

Book Reviews

IRIS H. W. ENGSTRAND, *Spanish scientists in the New World. The eighteenth-century expeditions*, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 1981, 8vo, pp. xiv, 220, illus., £17.50.

Changes of policy, the Napoleonic conflict, and the collapse of the Spanish Empire meant that the massive amount of documentation and other materials arising from the Spanish expeditions to the New World during the eighteenth century was widely dispersed and that it remained largely unpublished until our own century. Undeserved obscurity has therefore been the lot until recently of many of these extraordinarily wide-ranging expeditions.

The present account, meticulous in its scholarship, and impressive in its graphic understanding of the place of detail within the whole, does much to rectify two previous omissions. It recounts the story of the Royal Scientific Expedition to New Spain (1785–1800), and of the Malaspina Expedition (1784–94) to South America, Mexico, Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, and California. An account of the latter has hardly yet appeared in print.

Concentration on these two interconnected expeditions has enabled the author to include a remarkable amount of material, including reports on the medicinal value of the flora, descriptive material on the fauna, on ethnography, geography, cartography, and, of course, much on botany, a prime concern of expeditions of this period. Contacts and co-operation between contemporary Spanish expeditions are made clear for the first time; and many historians will be grateful for an account of the hitherto little-known Mopox expedition in Cuba.

Much human detail emerges, not least the embittered relationships between some expeditionaries. Or, more largely, the heroic adventures of Theodor Haënke which surpass those of Munchhausen, in joining the Malaspina Expedition in Chile in 1790 after missing his ship in Cadiz. Not less interesting are the accounts of expeditionary ideals upheld by the second Viceroy Revillagigedo in New Spain, of ideals given passage by a cumbersome if ultimately efficacious imperial bureaucracy, and of the same ideals thwarted and even crushed by the narrow vision and exiguous purse of Carlos IV.

It is fortunate indeed that the balance of justice to these largely ill-treated and unsung scientists, illustrators, geographers, cartographers, and ethnographers, should have been redressed so ably in a production which it is impossible to fault. The writing is detailed, graphic, sympathetic, well referenced, but not without irony; the illustrations and maps are well chosen for variety and excellence (those in colour demonstrate the high quality of scientific illustration at this period), the appendices expand appropriately on the main text (particularly the invaluable list of books for the use of the Expedition in New Spain); and the bibliography of manuscript sources demonstrates the wide dispersal of the relevant documents and illustrations and the energy and devotion which has gone into their research. The index is excellent. In brief, both author and publishers are to be congratulated on an excellent product. Not only good scholarship, but a marvellous read.

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JOHN THORNE CRISSEY and LAWRENCE CHARLES PARISH, *The dermatology and syphilology of the nineteenth century*, New York, Praeger, 1981, 8vo, pp. viii, 439, illus., [no price stated].

Dermatology should be the easiest of all medical specialities: its lesions are there for all to see. In practice, however, most doctors find it easier to come to a diagnosis of the most obscure disease from a battery of biochemical and radiographical tests than to say what has caused the rash on a patient's skin. ("An allergy" is the usual guess.) Not surprisingly, the history of dermatology has also remained a rather esoteric pursuit, the almost exclusive domain of the dermatologists themselves.

The authors of the present work do not upset precedent, since they are both practising dermatologists. But they do manage to make the history of their mysterious craft accessible, even fun, for the unenlightened. Their survey of personalities and ideas from Robert Willan (1757–1812) to Karl Herxheimer (1861–1944) is filled with good stories, splendidly told. Behind the racy style, however, lies a solid core of fact and interpretations, thoroughly researched and