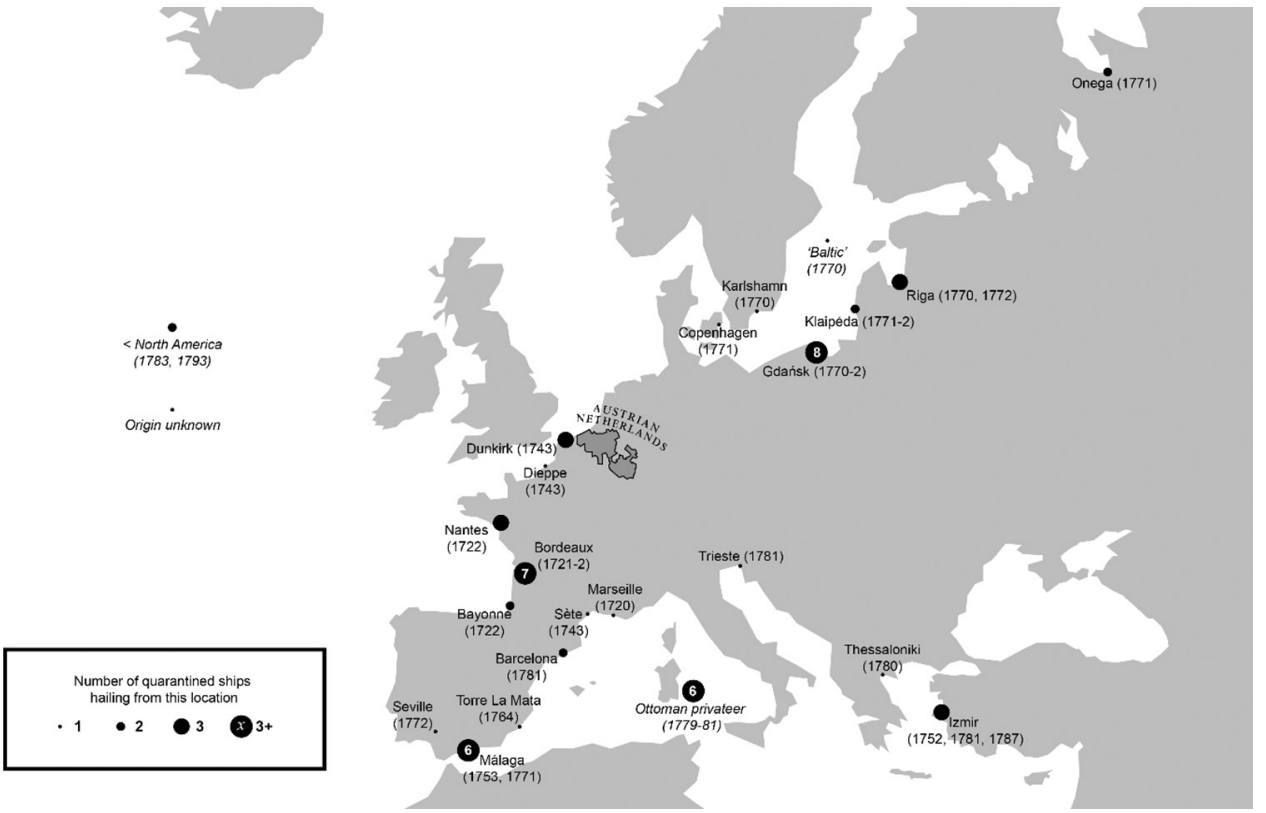

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Figure 7. Origin of quarantined ships in the Austrian Netherlands, 1720-95. For a more elaborate overview, see Annex. © Created by Stan Pannier. *Source:* GVG, NAB, SAG, SAB.

Sanitary peer pressure was present in the North Sea region as well – and often abused in a similar way as in the Mediterranean. In 1743, during an earlier plague episode on Sicily, Maria Theresa ordered an additional 20-day detention for ships arriving from France. According to the Empress, Versailles had not taken sufficient measures to prevent the importation of the disease.[94] However, it is likely that the 1743 quarantine against France was also motivated by political reasons: France opposed the Habsburg monarchy during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), and would invade the Austrian Netherlands the following year. Moreover, news of strict sanitary precautions being taken in Dunkirk had already reached Ostend prior to the ban against French shipping.[95]

Such retributions were the result of an extensive national and transnational exchange of information through public bodies, captains, merchants, or consuls regarding quarantine restrictions and reports on allegedly plague-stricken ships. Both kinds of intelligence triggered new sanitary precautions, or led to their repeal.[96] In the Mediterranean port cities, quarantine measures were maintained by local health boards. These institutions communicated intensively with each other, generally independent from politics.[97] The same was true for northwestern Europe, although no boards of health were established here: in the principal French Channel port of Le Havre, for example, there was a continuous exchange of sanitary information with Great Britain, despite Versailles opposing London during much of the eighteenth century. Additionally, Le Havre maintained communication with other French Channel ports, stretching as far as Dunkirk.[98] The latter port, in turn, was part of a North Sea information network, in which the Austrian Netherlands were firmly embedded as well. In November 1771, for example, the Swedish ambassador to Great Britain had warned that the Stockholm newspapers spoke of a Dutch plague-ridden ship roaming the North Sea. The London admiralty swiftly ordered the custom officers of Dover to prevent the ship's entrance. By way of a British ambassador, the news soon reached Calais and Dunkirk. In turn, Dunkirk noticed Veurne-Ambacht, whereupon the castellany spread the news to the Franc of Bruges. The latter finally warned the Franc of Sluis and the city of Middelburg in the Dutch Republic.[99] Faced with a disease that did not

94 ROPBA, 27 August 1743.

95 *Gazette van Gendt*, 12 August 1743.

