

**Mesoamerican Healers. (Book Review) (Brief Article).** Allen Christenson.  
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BRAD R. HUBER and ALAN R. SANDSTROM, editors. University of Texas Press, Austin, 2001. xvi + 403 pp., figures, tables, glossary, bibliography, index. \$24.95 (paper).

Huber and Sandstrom have compiled a series of articles by prominent researchers that provides a highly useful comparison of the various roles played by indigenous healers in the general region of Mexico and Guatemala. The studies survey healing practices from the early Colonial period in the sixteenth century through today. The introductory chapter provides a brief introduction to the literature and methodological approaches to this important field of research, which has not received the kind of structured, comprehensive treatment that it deserves. This is particularly true for the early history of indigenous healers. Sandra Orellana's fine study of Maya healers in precolumbian and early Colonial Guatemala, *Indian Medicine in Highland Guatemala* (1987), is a notable exception. This new volume is therefore a most welcome addition to the literature with regard to indigenous healing practices in Northern Mexico and Mesoamerica.

Contributions include ethnohistorical studies of early Mesoamerican healers that stress their indigenous, as well as Hispanic and African, influences. The chapter on the history and philosophy of medicine and curanderismo in Colonial New Spain and Guatemala by Luz Maria Hernandez Saenz and George M. Foster is particularly well-researched and interesting in this regard. Most of the articles included in the volume concern contemporary Native American and mestizo healers who follow traditional practices, some of which are wholly independent of Western medical practitioners, and others who work in concert with them. These articles focus on the work of shamans, spiritualists, midwives, bonesetters, and other traditional specialists. In addition, Margaret E. Harrison's article surveys the uneven distribution of physicians, nurses, and social workers in modern Mexico, an acute and worsening problem that has a significant impact on the continued need for indigenous practitioners, particularly in rural communities. One major related topic of interest that is purposely left out of this study is the usage of medicinal plants, a subject that is extensively covered in other published sources and which is too large a topic to cover adequately in a study of this kind. The book also does not include extensive material on the actual process of indigenous healing, focusing instead on the history, prevalence, training, specialization, social function, and perception of traditional healing practices by Native Americans within their communities.

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**Named Works:** Mesoamerican Healers (Book) Book reviews

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