

Book Reviews

Muslim Rebellion (1856–73) the movements of troops again disrupted the ecological equilibrium, and further plague epidemics ensued. The war also forced the opium traders to take an alternative trade route between Yunnan, which was a major Chinese opium growing area, and Lingnan. The ecological conditions of the new route were more favourable for the spread of plague. After 1860 plague gradually spread eastward and finally reached Canton and Hong Kong.

Benedict is familiar with Andrew Cunningham's argument that the rise of laboratory medicine has radically transformed the identity of plague, and that bubonic plague defined by bacteriology should not be confused with "plague" recorded in the pre-bacteriological literature. But Benedict believes that "by supplementing the historical record with knowledge drawn from modern epidemiology, medical geography and regional analysis" (p. 11), this identification can be achieved. However, as the author admits, this approach faces several difficulties. It relies on the assumption that the environment of this region remained unchanged during the past two centuries (p. 24). This assumption has not been proved. Moreover, the nosology of traditional Chinese medicine differed significantly from Western medicine. Until the late nineteenth century, there was not even a Chinese word corresponding to "plague" (p. 8). Most Chinese historical literature documented only when and where epidemics occurred without giving detailed descriptions of them (p. 11). Given these difficulties, Benedict's assertion seems highly problematic.

The second half of the book documents various Chinese responses to the alleged plague epidemics. Benedict gives a succinct account of the controversy between the Cold Damage school and Warm Factor school of Chinese medicine over the cause and treatment of "plague". She also gives a vivid description of popular religious beliefs about "plague" and the rituals practised to exorcise it. The account in chapter 5 of the conflict between British colonial authorities and the Dunghua Hospital, a powerful Chinese charity organization, is a

nice study of native resistance to colonial medical policy. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the Chinese government seldom imposed public health measures during the plague epidemics because Chinese medicine did not consider the disease contagious. However, after China was defeated in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), the Chinese reform movement introduced public health institutions based on the Japanese model, which relied on policing to enforce health policy. Benedict uses the responses of the Shenyang city police to the Manchurian plague epidemic as an example to illustrate the character of the newly founded Chinese state medicine.

The first half of the book is a bold but questionable exercise in historical epidemiology. Its detailed statistical data, which are useful for future research, are a redeeming feature. The second half of the book is more satisfying, and it is to be regretted that Benedict did not explore some of the issues raised in this part further. There are some scattered whiggish remarks on past medical practices (both Western and Chinese). Social historians of medicine may feel uneasy about Benedict's more biologicistic statements such as "[T]hese stark biological facts about plague pathology meant that individual residents and communities faced common dilemmas during epidemic outbreaks regardless of historical and geographical location" (p. 129). Still, historians who are interested in colonial medicine and the introduction of Western medicine into non-western societies will find fascinating materials and rewarding reading in this book.

Shang-Jen Li, Imperial College, London

Michael Anderson (ed.), *British population history: from the Black Death to the present day*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 421, £50.00, \$69.95 (hardback 0-521-57030-1); £16.96, \$24.95 (0-521-57884-1).

Recent studies of the population history of Britain by historical demographers and medical historians have produced a wealth of

Book Reviews

demographic information, opening up new and exciting issues of debate. We are now able to chart, with some confidence, the chronology of population change from the Black Death to the present day. Analyses of shifts in age-specific mortality, age at marriage, maternal mortality and a host of other demographic variables are helping to enrich our understanding of the past and to throw new light on the interrelationships between demographic, social, economic and epidemiological changes. Many questions remain to be explored and answered, and the subject of population history will continue, into the next century, to be as stimulating and tantalizing as ever.

This edition aims to bring together in a coherent and readable manner some of the main findings and debates which have stemmed from the prolific outpouring of scholarly work on the population history of Britain and Europe. While many of the original studies remain highly technical, this volume is ideally suited to students and non-specialist readers. It contains five extremely well written essays covering English population change from 1348 to 1991; some essays also contain information on Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and one encompasses north-western Europe. The essays, however, are not new. Readers familiar with the series *Studies in Economic and Social History* will immediately recognize that four of these essays have been published before—one as long ago as 1977. The original individual paperback books (of roughly 80 to 90 pages each and currently priced at £6.95) have always been popular with students and are still widely available in libraries and bookshops.

John Hatcher's excellent piece on 'Plague, population and the English economy, 1348–1530' was first published in 1977 and has not been altered in this edition. According to the editor: "the basic trends which it proposes have largely been confirmed by subsequent work, and the demographic processes underlying the trends remain subject to debate". Michael Anderson's essay on 'Population change in north-western Europe, 1750–1850' was originally published in 1988;

R A Houston's chapter 'The population history of Britain and Ireland, 1500–1750' and R I Woods' 'The population of Britain in the nineteenth century' were published in 1992. The only new, and very welcome addition is the essay by Michael Anderson on 'British population history, 1911–1991'.

While this collection provides a useful synthesis for students and non-specialists, it is a great pity that the original essays have not been up-dated to include recent material and references. This will be disappointing for readers who are looking for the latest ideas on a topic or who are expecting a good introduction to current discussions in population history. Omissions from the bibliographies of key works published in the last ten to twenty years will prove especially frustrating.

Mary Dobson, Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, Oxford

G Melvyn Howe, *People, environment, disease and death: a medical geography of Britain throughout the ages*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1997, pp. xx, 328, £50.00 (0-7083-1373-6).

The first version of this book, *Man, environment and disease in Britain: a medical geography through the ages*, was published in 1972 and appeared in paperback in 1976. In this, the "revised and restructured edition", the chapter headings are the same, except for an additional "retrospect and prospect" in this new version. Most of the original maps, graphs, and tables have been retained, and some new ones added. The result, however, falls short of bringing the book up to date. Either the author is unaware of, or chose not to include, a great deal of important historical work which has appeared in the quarter century which separates the two versions. Thus, the section on the increase in the population of Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (p. 141), where the author cites the papers of Griffith (1926) and McKeown and Record (1962), he neither mentions nor shows awareness of the