96 The ordinance of 13 August 1770 (ROPBA), SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter from the Ostend city council (27 September 1743); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter to the Ostend, Nieuport and Blankenberghe city councils (18 November 1754); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter from the Secretary of State and War (22 September 1784); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter from minister plenipotentiary Königsegg-Erps (25 September 1743).

97 Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag*, 78-82, 123-153.

98 Rioult, 'Le Havre', 29.

99 SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter from Veurne-Ambacht (28 November 1771); SAB, FOB:B, nr. 350, Letter from the Franc of Sluis (26 November 1771).

respect borders, port authorities around the North Sea took to international coordination and cooperation, much like health boards in the Mediterranean, to maintain a mutually assured protection – and to give no state cause for retaliation.

Central action: sanitary protection or economic policy?

During the early modern period, many European states embarked on a process of centralisation. Often administrations closely followed the policy lines of statecraft doctrines like mercantilism. Scholars like George Rosen have argued that, because these theories saw a healthy and growing population as a crucial source of power for the state, governments became more active in the field of public health, and, as Porter and Harrison have said, the enforcement of maritime quarantine. In the Habsburg Empire, similar centralising and 'populationist' ideas were propagated by cameralism. Cameralism emerged in the seventeenth century as a discipline focused on optimising the governance of the realm and maximising revenue sources for the treasury. During the early reign of Maria Theresa, it gained widespread attention in the hereditary lands – not least due to the confrontation with the well-oiled state machinery of Frederick II's Prussia, and the enormous debts that arose from this military strife.[100] The influence of this 'German mercantilism' extended to Vienna's Lowland provinces: here, cameralist ideas permeated thinking about trade, public finances, and monetary policy; all came to be organised in a more centralised way as the eighteenth century progressed.[101] Despite its concerns over population levels, the influence of cameralism on sanitary issues long remained limited. Claude Bruneel has attributed this modest central involvement in health measures to the opposition of lower levels of government to a centralised political structure.[102] Another factor was a lack of budget: Paul Bonenfant calculated that the central government's budget for public welfare was limited to a mere 2,000 florins a year (about 4,000 working days for a day

100 For a detailed discussion of cameralism, its origins and its ideas, see for example Louise Sommer, *Die österreichischen Kameralisten* (Scientia Verlag Aalen 1967) and Guillaume Garner, *État, économie, territoire en Allemagne. L'espace dans le caméralisme et l'économie politique, 1740-1820* (Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales 2005).

101 See for example Helma Houtman-De Smedt (ed.), *Overheid en Economie. Economische Aspecten van de Overheidspolitiek in en met betrekking tot de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden* (Antwerp 1989) especially 7-9.

102 Claude Bruneel, 'Les pouvoirs publics, la médecine et la santé dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens', in: Moritz Csaky and Andrea Lanzer (eds.), *Etatisation et bureaucratie, Staatswerdung und Bürokratie* (Vienna 1990) 74, 77.

labourer), and served mostly for almsgiving and supporting victims of small, extraordinary events. Thus, for most of the eighteenth century public health in the Austrian Netherlands remained largely a private, ecclesiastical, and local matter.[103] During the second half of the century, Brussels did begin to intervene in health issues, especially under the more vigorously centralising administration of Joseph II. Government officials addressed an outbreak of dysentery in 1779, tackled the problem of malaria by draining marshes (although largely for agricultural reasons), and attempted to curb epidemics of cattle plague.[104] During this time frame, the ideas of populationism were vividly present in the Austrian Netherlands. Treatises on agriculture and fisheries written by people such as Nicolas Bacon and Theodore Augustin Mann – the former a merchant and member of the Financial Council, the latter a learned cleric – were widely read in government circles, and were applied to agricultural reforms.[105] While it is challenging to prove a direct link between sanitary interventions and the ideas of populationism, it is

103 Paul Bonenfant, *Le problème du paupérisme en Belgique à la fin de l'Ancien Régime* (Brussels 1934) 142-143; Bruneel, 'Un problème de gouvernement: le pouvoir face à l'épidémie de fièvre putride à Bruxelles en 1772-1773', *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften* (1980) 199-221; Eddy Van Cauwenberghe and Erika Meel, 'Overheidsinitiatief aangaande leefmilieu, de openbare hygiëne en veiligheid in enkele steden van de Zuidelijke Nederlanden uit de pre-industriële tijd (17de en 18de eeuw)', *Het openbaar initiatief van de gemeenten in België. Historische grondslagen (Ancien Régime)*. Historische Uitgaven LXV (Gemeentekrediet van België 1984) 270-275; Bruneel, 'De bevolkingsgroei', in: Hervé Hasquin (ed.), *Oostenrijks België, 1715-1794. De Zuidelijke Nederlanden onder de Oostenrijkse Habsburgers* (Brussels 1987) 194; Bruneel, 'L'aurore de la médicalisation dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens', *Annales de la Société belge d'histoire des hôpitaux* 28 (1993) 3-33.

