

### Book Reviews

Medical historians will find the chapter on plague epidemics of particular interest. Dr. Finlay shows how epidemic death rates varied with location, social status, age, and (least easily explained) sex; and he stresses in a telling conclusion that London's demography depended more on the "background" level of mortality than on these occasional critical years, despite their dramatic effects. Here and elsewhere, he succeeds in illuminating some of the most fundamental features of London at a time when it was becoming the greatest metropolis in Europe.

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PHILIP CASH, ERIC H. CHRISTIANSON, and J. WORTH ESTES (editors), *Medicine in Colonial Massachusetts, 1620–1820. A Conference Held 25–26 May 1978 by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, Boston, The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1980, pp. xxiii, 425, illus., \$25.00.

This volume's paradoxical title, which identifies the colonial period in Massachusetts with the years from 1620 to 1820, reflects one of the leading constraints placed upon the colonial medical historian's endeavour. The few extant sources from the bulk of the colonial period have been exhaustively studied; documentation is extensive only from the 1740s, and abundant only after 1760. Further exacerbating this problem is the fact that unlike Philadelphia, in Massachusetts, or more particularly in Boston, medical institutions such as schools and societies that conventionally provide grist for the historian's mill were almost entirely founded only after the Revolutionary War, for reasons that Whitfield J. Bell jr., and G. B. Warden skilfully explicate in their studies. Accordingly, many of the fifteen essays that comprise this collection not only needlessly recount knowledge that is commonplace, but also deal almost exclusively with the period after 1775, and strictly speaking are not colonial history at all.

Three essays obviate these problems by exploiting new categories of sources using demographic and quantitative analysis. Douglas Jones's study of the sick poor and the practitioners who attended them in eighteenth-century Essex County is plainly the outstanding piece of the volume. Based largely upon court and town records, it incorporates the techniques and ideas of the best of colonial American historiography. Using similar records, as well as church registers, Eric Christianson's discussion of the demographic, educational, and economic characteristics of Massachusetts' practitioners is extracted from the longer study that is his dissertation; it is unlikely that anyone else could coax more information out of the sources he has mined. J. Worth Estes's contribution pivots upon an analysis of four physicians' manuscript account books and ledgers. Although his study is drawn from a limited number of sources, it provides intriguing insights into eighteenth-century therapeutic practice by pointing to the similarities and differences among his practitioners in their uses of the *materia medica*.

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GUSTAV HENNINGSEN, *The witches' advocate. Basque witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition (1609–1614)*, Reno, Nevada, University of Nevada Press, 1980, 8vo, pp. xxix, 607, \$24.00.

This fascinating book makes an extremely important contribution to the history both of the European witch-craze and of the Spanish Inquisition. The "witches' advocate" was Alonso de Salazar Frías, one of the three inquisitors at Logroño, in the North of Spain. The importance of this inquisitor's sane and sceptical investigations into an outbreak, lasting from 1609 to 1614, of witch-accusations in the Basque region, has long been known, from C. H. Lea's *History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages* (1888), and quite recently from Julio Caro Baroja's *The world of the witches* (1964); but Henningsen, a Danish folklorist, has discovered an enormous wealth of documents in the archives of the Inquisition in Madrid, which enable him to trace in the greatest detail the history both of this witch-panic and of the gradual development in the *Suprema* (the central tribunal of the Spanish Inquisition, in Madrid) of a sceptical attitude towards accusa-

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tions of witchcraft and of a policy of dampening, rather than fostering, such panics. This development was not, of course, achieved by Salazar single-handed, important though his activities were; he was helped by the sceptical Bishop of Pamplona, Antonio Venegas de Figueroa, who carried out investigations in his own diocese and communicated the results to the *Suprema*, and, still more important, by the Inquisitor General, Bernardo de Sandoval y Rojas, a patron of Cervantes, and also of Salazar himself, from about 1590 onwards.

It is evident from instructions (p. 256) sent by the *Suprema* to the inquisitors at Logroño as early as 1608, at the beginning of the Basque panic, that this all-powerful, central tribunal of the Inquisition was already in favour of careful, sceptical, fact-finding investigations of mass-accusations of witchcraft, in particular, of trying to establish whether the witches' meetings, the *aquelarres* (i.e., Sabbaths), really took place, or were merely illusions or dreams. This last point was especially important, since most of the accusations came from children under twelve who named people they had seen at the Sabbath, to which, on their own testimony, they had been unwillingly transported, while asleep. The diabolic goings-on they claimed to have seen at the *aquelarres* derive almost certainly from the slightly earlier panic on the French side of the border, where the notorious mission of Pierre de Lancre had established a very full mythology of the Sabbath. Salazar's visitation of the infected area of 1611–1612 established beyond all reasonable doubt, or at least, more importantly, beyond the doubt of the *Suprema*, that there was no factual evidence at all for any regular meetings of witches, and that the great majority of confessions of attendance at Sabbaths, made by both adults and children, were the consequence of intimidation, powerful suggestion, or, when not consciously mendacious, vivid dreams.

Since Henningsen himself (p. 390) considers that this epidemic of "stereotyped" dreams was one of the main causes of the Basque witch-panic, it is odd that he does not discuss Carlo Ginzburg's *I Benandanti* (though this is mentioned in a footnote), also based on inquisitorial records, which describes a similar dream-epidemic in north-eastern Italy, and provides the only solid evidence in favour of Margaret Murray's hypothesis that the witches' Sabbath derived from a beneficent pagan fertility cult – a theory which Henningsen spends some time in refuting.

My only other criticism of this excellent and important book is that, owing to the extreme abundance of his source materials, the narrative is sometimes not easy to follow, and that the index is defective. But I look forward to the promised publication of the documents relevant to this book, and to further studies based on the archives he has so thoroughly explored.

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H. M. RUSSELL and J. WEINBERG (translators). *The Book of Knowledge from the Mishnah Torah of Maimonides*, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, 1981, 4to. pp. xi, 135, £4.00.

At first instance it may seem strange to find part of the *Mishnah Torah* of Moses ben Maimon as a publication of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Maimonides, however, was a man of learning in the catholic sense as understood in the ancient world where scholarship was interdisciplinary, free from the narrow specialization of our day. Maimonides as Talmudist, philosopher, astronomer, and physician belonged to that tradition and it is appropriate that a translation of part of one of his works should be published by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, the acropolis of the north.

The *Mishnah Torah* was the result of ten years' labour in which Maimonides set out the first complete classification of the intricate mass of Mosaic and rabbinical laws into fourteen coherent groups. Each group contains a book which is subdivided into sections, chapters, and paragraphs. The first book, the *Book of Knowledge (Madda)* which Dr. Russell and Rabbi Weinberg have given us in English translation, is concerned with such basic truths as the unity of God, the study of the Torah, idolatry, and repentance, matters of importance to the preservation of a healthy mind and body. As the translators correctly point out in their introduction, Maimonides concentrated on preventative rather than curative medicine and strongly advocated the discipline of mind and body to this end.