John Slater, Maríaluz López-Terrada, José Pardo-Tomás, eds. Medical cultures of the Early Modern Spanish Empire. Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate; 2014. 309 p. ISBN: 9781472428158. $ 109,95.

This book brings together in English papers from several recent academic conferences and research projects which have dealt with «medical cultures» in the early modern Hispanic world, both in the metropole and in various locations within Spain's overseas empire. The first and third parts deal respectively with medical knowledge and practices in colonial New Spain, and literary representations of diverse facets of the same, mostly in Spain itself. In between them lurks a more heterogenous section, devoted largely to the transnational communication of medical knowledge both within and beyond the peninsular sphere.

A brief run-down gives a sense of the interesting themes under discussion. The opening chapter, by Angélica Morales Sarabia, provides a succinct overview of the medical uses of peyote and other hallucinogenic plants during the first century of Spanish rule in Mexico. The author finds a fairly broad range of functions and users despite the negative associations of such plants with magic and even witchcraft, as well as with non-professional healers (especially indigenous women). José Pardo-Tomás then surveys the references to the demographic disaster which befell the native peoples of Mexico which appear in the famous yet still little-studied *Relaciones Geográficas de Indias* of the 1570s-80s. His intelligent probing of this fascinating source brings to light not only the polyphony of voices within these documents, but also the considerable diversity of explanations of the causes as well as the consequences of such an enormous catastrophe. Then Ralph Bauer weighs in with an intriguing glance at the alchemical associations of a novel plant from the New World, the so-called «dragon fruit», as it was presented by Nicolás Monardes, the famous Sevillian physician and tireless impresario of materia medica from the Americas. Bauer brings together iconography and botany to bear on a simple with rich cultural associations on both sides of the Atlantic, while emphasizing its role in attracting attention to the way in which certain New World plants were promoted as rivals to the more traditional forms of gold pursued by alchemists and conquistadores alike.

Part Two shows early modern Spanish medicine and science on the road, so to speak. Mauricio Sánchez-Menchero wades through the ever-useful corpus of letters between Spain and the New World —especially Mexico— to see what they reveal about health and disease. He unearths much of interest, including down-to-earth advice about how to cope with the fevers which

befell Europeans after landing at Veracruz, or how to adapt to the different food —«of less substance(…) but easier to digest»— that prevailed in the Indies. His short but interesting essay is quite literally an exercise in transatlantic history of medicine from below, and suggests that much more can be squeezed from such sources. M.A. Katritzky then investigates the notorious case of Pedro González, the patriarch of several generations of Canary Islanders who would become famous throughout Europe as unusually hairy «Wild Men» (and women). The author takes the reader on a breathless but highly learned romp in a search for ancient and medieval precedents for these portents. After lining up devils, anchorites, cannibals, amazons, and a wide range of animals he then shows how many of the qualities associated with these Old World figures were projected onto the indigenous peoples of the New World and this pace the widespread characterization of the latter as often *lacking* hair. Finally, Elisa Andretta offers a tight case study drawn from sixteenth-century Italy. She focuses in particular on how the numerous letters the humanist historian Juan Páez de Castro wrote to his friend Jerónimo Zurita back in Spain during the later 1540s can be tapped for revealing information concerning a wide range of subjects. These include his contacts there not only with Italian scholars and writers but also with numerous fellow Spaniards. By far the most interesting among the latter was Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, the imperial ambassador in Venice and later in Rome, and an energetic collector of ancient books and manuscripts. Andretta's generous quotation from Páez de Castro's missives provides a fascinating glimpse of the activities of a small but dedicated group of scholars, historians and physicians in Trent, Venice, and Rome who pursued scientific and medical studies alongside their other spiritual and political duties.

The third and final part is more literary in character. Enrique García Santo-Tomás opens this section on «Textual Cultures» with an overview of the appearance of obstetric personnel and problems in seventeenth-century literature, in particular the satirical prose works of the self-proclaimed Madrid moralist Francisco Santos. He drums up a number of interesting references to childbirth in Santos' wide-ranging, even anarchic output (my personal favorite is the quotation on p. 163 regarding a midwife's impressive familiarity with the different brands of hot chocolate). Maríaluz López-Terrada then offers a broad and well-organized overview of the range of illnesses discussed or alluded to in Golden Age theatre. Making her way from oppilation (organ obstruction) through melancholy to dropsy and sexually transmitted diseases, she offers a number of prescient observations regarding, for example, the differences between the way medicine was presented in formal *comedias* as opposed to lighter *entremeses*.