104 Bruneel, 'L'épidémie de dysenterie de 1779 dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens', *Bulletin de la Commission royale d'histoire. Académie royale de Belgique* 145:3-4 (1979) 191-395. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/bcrh.1979.1439; Isabelle Devos, 'Malaria in Vlaanderen tijdens de 18de en 19de eeuw', in: Jan Parmentier and Sander Spanoghe (eds.), *Orbis in Orbem: liber amicorum John Everaert* (Ghent 2001) 223-225; Filip Van Roosbroeck, 'Experts, experimenten en veepestbestrijding in de Oostenrijkse Nederlanden, 1769-1785', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 128:1 (2015) 23-43. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5117/tvgesch2015.1.roos.

105 Hubert Van Houtte, 'Avant Malthus. La Théorie de la population et le mouvement en faveur de la petite culture dans les Pays-Bas à la fin de l'Ancien Régime', *Mélanges d'histoire offerts à Charles Moeller II* (Louvain 1914) 420-428; Paul Harsin, *Un économiste aux Pays-Bas au XVIIIe siècle. L'Abbé Mann* (Louvain 1933) 11-15; Hervé Hasquin, *Les 'Réflexions sur l'état présent du commerce, fabriques et manufactures des Pays-Bas autrichiens' (1765) du négociant bruxellois, Nicolas Bacon (1710-1779), conseiller député aux affaires du commerce* (Palais des Académies 1978) 39-40; Hervé Hasquin, 'Moyenne culture et populationnisme dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens ou les ambiguïtés du despotisme éclairé', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 12:4 (1981) 691-710.

likely no coincidence that interference increased when theories that sang the virtues of population growth were in vogue.[106]

How, then, should we assess the central government's role in preventing infectious diseases in the coastal region of the Austrian Netherlands? As previously mentioned, Brussels took the threat of epidemic diseases such as plague and yellow fever very seriously, as evidenced by the construction of the Hazegras lazaretto and the adoption of policies that resembled universal quarantine practices in the Mediterranean. While the government had issued sanitary directions and played a coordinating role before, Brussels became increasingly involved as the eighteenth century progressed, particularly during and after the crisis of 1770-1772. During this time, the Privy Council ordered extensive construction works, provided thorough guidelines to the coast guards, and assigned one of its members, Thomas De Grysperre, to closely monitor these precautions. The States of Flanders, too, acknowledged the growing interference of Brussels and recognised it as an improvement over existing practices:

> For the first time, precautions along the coast have been cast into rules and directions have been given in this matter; before, the Franc of Bruges was solely given general orders to keep guard along the coast; fortunately no critical event happened then, as it would undoubtedly have caused inconvenience and confusion, and the country would have been in the greatest jeopardy.[107]

In addition, it appears that Brussels increasingly valued the implementation of bills of health, a practice commonly used in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the Privy Council wished to be updated on anything that happened in the port cities: its councilors requested a report on every suspicious ship's arrival, including the name of the captain, the size of the crew, the cargo, the date of departure, and the date the vessel had arrived in the Austrian Netherlands.[108] This information was used to determine an appropriate detention period, which the Privy Council had the final say on. The central government also wanted to be informed on other events along the coast such as the Le Febvre case or the stranding of the *Orient*. When the Franc of Bruges tasked one of its deputies to monitor three guarding

106 Bruneel, 'Les pouvoirs publics', 62; Piet Lenders, *Overheid en geneeskunde in de Habsburgse Nederlanden en het Prinsbisdom Luik* (Kortrijk 2001) 42-49.

107 SAG, SOF, nr. 11077, Memorandum (s.d.), "C'est la première fois que les précautions sur les côtes ont été établis en regle et que l'on a préscrit des directions à cet égard, ci-devant l'on s'est contenté de charger en general ceux du Franc de Bruges de faire veiller sur les côtes de leur ressort; heureusement que aucun evenement critique n'y est arrivé, sans quoi il y auroit infailliblement eu de l'embarras et de la confusion, et le pais auroit courru le plus grand danger".

108 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, Letter to the Ostend and Nieuport city councils (12 October 1770).

stations for the prevention of cattle plague in addition to his principal prophylactic duties, Brussels angrily demanded the deputy's full dedication to his original assignment.[109] Similarly, the Privy Council voiced complaints to the Ostend city council when safety precautions in the port had been too lax (e.g. the *Galleon of Amsterdam*'s Salou-Salonique confusion).[110] Finally, the central government corresponded on public health news and policy with neighbouring countries and the Austrian hereditary lands. The latter provided the Brussels' officials with detailed instruction books that outlined public health measures on the Habsburg-Ottoman frontier and in the Austrian Mediterranean ports such as Trieste.[111]

Still, the involvement of the central administration should not be overstated: whilst it increasingly took on a coordinating role, its financial involvement, as in other public health issues, was close to non-existing. To compare with the 2,000 florins that were allocated to public welfare, the construction and repair of the Hazegras lazaretto in 1785-1786 cost 7,048 and 3,930 florins, respectively; expenses on the coast between August 1770 and November 1772 amounted to 45,284 florins.[112] As with other public health initiatives, these funds were entirely provided by lower levels of government.[113] Because the coastal region belonged to the administrative territory of Veurne-Ambacht and the Franc of Bruges, these regional institutions, together with the coastal towns, were the first in line to absorb the expenditures. As the efforts of the castellanies benefited the whole province, the States of Flanders agreed to shoulder at least part of the financial burden of sanitary protection. Yet, they did so reluctantly: by 1774, the settlement of the 1770-1772 emergency was still unresolved.[114] Numerous attempts by the States of Flanders to seek contributions from either Brussels (which had ordered the precautions in the first place) or the other provinces (which benefited from them as well) were ignored.[115]

