

packed and argued. Although it is immensely rewarding, the book is not light reading. I realize that historical demography is not every historian's choice, but provided you are not allergic to tables, graphs and statistics, this is a fascinating indicator of the way that historical demography is progressing.

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Paul Hackett, *"A very remarkable sickness": epidemics in the Petit Nord, 1670–1846*, Manitoba Studies in Native History 14, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2002, pp. xvii, 315, Can\$55.00 (hardback 0-88755-174-2), Can\$24.95 (paperback 0-88755-659-0).

In *"A very remarkable sickness": epidemics in the Petit Nord, 1670–1846*, Paul Hackett broadens our understanding of the diffusion of disease in the fur trade era in the Canadian Northwest known as the Petit Nord (south of Hudson Bay and north of Lake Superior, west to Lake Winnipeg). Hackett argues that epidemic disease spread into the region primarily through Aboriginal contacts. The study proceeds chronologically from 1670 through to a rather arbitrary end date of 1846; a structure that reflects the nature of his sources, Hudson's Bay Company records, rather than any regional patterns. Hackett also makes clear that the impact of disease was not uniform across the region. At times some groups were severely affected while others escaped completely. His use of a continental perspective is especially helpful as he documents the steady loss of isolation as the region is pulled into the larger disease pools to the east, south and eventually to the west at Red River. Hackett's work is an important contribution to a field that is often based more on conjecture and supposition than on specific regional analysis.

Hackett shows that epidemic disease probably did not arrive in the Petit Nord until the first decades of the eighteenth century, despite the presence of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) traders in the region. The length of the voyage from London to Hudson Bay and the small crews

mitigated against the transmission of what Hackett variously calls Old World diseases, crowd diseases, or epidemics. It was instead the westward expansion of Montreal-based traders in their relatively swift trade canoes that eventually brought epidemic smallpox to the Petit Nord. This was the "very remarkable sickness" mentioned in the title. It was considered remarkable because of the general good health enjoyed by the Aboriginal people up to that time. In the last half of the century mention of epidemics, mostly respiratory diseases, increased in the region but, as Hackett admits, this may simply reflect better record keeping by the HBC. Smallpox broke out again in 1779–1783, this time spread from the south at Mexico City. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the fur trade itself changed as competition between the HBC and Montreal-based traders led to a rush of post-building in the region. At the same time new disease pools emerged to the south as settlers and traders moved into the upper Missouri River region, and to the west at Red River. This increasing loss of isolation had predictable results for the Aboriginal people—increasing frequency of illness and the emergence of new diseases acting in concert such as whooping cough and measles.

Hackett argues that the period from 1821 to 1845 saw an epidemiological transition in the region as canal building in eastern North America and the introduction of steam technology brought families and their diseases more quickly to the margins of Petit Nord. Especially important was the increasing number of immigrant children to the south and west who brought childhood diseases such as mumps and chickenpox. The deadly transition was marked by repeated, often annual, epidemics. No longer would the people of Petit Nord have decades or even years to recover from epidemic disease. Compound epidemics of influenza, whooping cough, and scarlet fever also began to appear. But here Hackett makes two important points. First, even in this period of increased disease load, within the region disease continued to be carried from community to community by Aboriginal contacts. Second, within the region disease diffusion continued to

be variable. Some groups remained isolated and therefore relatively healthy because of limited contact with these Aboriginal contacts. Hackett suggests that contact was limited by geography and by fear of warfare. One wonders if contact was not in fact limited by a fear of disease! But there is little human agency in this study of epidemics.

Hackett's study is influenced by American anthropologist Henry Dobyns' *Their number become thinned*, although Hackett does not engage some of Dobyns' more controversial conclusions regarding the size of pre-contact (1492) populations in the Americas. Dobyns argues that the spread of epidemic disease in the Americas was often through Aboriginal contacts, thereby outstripping the direct influence of Europeans themselves. Thus, according to Dobyns, historic Aboriginal populations that were eventually encountered by those who kept records had already suffered considerable population loss. They were mere vestiges of once larger groups, leading Dobyns to increase significantly estimates of pre-contact populations in the Americas. Indeed, Hackett rarely comments on population changes in his study, which seems rather remarkable considering the thrust of his argument is that there were continued and increasingly deadly epidemics throughout the period. Perhaps wisely, Hackett refuses to extrapolate (as Dobyns and others have done) from scanty and unreliable records. But the reader is left to wonder as to the impact of these diseases on the people he purports to study.

Aboriginal people are silent victims in Hackett's study. In the last chapter 'The epidemics of 1846' Hackett attempts some analysis of the impact of disease on Aboriginal people. He suggests that those who turned to the fur trade posts for comfort and medicine had a chance of recovering from their condition; those who relied on Aboriginal medicine did not. Hackett bases this conclusion on one report of one Hudson's Bay Company trader (pp. 232–3). That Hackett accepts this conclusion at face value without analysing its self-serving nature is characteristic of the whole study. This is a study of disease, not of its victims.

Moreover, it skews the history of Aboriginal people. They are denied the human agency to respond to their condition; their fate is sealed by larger forces. Hackett's study perpetuates colonial images of Aboriginal people as doomed and dying. Constructions of Aboriginal people as fundamentally unwell and unable to withstand the rigours of change provided incoming colonial governments with the justification to deny them their lands and livelihoods. Today Canadian Aboriginal people continue to struggle to reclaim their lands, their resources and their own history.

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Nikolai Kremontsov, *The cure: a story of cancer and politics from the annals of the cold war*, University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. xvi, 261, illus., £16.50, US\$26.00 (hardback 0-226-45284-0).

Part political thriller, part love story, Kremontsov's account of a failed and now little remembered cancer therapy is a gripping read. The popular and accessible style of *The cure* and its considerable meditations on the romantic lives and attractions between the tale's chief protagonists, Russian scientists Nina Kliueva and Grigorii Roskin, certainly give the book an appeal beyond an historical audience; none the less, this *is* good history of medicine. *The cure* offers a solidly-researched, well-written account of the relationship of medicine and disease to wider social and political events and networks. It is, moreover, a particularly welcome addition to the literature on the history of cancer research and therapy, and more generally to the history of laboratory-based clinical research and its relationship to clinical practice.

Accounts of how post-Second World War and Cold War politics affected the development of experimental biology and experimental medicine in the US are quite numerous, but few consider the USSR in any depth. Work on Soviet science has, furthermore, tended to focus on the politics surrounding Sputnik or Lysenkoism; as such the world of Soviet