Tayra M.C. Lanuza-Navarro follows this with a parallel effort: a summary of the ways in which astrology, and astrological medicine in particular, were alluded to and evaluated in the same theatrical culture. She carefully distinguishes between the two faces of astrological medicine of the time: that which formed a normative part of academic medical tradition, and the much less reputable references to the stars were habitually written off as popular or magical healing. She finds that precisely the cultural ambiguity that surrounded astrology enhanced its appeal as a topic on the Golden Age stage, while at the same time it limited attempts to present astrology as a respectable ally of medicine. Finally, John Slater ends this section with an essay on the theological implications of «chymical medicine» in seventeenth-century Spain. After opening with an intriguing incident that suggests that chemical medicine found a significant degree of acceptance in Spain, he goes on to argue that Spanish Baroque literature was much more engaged with scientific questions than is usually believed. According to Slater, this is especially true of the later seventeenth century, which saw a visible turn toward arcana, chemical philosophy, Christian kabbala, and the like, at precisely the same time in which the much-celebrated *novatores* were trying to introduce recent developments in chemical medicine into Spain. The author explores this interesting coincidence (?) in relation to understandings of the Eucharist and other theological issues with considerable scientific implications. The result is a stimulating and wide-ranging look at a singular conjuncture, and one that suggests that there was much greater complexity in Spanish intellectual discourse than one would expect from a period commonly written off as one of isolation and decline.

Despite its solid organization and relatively tight focus, this book is subject to the dispersion typical of any collection of papers. It nevertheless has various messages to send, and these wind up lending coherence to the project. The first is one of forward movement. That is, even though the number of scholars working in this subfield is not large, it is growing, and the results of their work are increasingly solid and cumulative. Even stronger statements can be found in the two bookends of this volume. The introduction by the three co-editors, while occasionally too indulgent with the academic buzzwords of the day, is nevertheless lively and learned, and makes a strong case for the fundamental diversity of medical theory and practice within the Spanish empire. They conclude that the empire housed many medical cultures, and that these interacted in often unpredictable ways to limit the hegemony of European academic medicine. Their assertion that «there was no hegemonic medical culture... and no medical monoculture» may seem obvious on first sight, but

it certainly contradicts the common sense of much previous medical history, which took for granted the imposition of metropolitan medicine along with Spanish law, theology, and institutions.

This «soft» revisionism pales in comparison with the stirring declaration with which William Eamon closes the book. He takes up the famous (and for many Spaniards infamous) question posed by the French *Encyclopédie*, «what does Europe owe Spain?» His answer: plenty. What Europe owed Spain was its empire, which was not just the gold and silver it despoiled, but also the experience of being the first group of Europeans to construct and run a literally global entity full of strangeness and novelty in terms of (here he paraphrases John Elliott) the American environment, its exotic flora and fauna, and the diversity of its peoples and cultures. The Spaniards reacted to this unprecedented situation by collecting a massive amount of information about the New World, which they interpreted in often innovative, even surprising ways. Only a Eurocentric history of science focused tightly on theoretical disciplines to the detriment of a more empirical (and socially and geographically widespread) natural history could blithely ignore the significance of all that the Spaniards achieved, and which was then erased from the broader historical record.

It is hard to work on Spanish history and not be stirred by such a call to better remembrance, and I for one would not quibble with such revisionism. Still, what is not addressed here is how and why what started off being in Iberian hands —yes, the Portuguese had a role in all this as well— soon migrated elsewhere. By the later seventeenth century Spain was for most purposes no longer discovering, much less developing, this empirical knowledge. Even more woeful is the tale of its lack of diffusion to the rest of Europe and beyond. Eamon is quite right to chide well-known scholars for ignoring the Iberian underside of the Scientific Revolution. But he is much too quiet about the elephant in the room: the endgame to all this, which is the longterm failure of Spanish science to sustain the exciting momentum provoked by the early need to grapple with an unprecedented intellectual strangeness that called forth in turn «hybrid medical cultures that were cut loose from the strictures of academic medicine» (p. 243). And then what went wrong? ▮

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