Despite the fact that local and regional governments continued to bear a lot of responsibility (especially financial), the central government increasingly intervened in warding off disease in the Austrian Netherlands'

109 SAG, SOF, nr. 11077, Letter from the Privy Council (17 December 1770).

110 In 1776, the Privy Council criticised the Ostend city council for having allowed free entrance to a vessel allegedly coming from Tripoli. As it turned out, the ship came from the Italian port of Gallipoli. NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Record (2 October 1770).

111 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/A, General Gesundheits-Ordnung, und Instructionen für die Sanitäts-Beamte in dem Inner-Oesterrechischen Littorali (1755).

112 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Expenses to safeguard the coast from the plague (1770-72); NAB, FC, nr. 4358, Estimated expenses of the Hazegras lazaretto (25 August 1785); NAB, FC, nr. 4358, Letter to the States of Flanders (26 June 1786).

113 Bruneel, 'Les pouvoirs publics', 74.

114 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter to the States of Flanders (19 November 1774); SAG, SOF, nr. 11077, Letter from deputy John Porter to director of public works Hendrik Pulinx jr. (24 October 1770).

115 Muls, 'La prophylaxie', 6-9.

coastal region during the latter half of the eighteenth century. This corresponds with the conclusions of Rosen, Porter, and Harrison. The 'populationism' that appealed to many officials in the Austrian Netherlands might well have influenced quarantine practices in the coastal area.

An equally important explanation, however, should be found in the attempts by Vienna to economically enhance its North Sea possessions. After the Eighty Years War (1568-1648) and the forced closure of the Scheldt, the pivotal commercial position once held by the cities of the Southern Netherlands was taken over by the cities of the Dutch Republic. Worse still, Dutch middlemen had become inevitable for both international and domestic trade due to a lacking transport system. To alter this detrimental situation and bypass the Dutch Republic, the government aimed to establish a transport network connecting Ostend with its hinterland and even Central and Southern Europe – the so-called 'transit system'. Especially from the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (which in 1748 concluded the War of the Austrian Succession) onwards, authorities began extending Ostend's port infrastructure, dug new canals and improved existing ones, removed local tolls and other trade impediments such as mandatory transshipments, and established a revised customs system. Next to the 'organic' commercial growth realised by these policy decisions, Joseph II made use of the political turmoil of the late 1770s and early 1780s to declare Ostend a free port and create a formidable economic upturn. During this period, efforts were also made to establish trade relations with the United States of America. Lastly, in 1785, Joseph attempted to reopen the Scheldt, but was unsuccessful.[116]

It should come as no surprise that a concern for commercial development was accompanied by growing interest in quarantine practices. As noted in the previous section, trade and quarantine were very much intertwined: if a country's health precautions were considered insufficient, retributions would likely follow from other states. On the other hand, overly strict quarantine measures were equally destructive to trade. During the yellow fever episode of 1783, the government launched a comprehensive effort to gather information by interrogating sailors and captains and examining merchant's correspondence from North America.[117] The aim

116 Michael-W. Serruys, 'The Port and City of Ostend and the Process of State Consolidation in the Southern Netherlands in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Geopolitical Approach', *International Journal of Maritime History* 19:2 (2007) 319-349. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/084387140701900215; Ann Coenen, *Carriers of Growth? International Trade and Economic Development in the Austrian Netherlands* (Brill 2013) 21-24; Jonathan Singerton, *The American Revolution and the Habsburg Monarchy* (University of Virginia Press 2021) 143-189. DOI: https://doi.org/10.52156/m.5768.

117 NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Interrogation of François du Corroy, captain of the *Lion of Bruges* (4 December 1783); NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter from merchant J.F. Vercnocke to his parents (13 October 1783).

was undoubtedly to ensure no epidemic entered the Austrian Netherlands, but also to make sure the burgeoning trade with the United States would not suffer any unnecessary disruptions. Once it was determined that North America was free from disease, the government made a public announcement in all newspapers that 'the American Shipping is discharged from all obstacles and formalities'.[118] By continually seeking information, the central authorities aimed to strike a balance between establishing a level of protection that was safe and acceptable to neighbouring countries on the one hand, and allowing breathing space for local merchants on the other.

Similarly, the Hazegras lazaretto was primarily a commercial instrument. Instead of stating public health concerns, the merchants petitioning for its establishment emphasized the profits of direct trade with the Levant and the crux of the government's commercial policy – getting rid of the despised 'Dutch detour'[119]:

> Not permitted to enter Ostend, I have to send my ships to Holland to perform quarantine, where they have to pay import and export duties and other fees that absorb all the profits one could derive from such an expedition […] with their greedy hands, our Dutch neighbours only try to destroy our business[120]

This choice of arguments indeed found fertile ground in Brussels, as shown by the phrasing used by minister plenipotentiary Belgiojoso when proposing the government's plans to the States:

> Our Royal Highnesses, having agreed to this Establishment in order to try and attract to Flanders the profitable Branch of Commerce with the Levant, without exposing the People to the danger of Contagion, would desire […] the advance of the Sum of 7,048 florins.[121]

118 *Gazette van Gendt*, 11 December 1783; NAB, PC, nr. 1230/B, Letter from the Secretary of State and War (5 December 1783).

