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Secret Judgments of God: Old World Disease in Colonial Spanish America

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NOBLE DAVID COOK and GEORGE LOVELL, editors. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1992. xxiii + 285 pp., figures, tables, glossary, bibliography, index. \$28.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Ann F. Ramenofsky, University of New Mexico.

This edited volume began as a session of the International Congress of Americanists held in Amsterdam in 1988. Cook and Lovell selected from the presentations those that focused on "the impact of Old World diseases on native peoples during the colonial period in Spanish America" (p. xvi). The selection process resulted in a topically and methodologically coherent product. Contributors use historical methods to investigate the "web of disease" (p. 213) in various regions throughout Central and South America. Seven case studies are presented: Hanns Prem (Valley of Mexico in the sixteenth century), George Lovell (sixteenth-century Guatemala), Linda Newson (colonial Ecuador), Juan and Judith Villamarin (colonial Sabana de Bogoth), Brian Evans (sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Aymara, Peru), Susan Alchon (eighteenth-century Quito), and Fernando Casanueva (eighteenth-century southern Chile). Woodrow Borah provides the introductory essay; Noble Cook and George Lovell write the concluding essay.

The quality of the papers varies. Some have exciting insights into the disease process and its catastrophic consequences; others are prosaic in method or inference. Despite the uneven quality of the papers, this volume is an important addition to the study of Post-columbian disease history in the Americas. I am hopeful that this effort marks the beginning of much more research focused on investigating the general topic of disease among native, Latin American populations. Additionally, as the number of studies focusing on native demographic consequences of Old World disease introduction increases, our cherished assumption of continuity between prehistory and history may simply be proven wrong. Latin American populations, like those of North America, changed irrevocably because of the spread of Old World diseases.

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