

The History of Public Health in Pre-Industrial Societies

A bibliography compiled by G. Geltner and J. Coomans, University of Amsterdam

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This is a list of secondary sources with direct bearing on the history of public health before c. 1750. It is predominantly European and Mediterranean, although we are gradually expanding the geographical coverage of studies concerning *population-level, preventative interventions in pre-modernity*. Wherever possible, we added links to works that are **freely and fully available online**, that is, they neither hide behind pay walls nor require membership or any other form of (pre)registration to be accessed. Your comments and references are always welcome and can be sent to: g.geltner@uva.nl or j.coomans@uva.nl.

A few clarifying notes, especially for those wishing to propose additional items:

1. **Primary sources** were excluded mainly because we know of relatively few original texts in print that mainly and directly attest population-level preventative theory, policy, or practice.¹ To be sure, the topic can be fruitfully explored by mining government, office-holders', and guild statutes, architectural and building manuals, narrative accounts, tax records, and of course medical and scientific texts and recipe books—all sources that have been frequently edited, printed, and even translated. But these would be too numerous to list here, as would be other directly relevant sources not yet in print and surviving in numerous archives and libraries.
2. **Conceptual boundaries:** We have steered clear of several closely-related fields, including demography, nutrition and private hygiene, commerce and food supply, charity and lay piety, and the institutional history of hospitals, alms-houses, leprosaria, prisons, mental asylums, and brothels. While the latter group of institutions certainly had preventative functions, it is rarely the focus of the existing literature; and to a lesser but still significant extent this tendency characterizes studies on Black Death, whose themes usually far exceed the scope of this list. As for medical history itself, we have left out the bulk of works on curing, caring, and even prophylactic medicine, unless they directly comment on population-level healthcare. These hard choices were in part made possible by the solid state of these fields.
3. **The chronology** adopted here is Euro-centric. It derives from the conventional dating of the Industrial Revolution's onset, which, along with rapid urbanization, generated major pressures on city dwellers. Rather than as a watershed moment, then, industrialization captures the nexus of political, medical, and technological developments widely perceived as ushering in the modern public health movement, from democratization and health citizenry, to the rise of germ theory, to organized public hygiene and inoculation campaigns.
4. We did not specify **individual contributions in edited volumes** that deal mainly or solely with pre-modern public health. In other words, if an edited volume appears below, it contains more than one essay that is directly relevant to pre-modernity. Underlying this choice is our desire not only to save space but also to encourage users to become familiar with the broader debates and contexts in which earlier examples of public health are discussed.

This list is updated annually. You may always access it through G. Geltner's [website](#) and J. Cooman's [website](#).

¹ Two exceptions are H.M. Chew and W. Kellaway (eds.), *London Assize of Nuisance 1301-1431 - A Calendar* (London: HMSO, 1973) and N.E. Vanzan Marchini (ed.), *Le leggi di sanità della Repubblica di Venezia*, 4 vols. (Venice: CISO-Neri Pozza, 1995-2000).

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