119 Serruys, *Port and City of Ostend*, 336-341. See also Piet Lenders, 'Neny en de staatstheorie van zijn tijd', *Standen en Landen* 88:1 (1983) 96-97.

120 NAB, SSW, nr. 2160, Letter from merchant Victor Van Poppelen jr. to the Chamber of Commerce of Ghent (7 July 1784), passed on to the central government, and a direct letter identical in argumentation to minister plenipotentiary Belgiojoso (30 September 1785). Citation from the first letter: "je Serai obligé de faire revenir le susdit navire sur la Hollande pour y faire sa quarantaine, n'étant pas admis a Ostende, d'y devoir ensuite supporter des droits d'entrée, et de sortie, commissions et autres fraix qui absorberont tout l'avantage qu'on pourra retirer de cette expedition…dêvant passer par les mains avides de nos voisins les Hollaindois, ils ne chercheront qu'a faire échouer nos entreprises".

121 SAG, SOF, nr. 11078, Letter from minister plenipotentiary Belgiojoso (12 September 1785), "Leurs Altesses Royales, ayant agrée cet Etablissement pour tacher d'attirer dans la Flandre l'utile Branche du commerce du Levant, sans cependant exposer les Peuples au danger d'une Contagion quelconque, désirent…l'avance de la Somme susmentionnée de f. 7048".

Commercial motives influenced the establishment of lazarettos in the Mediterranean as well, but they were more important north of the Alps where the threat of epidemic intrusion was less urgent.[122] The French city of Le Havre, for example, extended its quarantine infrastructure to attract a portion of the Marseille Levant trade.[123] Similarly, in Great Britain, proponents of a lazaretto argued that such a building would spare merchants from the expense of a stay in a Mediterranean lazaretto and would reduce the indirect Levantine trade via the Dutch Republic in favour of a lucrative, direct trade route to Great Britain.[124] The establishment of the Hazegras lazaretto fits this pattern neatly. While historians have paid heed to the numerous infrastructure projects in the coastal area during the 1770s and 1780s to increase trade, the building of a lazaretto for the same purpose has been overlooked.[125]

Conclusions

At numerous times between 1720 and 1795, extensive measures were imposed in the coastal area of the Austrian Netherlands to keep epidemic disease at bay. Due to the open and flat topography of the region's shoreline, precautions were focused as much on the port cities of Nieuport and Ostend, as on the coastal towns and the wider dune region. While the Austrian Netherlands employed sanitary precautions that had long been customary in the Mediterranean – a standard isolation period of 40 days, the same selection of commodities deemed capable of harbouring disease – authorities also implemented policies that diverged from southern practices, for example the questioning of incoming vessels by pilots in front of the port, the absence of health boards, or the purification of documents through vinegar instead of fumigation. The international exchange of sanitary information among officials in all echelons of government resulted in a remarkable synchronicity of measures with neighbouring towns and states. As was the case in the Mediterranean, the threat of epidemic disease fostered cooperation and coordination across the North Sea basin.

For most of the eighteenth century, the Austrian Netherlands' case confirms the traditional image of quarantine measures in the ports of the English Channel and the North Sea being limited, ad hoc and lacking any permanent infrastructure. Yet towards the end of the century, I observed an increasing commitment from the central government to sanitary measures in the coastal area. Firstly, whereas these policy areas had hitherto been left largely to local and regional authorities, the Privy Council assumed a more

122 Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag*, 113-114; Harrison, *Contagion*, 14-15.

123 Rioult, 'Le Havre', 7-31.

124 Howard, *An Account*, 26-32.

125 Farasyn, *Bloeiperiode*, 63-175.

prominent coordinating role from 1770 onwards, though, as I have shown, without financial contribution. Additionally, ad hoc restrictions against shipping from the Ottoman Empire adopted during particular plague epidemics became permanent policies after the initial outbreak had ceased. Lastly, in 1785, the government tried to redeem natural places of isolation like the Gouweloze Creek for more elaborate, man-made quarantine facilities. A Mediterranean-style lazaretto was constructed in the Zwin, and efforts were made to establish a permanent quarantine site in Nieuport. Both latter evolutions coincided with the move towards 'universal quarantine', identified by Chase-Levenson, and the rejuvenated interest in quarantine infrastructure in Mediterranean port cities, and indeed neighbouring countries such as Great Britain and the Dutch Republic. The growing interference of the central government reflected two core policy trends: the increasing influence of cameralism and populationism, which viewed a growing and healthy population as the base of the strength of the state, and commercial development, which could be greatly hampered by both too stringent and too lax quarantine measures. In this view, health measures in the coastal area were as much a protection against plague as a protection against economic downturn.

The permanent quarantine facilities in both Nieuport and the Zwin, however, proved short-lived. When captains from yellow fever-stricken North America arrived in the Austrian Netherlands in 1793, they were still greeted and questioned by a sloop in front of the harbour, visited by members of the city council instead of deputies of a specialised health board, and were led to an improvised part of the harbour instead of a permanent lazaretto – just like their Marseille colleagues had been 73 years earlier. By the end of Austrian rule, sanitary policies in the Southern Netherlands' port cities and coastal area continued to primarily resemble those typical of northern countries. Still, during the eighteenth century, northern and southern Europe clearly were no entirely separated sanitary spheres. Concerning quarantine practices, Mediterranean currents stretched as far as the North Sea.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful and constructive comments.

