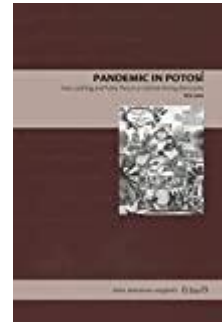


Kris Lane. *Pandemic in Potosí: Fear, Loathing, and Public Piety in a Colonial Mining Metropolis.* Latin American Originals Series. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021. Illustrations. 152 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-271-09198-3.



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Pandemic in Potosí offers the first English-language translation of primary source accounts of the Gran Peste (great pestilence) from 1717 to 1722. Kris Lane's adroit translations and helpful analysis and commentary highlight how past societies coped with public health crises in the context of contagion, when vaccines were nonexistent, even unimaginable. These concise excerpts from contextual primary sources emphasize what Lane terms "common stress points" between pandemics past and present. In particular, Lane identifies the themes of calls for isolation versus global interdependency, denunciations of opportunism versus praise for civic duty, class solidarity versus division, promotion of innovative public health interventions versus false palliatives, and the search for cosmic causes or meaning versus secular views and limitations.

Thought to have originally arrived in Buenos Aires via English slave traders, the "plague" then traveled through present-day Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, and Peru. Lane's translations underscore

the spread of the plague and contextualize public response as the contagion moved throughout the viceroyalty of Peru. Lane's excerpts specifically stress the devastation in Cuzco and Arequipa as well as in Potosí.

Lane begins with Bartolomé Arzáns de Orsúa y Vela's (1676-1736) *Historia de la Villa Imperial de Potosí* (1705-36), which contextualizes the mining metropolis of Potosí, Bolivia, in the years leading to and during the pandemic. Silver production essentially collapsed due to diminished work forces, and indigenous communities struggled to rebound in numbers after years of labor turns, displacement, and disease. Illustrative of Lane's "common stress point" relating to the search for causes or meaning, *Pandemic in Potosí* poses a fascinating juxtaposition of religious and secular interpretations of the plague, its causes, and its ramifications. Ventura Travada y Córdova's *Suelo de Arequipa Convertido en Cielo* (1752) asserted that the plague resulted from the divine judgment of God. Creole priest Diego de Esquivel y Navia seconded the belief that the plague was demon-

strative of God's anger. Both Travada and Peruvian physician Hipólito Unanue mentioned the occurrence of a solar eclipse on August 15, 1719. While neither Travada nor Unanue attributed the plague specifically to the eclipse, their mentions suggest a perceived astrological affiliation.

Alongside perceived divine or celestial causes of the plague, "Enlightenment" scientific principles also influenced public health measures to combat the disease, another of Lane's "common stress points." Amid chaos and death, the removal of burial grounds to the outskirts of cities and villages aided in ceasing the spread of contagion from corpses to the living. The removal of said burial grounds to the peripheries of the populace also adhered to principles of miasma theory. Coupled with street cleaning, the practices cleared the air, thus slowing the spread of further infection.

The primary sources translated herein illustrate an embrace of humoral theories of balancing the body's humors and a rejection of certain Galenic practices like purging and bloodletting as they weakened the body's constitution. Classified humorally as hot and choleric, a remedy for the plague must necessarily be cold and balance the choler with phlegm. The anonymous letter translated in Lane's fifth chapter chides the use of *chochos* or lupine seeds, an Andean bean used for killing intestinal worms, as a quack remedy. Humorally hot and dry, the beans thus failed to balance the plague's effect on the humors. Instead, the anonymous author advocated blessed thistle (*cnicus benedictus*) or a native plant of the same family, arguing that its properties counter the effects of the plague. According to Travada y Córdova, bloodletting proved disastrous for most who underwent the practice on the advice of physicians, only hastening death.

Coupled with Lane's helpful contextual commentary, these primary sources offer a fascinating glimpse into both secular and faith-based approaches to this historical pandemic. Lane's trans-

lation is a worthy addition to the Latin American Originals series from Pennsylvania State University Press, which offers condensed, accessible, and affordable scholarly contributions to the discipline. These primary source translations are essential to historical education and understanding. Lane's work will prove of particular value to those interested in the histories of science, medicine, and public health. Exceedingly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, *Pandemic in Potosí* is an erudite primary source translation perfectly suited to classroom use.

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