

Book Reviews

reserve is no sign of other-wordliness, for Rosenthal has never been one to shrink from difficult topics or from illuminating present concerns with light from the past. His book on hashish (1971), and his study here of passive male homosexuality, treat with tact and erudition topics that might, in others' hands, have degenerated into sensationalism or propaganda.

As well as an index and a selection of additional notes, this collection contains a full bibliography of Rosenthal's papers, books, and reviews, which will serve to direct the interested reader to other relevant, if less familiar, publications of the author.

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FRANCISCO GUERRA, *La medicina precolombina*, Madrid, Instituto de Cooperacion Iberoamericana, 1990, pp. 340, illus. (84-7232-567-9).

BERNARD R. ORTIZ DE MONTELLANO, *Aztec medicine, health, and nutrition*, New Brunswick and London, Rutgers University Press, 1990, pp. xvi, 308, illus., \$40.00 (0-8135-1562-9), \$15.00 (paperback, 0-8135-1563-7).

These two volumes contribute to the growing literature on the health of native Americans and the nature of their medical systems before the arrival of Europeans. In the introduction to *Aztec medicine, health, and nutrition*, Bernard Ortiz de Montellano raises the often-asked question, "Can Aztec vulnerability to European disease and abuse be explained by general weakness before the Conquest?" He responds by arguing that "in the main, the Aztecs were a healthy people [thus] Aztec medicine becomes an important part of the issue." The author begins his study with a systematic review of written sources compiled after the Spanish invasion and an explanation of the Aztec world-view and its relation to medical practices. Then he proceeds to tackle the controversy surrounding the size of the native population of Aztec Mexico in 1519. Using a model based on the carrying capacity of the land, he concludes that the oft-cited estimate of 25 million inhabitants should be halved.

According to Ortiz, the Aztec diet was excellent, better, in fact, than that consumed by modern-day residents of central Mexico. In addition, he offers an empirical evaluation of the Aztec diet and medicinal herbs, much of which is summarized in the Appendices where he includes data on the chemical analyses of commonly-used foods and herbs. In this way, he claims that one can determine the effectiveness of Aztec cures and the nutritional strengths and weaknesses of the Aztec diet.

Ortiz's discussion of epidemiology is rather brief and covers no new ground, but his chapters on aetiology, curing, and syncretism are important and innovative. He argues convincingly that modern Mexican folk medicine is the result of a syncretic process involving both Aztec and European medical traditions, thus challenging the studies of anthropologist George Foster and others who claim that modern Latin American folk medicine derives almost entirely from European medical traditions. The author also offers an innovative discussion of causation, concluding that Aztec aetiology was so complex that it is better to think of causation as a continuum between natural and supernatural forces.

Ortiz overstates his case when he claims that Aztec medicine was unique; in fact, recent research in the Andean area suggests that Aztec and Inca medical traditions were remarkably similar. Nevertheless, this book makes several valuable contributions to our understanding of Aztec medicine and offers a model for researchers working in other areas of Latin America.

The Instituto de Cooperacion Iberoamericana issued Francisco Guerra's book, *La medicina precolombina*, in honour of the quinquennial. Intended for a general audience, the photographs and illustrations in this work are outstanding and comprise one of its most valuable contributions. Guerra divides his study into chapters covering sources, cultures, nutrition, nosology, and regional overviews of aetiology and medical practices. The scope of the book is ambitious, attempting to treat the health and medical practices of native societies throughout the hemisphere. While the book contains an extensive bibliography, it fails to incorporate information from much of the recent literature on indigenous health and medicine. In spite of this shortcoming, Guerra's study offers an adequate, if somewhat traditional, introduction to the subject.

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