Annex: Maritime quarantine in the Austrian Netherlands, 1720-1795

Year	Ship	Captain	Crew size	Flag[1]	Begin of quarantine	End of quarantine	Length (days)	Quarantine location	Location	Voyage[2]	Cargo	Sources[3]
1720	*The Ambitious*	Henry du Peuse	27	FR	18.10.1720	(c.) 05.12.1720	40+	land	Ostend/ Bredene	Marseille (17.05) > Sète (24.06) > Mallorca > Gibraltar > Cádiz > Calais (27.08) > Hellevoetsluis (02.09) > Ostend (Rotterdam*)	cotton, tobacco, spirits, wine, roots, dye	SAB
1721	*The Elisabeth*	Niclais Daneke			13.12.1721			ship	Ostend	Bordeaux > Ostend	brandy	SAB (NOT)
1722	*The Love of Bruges*	Joseph de Paine			12.01.1722			ship	Ostend	Bordeaux > Ostend	wine	SAB (NOT)

[1] ANL = Austrian Netherlands, FR = France, DK = Denmark, SW = Sweden, REP = Dutch Republic, VEN = Venice.

[2] Dates are dates of leave. * = actual destination. † = quarantine. P = visit by Ottoman privateer.

[3] As mentioned in the introduction, the city archives of Ostend, with its admiralty and city council documents supposedly the most valuable source of information regarding maritime quarantine in the Austrian Netherlands, were lost during World War II. Additionally, because quarantine measures touched upon many aspects of society (health, economy, public works) and different levels of government, remaining traces of isolated ships are spread across various archival locations. Without doubt, some of these are missing here, and the number of vessels included here and condensed into Table 2 and Figure 7 should be considered as a lower bound. NAB = National Archives Belgium, SAB = State Archives Bruges, SAG = State Archives Ghent. FOB = Franc of Bruges, SOF = States of Flanders, PC = Privy Council, FC = Financial Council, SSW = Secretary of State and War. NOT = Notary Public. GVG = *Gazette van Gendt*. Consulted documents are *Gazette van Gendt*, 1743-1744, 1750, 1752-1756, 1758-1765, 1766-1790, 1792-1795; ARA, *Privy Council*, nrs. 1230/A, 1230/B, 1231; ARA, *Financial Council*, nr. 4358; ARA, *Secretary of State and War*, nr. 2160; SAG, *States of Flanders*, nrs. 11077/BIS, 11078, 11079, 11080; SAB, *Franc of Bruges: Bundles*, nr. 316, 321, 349/1, 350, 713, 755/2; SAB, Notaries Public, Deposit 1940 and 1941. Concerning these notary archives I made thankful use of the inventory created by the late Jan Coopman, who spent decades making the many thousands of deeds accessible for research. Coopman's momentous achievement rests at Familiekunde Oostende, free to use by all historians interested in maritime history.

Annex: continued

Year	Ship	Captain	Crew size	Flag[1]	Begin of quarantine	End of quarantine	Length (days)	Quarantine location	Location	Voyage[2]	Cargo	Sources[3]
1722	*The Two Brothers*	Martinus Maes			16.01.1722			ship	Ostend	Bordeaux > Ostend	wine, plums, syrup	SAB (NOT)
1722	*The Joanna Inspirita*	Ivo Nio			27.01.1722			ship	Ostend	Bordeaux > Ostend	wine, sugar, syrup	SAB (NOT)
1722	*The Flying Mercury*	Nicolaes Lootens			05.03.1722			ship	Ostend	Bordeaux > Ostend	wine, plums	SAB (NOT)
1722	*The Mary*	Guillaume Le Godee			15.03.1722			ship	Ostend	Nantes > Ostend	wine	SAB (NOT)
1722	*The Anna Louise*	Cornelis Gyllegodt			15.03.1722			ship	Ostend	Bayonne > Ostend	wine	SAB (NOT)
1722	*The Jacoba*	Joannes van Braekel			15.03.1722			ship	Ostend	Nantes > Ostend	wine, brandy, sugar	SAB (NOT)
1722	*The Friends' Adventure*	Pieter Valckenier			17.03.1722	04.1722		ship	Ostend	Bayonne > Ostend	wine	SAB (NOT)
1722		John Battels			26.04.1722	>31.05.1722	36+	ship	Ostend	Nantes > Ostend	wine, brandy	SAB (NOT)
1722	*The Amiable Guardian*	Charles de la Loche			20.05.1722	06.1722		ship	Ostend	Bordeaux > Ostend	wine	SAB (NOT)
1722		Charles Langlois			08.11.1722			ship	Ostend	Bordeaux > Ostend	wine, brandy	SAB (NOT)
1743		Sablé			10.09.1743	01.10.1743	21	ship	Ostend	Dunkirk > Ostend	tobacco	GVG
1743		Joseph Willems			10.09.1743	01.10.1743	21	ship	Ostend	Dunkirk > Ostend	wool	GVG
1743		Mullaert			10.09.1743	01.10.1743	21	ship	Ostend	Dunkirk > Ostend	tobacco	GVG
1743		Gerrit Stroom			19.09.1743	28.10.1743	40	ship	Ostend	Sète > Ostend[4]	brandy	SAB, NAB (PC), GVG
1743				ANL	21.09.1743	01.10.1743	10	ship	Ostend	Dieppe > Ostend	fishing nets	GVG

[4] The *Gazette van Gendt* says the ship hailed from Ceuta ('Seuta'), contrary to Sètes ('Cette' in the spelling of the day) according to both Privy Council and Franc of Bruges records. I opted for the latter, as there was no recurring trade between Ceuta and Ostend, and brandy was a cargo typical of southern France.

