

Mundo tuvo en los desarrollos de concepciones, métodos y prácticas científicas en los territorios peninsulares ibéricos. Sin embargo, el horizonte americano está sorprendentemente ausente en *The Spanish Disquiet*. A la luz precisamente de lo que la autora misma proponía en *Secret Science* y de lo que otros trabajos, cada vez más numerosos, han continuado ofreciendo sobre la perspectiva imperial ibérica, nuestra concepción de las culturas y prácticas científicas en la España moderna se han transformado enormemente. Por eso, de la lectura del libro surgen inevitablemente preguntas como ¿cuál fue la relación de Arias Montano con la naturaleza de ese Nuevo Mundo? Algo con lo que sin duda tropezó directamente durante sus estancias en Sevilla y en El Escorial, donde, entre otras cosas, fueron depositados los materiales de la expedición de Francisco Hernández, quien además le dirigió el poema latino en el que el Protomédico de Indias se lamentaba de la suerte corrida por su obra americana. ¿Contribuyeron estos encuentros de alguna forma a la construcción o puesta a prueba de su sistema de interpretación del mundo?

Son cuestiones que, como digo, quedan abiertas como posibles vías de continuación de una línea de investigación que *The Spanish Disquiet* articula brillantemente, gracias al examen de la trayectoria individual de Benito Arias Montano y al análisis de su proyecto intelectual, extremadamente complejo, resultado del entrecruce de presupuestos lingüísticos, filosóficos, y teológicos. A lo largo del recorrido que nos propone en su libro, María Portuondo plantea, además, desde una perspectiva original algunos temas fundamentales para la renovación de la historia de la ciencia y de los saberes en la primera edad moderna, como son las relaciones entre estudio textual y prácticas empíricas o entre esfera religiosa y esfera del conocimiento científico. ■

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■ **Ruth MacKay.** *Life in a Time of Pestilence: The Great Castilian Plague of 1596-1601.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2019. xiv+276 p. ISBN: 978-1-108-49820-3. 29,99 £

Known for her stellar research and sharp, analytic insight, Ruth MacKay's *Life in a Time of Pestilence* further advances that reputation. In her exploration of the deadliest Spanish epidemic of the early modern era, MacKay seeks to uncover

the «ordinary amidst the extraordinary» and argues that Castilians responded to the arrival of plague and its destructive impact just as they had in previous generations; they followed deep-seated customs and beliefs that informed every choice Castilians made whether to obey, cooperate, flee, or protest in the face of impending death and destruction. Municipalities relied on traditional ideas of good government that were well-established in the fabric of Castilian society and implemented a variety of public health and policing policies intended first to prevent the contagion's arrival to their locale and then to curb its destructive impact once the contagion found its way through the city gates. What MacKay discovers is that «given what they had to work with, denizens of late sixteenth-century Castile were admirably responsible» (p. 8). Whether or not Castile suffered from *Yersinia pestis* or another pathogen matters little and MacKay does not waste time debating the issue. Castilians understood the calamity of that five-year period as one derived from *peste* and acted accordingly.

Plague studies have certainly entered a period of serious revision. New debates on the nature and identification of the disease in conjunction with significant archival research at the local level, which seeks to place plague studies within a particular political and civic setting, serve as the backdrop for MacKay. Her work fits well within recent Spanish contributions that challenge historians' narratives of complete societal collapse in the wake of plague in later centuries. MacKay suggests that once we move away from literary sources and place the calamity within its political and civic setting, a rather different picture emerges. «Society did not become unhinged», argues MacKay, rather people drew from their past history and their deep ties to church and government. They also relied on mechanisms of governance to see them through threat. Castilians did not routinely abandon their families, leave the poor to die in the streets, or scapegoat those of different ancestry. In short, life continued in Castile even in the throes of a devastating epidemic that left more than 500,000 dead.

MacKay follows the plague through communities and their archives and offers readers a «way of understanding the meaning and variations of each site and the conflict around it, on the one hand, and more universal practices and beliefs, on the other» (p. 4). MacKay's exhaustive research leaves no document or source unexplored. From city council minutes, correspondence between local and crown agents, municipal and royal accounts, institutional ledgers, health board records, medical treatises, contemporary narratives and an array of lawsuits, MacKay weaves a compelling story of how everyone from those in the sickbed to the itinerant king experienced, understood, and attended to the epidemic that plagued Castile between 1596 and 1601.

Each chapter explores life during the epidemic from a distinct viewpoint. She begins with «the Palace» and the crown's rather lackluster efforts, where she convincingly argues that the crown offered good advice and little else. She then traces the disease down the roads to the city walls, where one encounters travelers from information officers, town delegates, and spies to simple merchants attempting to move their goods to safer harbors. From the roads one encounters the city walls where guards, magistrates, and citizens weighed the entrance of much-needed good against the health of its people. Once inside the city walls, the scourge makes its way through the marketplace, to the town hall, and finally to the sickbed. Communities were faced with difficult decisions at every turn, and yet they relied on customary practice, the law, and Christian morality to guide action. Towns negotiated with each other for access to foodstuffs and necessary goods while citizens came up with monetary schemes to care for the poor and sick in the streets. City authorities and elites took their turns guarding the gates as priests and gravediggers cared for the dead. Fleeing the pestilence was often weighed against the advantages brought by staying put in municipal and private correspondence. And for those who abandoned their duties, a lawsuit or hefty fines often awaited them upon their return.

Negotiation was key at every site, argues MacKay. Authorities, citizens, neighbors, and individuals consistently measured their needs and desires against the common good. Each negotiation reveals elements of Christian charity, communal investment, effective leadership, and rational decision-making. There are, of course, stories of greed, price-gouging, and deception, as well as accounts of civil, ecclesiastical, and medical authorities who left their posts, though those tales are fewer and farther between. Castilians balanced private pursuits against public well-being and found room for both pursuits to prevail. Life in a time of pestilence was clearly one of consistent negotiation among vested interests, but also one shaped by precedent and historical knowledge. Castilians knew what to do because they had been there before; the structures that surrounded them endured.

Above all, *Life in a Time of Pestilence* is a story of human resilience and one that will certainly resonate with readers today. ■

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