

more difficult to get funding for and it required particular persistence on the side of the researchers. Combined with the current trend towards molecular biology and thus away from biological research which focuses on the ecosystems and on the whole organism and with less industrial interest in small natural products as drug leads, the field has also seen a steady erosion in the breadth of its intellectual and institutional basis. Biodiversity research is conducted by very diverse research groups—from the enthusiastic Ph.D.-students who is not part of a large team focusing on a similar topic to the large and multidisciplinary research groups in some of the major US-universities. However, only the latter will have the financial and personal infrastructure to follow many of the guidelines as they are outlined in this book.

The flexibility required for research on biodiversity and traditional knowledge should have been much more at the centre of this book. Also, it would have greatly benefited from more input by researchers actively working on biodiversity issues onto the *main chapters* and from detailed chapters on their problems in the everyday implementation of the CBD. This would have been particularly pertinent since the title implies that the focus of this book is on the *practice* of developing novel partnerships between scientists all over the world.

Michael Heinrich
Centre for Pharmacognosy and Phytotherapy,
The School of Pharmacy,
University of London,
29-39 Brunswick Sq.,
London WC1N 1 AX, UK
 E-mail: phyto@ulsop.ac.uk

PII: S0378-8741(02)00098-3

Mesoamerican Healers

Edited by Brad. R. Huber, Alan R. Sandstroem, University of Texas Press, Austin, USA, 2001. 403 pp.; index, bibliography, some tables and line drawings, preface by Bernard Ortiz de Montellano, ISBN 0 292 73456 5 (pb) \$24.95 (ca Euro 28.--)

‘Mesoamerican healers’ is an exciting and very relevant book on the medical practice of peoples in Mexico and Central America. It covers numerous ethnomedical aspects of the healing traditions in this region and includes contributions on.

- Curers and their cures in Colonial New Spain and Guatemala—the Spanish component (L.M. Hernandez S and G.M. Foster).

- Historical evolution of curanderismo from the 16th to the 19th century (C. Viesca T.).
- Central and North Mexican shamanism (J. Dow).
- A comparative analysis of southern Mexican and Guatemalan shamanism (F.J. Lipp).
- A study of women’s particular interests and roles in Spiritualism (K. Finkler).
- Several chapters on midwives, on their recruitment, training and practice (B.R. Huber and A.R. Sandstrom), on Mayan midwives (S. Cosminsky) and on the relations between government health workers and traditional midwives in Guatemala (E. Hurtado and E. Séanz de T).
- Mesoamerican bonesetters (B.D. Paul and C. McMahon).
- Mexican Physicians, Nurses and Social Workers (M.E. Harrison).
- A concluding chapter on Mesoamerican healers and medical anthropology (A.R. Sandstrom).

In a short preface B. Ortiz de M. highlights some of the developments, which he considers particularly pertinent. In an introductory chapter B.R. Huber provides an overview on the scope of the book. The volume includes contributions, which are based on a variety of theoretical concepts including feminist theory, medical history, interpretive theory, political economy and medical geography. It covers important areas of research in Mesoamerican medical anthropology, which in recent years have been at the centre of the discipline’s discussions, especially medico-anthropological studies of rural indigenous communities as well as gender issues. Medicinal plants and herbalists have been excluded since the editors felt that this area is beyond the scope of the present volume (p. 11). Also missing are studies on healing in an urban context and the relationship between medical doctors and patients (with the exception of a comparison of spiritualist healers and biophysicians as part of Kaja Finkler’s chapter). On the other hand M.E. Harrison provides a general and useful overview of the role doctors, nurses and social workers play within the Mexican health care system. She discusses the historical developments of the Mexican health care system from a public health and medico-geographical perspective. Carlos Viesca Treviño provides a very stimulating contribution which also includes a discussion of the first healer from Mesoamerica from whom we have a written account about healing—the Aztec Martin de la Cruz, whose *Libellus de Medicina-libus indorum herbis* is a core resource for 16th century colonial New Spain. With both G. Foster and C. Viesca T. presenting their work one may have expected a detailed discussion on the role of the hot–cold concepts and its origin, but while this topic is mentioned frequently throughout the book, the controversies surrounding it and especially its origin are not ad-

dressed. Also other theories on how curanderos select a treatment and especially herbal remedies are not discussed.

While the book is not necessarily at the centre of interest for a researcher in the area of ethnopharmacology, the volume brings together excellent overview by many of the scholars working on Mesoamerican curanderos (however, with one exceptions only from the USA and Mexico/Guatemala). It provides useful insights into the complexities of healing practice and the reality in today's Mesoamerican cultures. Also, the chapters are generally very well written and interesting to read. The book thus is an excellent textbook for broadening the scope of, for example, classes in

ethnobotany and ethnopharmacy. At the same time, it is of course a very useful resource for anyone interested in medical anthropology.

Michael Heinrich
Centre for Pharmacognosy and Phytotherapy,
The School of Pharmacy,
University of London 29-39 Brunswick Sq.,
London WC1N 1AX, UK
E-mail: phyto@ulsop.ac.uk

PII: S0378-8741(02)00100-9