Annex: continued

Year	Ship	Captain	Crew size	Flag[1]	Begin of quarantine	End of quarantine	Length (days)	Quarantine location	Location	Voyage[2]	Cargo	Sources[3]
1743	*The Anna Margaret*	Job van Zut			01.11.1743			ship	Ostend	Málaga > Ostend	wine, figs, raisins	SAB (NOT)
1744	*The Three Sisters*	Lobbeken Boom			27.02.1744			ship	Ostend			SAB (NOT)
1745	*The Alida Cornelia*	Barent Pietersens			02.02.1745			ship	Ostend	Málaga > Ostend	figs, raisins	SAB (NOT)
1751	*The Stephan*	Philip Payne			26.11.1751	12.12.1751	17	ship	Ostend	Málaga > Ostend		SAB (NOT)
1752	*The King George*		14		14.12.1752			ship	Ostend	Smyrna > Civitavecchia† > Ostend (Dunkirk*)	wool, marble	SAB
1753	*The Gertrude*	Hans Pieter Gros		DK	05.03.1753			ship	Ostend	Málaga > Ostend	fruit, wine	GVG, SSW
1764		Hulder			18.09.1764			ship	Ostend	Torre la Mata > Ostend	salt	GVG
1770	*The Two Sisters Clara & Johanna*	Jan Slaak		REP	03.10.1770	15.10.1770	14	ship	Ostend	Gdańsk ('Danzig') (25.08) > Hellevoetsluis† > Ostend	timber	GVG, NAB (PC)
1770	*The Four Brothers*	P.J. De Vries	5	REP	11.10.1770	> 20.11.1770	60+	ship	Ostend	Gdańsk (15.09) > Ostend	wool, potassium, woad, gravel	GVG, NAB (PC)
1770	*The Six Brothers*	Jacques De Ruyter	5		01.11.1770			ship	Ostend	Gdańsk (19.09) > Veere (31.10) > Ostend (Bruges*)	potassium, woad, gravel	GVG, NAB (PC)
1770	*The Emperor Josephus*	M. La Grande			18.11.1770	28.12.1770	40	ship	Ostend	'Baltic' > Ostend	timber, sailing cloth	GVG, SAG (SOF), NAB (PC)
1770	*The Prince Charles*	Alexander De Vos			19.11.1770	28.12.1770	40	ship	Ostend	Riga > Ostend	timber, sailing cloth	GVG, SAG (SOF), NAB (PC)

Annex: continued

Year	Ship	Captain	Crew size	Flag[1]	Begin of quarantine	End of quarantine	Length (days)	Quarantine location	Location	Voyage[2]	Cargo	Sources[3]
1770	*The Magdalena*	P. Reynders			19.11.1770	28.12.1770	40	ship	Ostend	Riga > Ostend	timber, sailing cloth	GVG, SAG (SOF), NAB (PC)
1771	*The Orient*	Nicolas Bergman	12	SW	08.12.1770	14.12.1770	7	land	Middelkerke	Karlshamn (17.10) > Ostend (Lisbon/Marseille*)	timber, iron, tiles, whetstones	NAB (PC), SAG (SOF), SAB
1771	*The Saint John Baptist*	Joachim Schultz			18.01.1771	12.02.1771	27	ship	Ostend	Gdańsk > Norway > Ostend	potassium, woad	GVG, SAG (SOF), NAB (PC)
1771	*The Tranquillity*	Engwens			12.06.1771	16.06.1771	5	ship	Ostend	Gdańsk > Ostend	potassium, woad	GVG
1771		Frans La Grande			08.11.1771			ship	Ostend	Archangel/ Onega > Ostend	timber	GVG, NAB (PC)
1771	*The Gift of God*	Jean Cannu	7	FR	16.11.1771	20.11.1771	5	ship	Ostend	Málaga (09.10) > Ostend	wine, fruit	GVG, NAB (PC)
1771	*The Wine Trade*	Roeland Rasmuth			18.11.1771	20.11.1771	3	ship	Ostend	Málaga > Ostend		GVG, NAB (PC)
1771	[local population]		3	ANL	18.11.1771	20.11.1771	3	land	Koksijde	-	touching stranded stockfish	NAB (PC)
1771	*The Elizabeth*	Pieter Anderson			19.11.1771	22.11.1771	4	ship	Ostend	Copenhagen > Helsingør > Ostend	tea, porcelain, silk	GVG, NAB (PC)
1771		Laurent Bublitz			25.11.1771	29.11.1771	5[5]	ship	Ostend	Onega > Ostend	potassium, woad, timber	GVG
1771		Jean Vool			26.11.1771	29.11.1771	5[6]	ship	Ostend	Klaipėda ('Memel') > Ostend	timber	GVG

[5] The *Gazette van Gendt* states that *Laurent Bublitz* when entering the port was condemned to a 40-day quarantine. GVG, 28.11.1771. Nevertheless, Privy Council records prove that Bublitz was discharged prematurely, probably because of his cargo.

[6] The *Gazette van Gendt* states that Jean Vool when entering the port was condemned to a 40-day quarantine. GVG, 28.11.1771. Nevertheless, Privy Council records prove that Vool was discharged prematurely, probably because of his cargo.

Annex: continued

Year	Ship	Captain	Crew size	Flag[1]	Begin of quarantine	End of quarantine	Length (days)	Quarantine location	Location	Voyage[2]	Cargo	Sources[3]
1771	*The Appolonia*	Gauke Jelles		REP	24.12.1771	(c.) 04.01.1772	13	ship	Ostend	Gdańsk (23.10) > Marstrand > Ostend	wool, potassium, feathers, hare skins, brushes	GVG, NAB (PC)
1772	*The Hope*	Pierre Bauman			01.01.1772	05.01.1772	5	ship	Ostend	Riga > Ostend	timber	GVG
1772	*The Theodosia*	Hendrik Reynbard			22.01.1772	22.01.1772	1	ship	Ostend	Klaipėda > Ostend	timber	GVG
1772	*The New Leeuwaard*	Albert Sikkes			10.08.1772		[1]	ship	Ostend	Gdańsk > Ostend	wool, hair, gravel	NAB (PC)
1772	*The Morning Star*	Fredrik Kinder			14.08.1772		[1]	ship	Ostend	Gdańsk > Ostend	timber, bronze case	NAB (PC)
1772	*The Peggy*	Edward Brown			18.08.1772		[1]	ship	Ostend	Gdańsk > Ostend	wool, gravel	NAB (PC)
1772	*The Drasma*	Minne Aukes Bakker			01.10.1772	06.10.1772	6	ship	Ostend	Seville > Ostend	wool	SAB (NOT)
1779	*The Cornelia*	Reintje Nobel			10.10.1779	17.10.1779	8	ship	Ostend	Livorno > P (22.08) > Ostend		GVG
1780	*The Neptune*	Stevert Sundberg			14.07.1780			ship	Ostend	Genua/Livorno > P (03.06) > Ostend	oil, fruit, rice	GVG, NAB (PC)
1780	*The Dongenburg*	Pieter Cogie		REP	16.07.1780	19.07.1780	4	ship	Ostend	Salou > P (19.05) > Ostend		GVG, NAB (PC)
1780	*The Freedom of Amsterdam*	Cornelis Aerts		REP	21.07.1780	28.07.1780	8	ship	Ostend	Livorno (21.05) > Genoa (23.05) > P (05.06) > Ostend	oil, wine	GVG, NAB (PC), SAB (NOT)
1780	*The Griffin*	Pieter Pieters		REP	31.08.1780	04.09.1780	5	ship	Ostend	Genoa > P (16.06) > Barcelona > Ostend		GVG, NAB (PC)

Annex: continued

Year	Ship	Captain	Crew size	Flag[1]	Begin of quarantine	End of quarantine	Length (days)	Quarantine location	Location	Voyage[2]	Cargo	Sources[3]
1780	*The Galleon of Amsterdam*	Romke Fedderickx			25.10.1780	18.12.1780	55	ship	Ostend	Thessaloniki > Ostend	wool, cotton	GVG, NAB (PC)
1781	*The Maria Elizabeth*	Anders Andersen			29.01.1781	04.02.1781	7	ship	Ostend	Trieste > Ostend	tea	GVG, NAB (PC)
1781	*The Bertella*	Martin Claasen			04.02.1781	07.02.1781	4	ship	Ostend	Smyrna > Ostend		GVG, NAB (PC)
1781	*Nostra Signora del Rosario*			VEN	03.10.1781	11.10.1781	9	ship	Ostend	Barcelona > Ostend > Rotterdam (11.10)	wine	NAB (PC)
1781	*The Frederic*	Diderik Cornelissen Dierderickx			31.08.1781	10.10.1781[7]	40	ship	Ostend	Genua (17.06) > P (20.06) > Algiers (30.06) > Ostend	olive oil	GVG, SAB (NOT)
1781	*The Rose*	Nicolas Thomson	14	DK	(c.) 13.11.1781			(stranded) ship	Nieuport	Barcelona† > Sant Salvador > Salou (27.09) > Nieuport (Ostend*)	spirits, silk tissues	NAB (PC)
1783	*The Lion of Bruges*	Francis du Corroy			03.12.1783	10.12.1783	8	ship	Ostend	Portsmouth, VA (27.09) > Dover (29.11) > Ostend	tobacco, rice	GVG, NAB (PC)
1787	*The Neptune*	S. Schulser			08.02.1787			ship	Nieuport	Smyrna > Ostend		GVG
1793	*The General Washington*	J. Bigland			13.12.1793		[10-12]	ship	Ostend	Charleston, SC > Ostend	rice, coffee	GVG, SAG (SOF)

[7] An advertisement in the *Gazette van Gendt* of 06.09.1781 states that '[…] hopes are high that capt[ain] D.C. Diederickx will be discharged of his quarantine in the coming days'. Notary records, however, prove that the ship completed a full quarantine of 40 days.

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