conducted by the *āšipu* or exorcist. Magic was used to counteract a bad omen (in so-called *Namburbî* incantations). Otherwise, there was no magic in divination or prophecy; the processes and theory and practices of divination and magic had little in common.

The title of the book includes the words "witchcraft" and "magic", but there is no attempt to distinguish between these two activities, which causes some difficulties in interpretation. As Thomsen herself points out (p. 32), the Babylonian Diagnostic Handbook was used theoretically by the exorcist as a means of prognosis by examining symptoms derived from observing the patient's body, and witchcraft only features in less than five per cent of the assigned "causes" of illness. Although Thomsen herself was puzzled by her own statistics, it probably reflects the true relationship between magic and witchcraft, which is only a small part of the large and complex field of Mesopotamian magic. Of the many causes of illness and misfortune, witchcraft and evil eye represent only one possible source within the sphere of magic; much more common are divine displeasure, the activities of a plethora of demons and supernatural adversaries, or violation of an oath or taboo. Furthermore, Thomsen (p. 23) assumes that someone using an anti-witchcraft incantation suspected who the witch might have been, which is a completely unsupported hypothesis. Witchcraft can exist without witches, simply as a function of paranoia; we have no Salem witch trials in Mesopotamia.

Finally, Cryer's discussion also never takes on board the biblical phrase, "do not allow a witch to live" (Ex. 22:17), which has been interpreted as a general attack on the use of magic in ancient Israel. The point is that witchcraft was universally feared in antiquity as black magic, comparable to an attack of malevolent demons, and one of the key roles of magic was to protect a client against witchcraft, or to make the client believe that he was being protected against some hostile force which he conceived to be a witch. The rest of magic, however, was mostly benevolent, designed to offer protection and even healing, and was not proscribed by the Bible. This point needed to be made.

Despite these criticisms, the book is useful for readers who have no prior knowledge of ancient Near Eastern magic, and they will find the book an easy and pleasant read.

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Simon Varey (ed.), *The Mexican treasury: the writings of Dr Francisco Hernández*, trans. Rafael Chabrán, Cynthia L Chamberlin, Simon Varey, Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. xix, 281, £40.00, US$65.00 (hardback 08047-3963-3).

Simon Varey, Rafael Chabrán, and **Dora B Weiner** (eds), *Searching for the secrets of nature: the life and works of Dr Francisco Hernández*, Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. xvi, 229, illus., £40.00, US$60.00 (hardback 08047-3964-1).

These companion volumes will be greeted with enthusiasm by anyone interested in early modern medicine, ethnobotany, or colonial science. They make available in English translation the writings of the Spanish physician Francisco Hernández (1515–87) and provide a series of authoritative articles analysing his work and situating it in historical context. In what was arguably the first scientific expedition in the age of European imperialism, Hernández travelled in New Spain between 1571 and 1577 under orders from Philip II to gather information on the medicinal uses of New World plants. Over these six years Hernández visited the major hospitals, interviewed numerous European and Amerindian informers, cared for victims of epidemic diseases, and compiled descriptions of thousands of plants and hundreds of animals and minerals. The original manuscript of Hernández's *Natural history of New Spain*—six folio volumes of text and ten containing illustrations of plants and animals—was the most complete repository of first-hand knowledge on New World *materia medica* at the time. It provided information on Amerindian medical knowledge, which was rapidly disappearing due

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to death and conversion, and also described plants that held enticing medical and commercial promise for Europeans. The Spanish crown, eager to protect such sensitive information, did not publish the manuscript, and it was destroyed by a fire in the Escorial palace in 1671. Fortunately, several copies and abstracts of Hernández's work existed, and his descriptions were incorporated into the publications of many well-known authors—most often unaccredited, a common practice at the time but one that has caused great trouble for scholars wishing to study his writings or assess their impact.

The Mexican treasury provides English translations of a rich selection of Hernández's varied works, and explains the complicated trajectory of his *Natural history of New Spain*. The chart illustrating the fascinating and intricate history of this text highlights the enormous challenge faced by the book's editor and translators, and the great service they have performed in providing what will from now on be the standard English edition of Hernández's work. Roughly half of the translations are dedicated to Hernández's letters to the king, his will, and extracts from his varied writings, among them *Antiquities of New Spain* (a description of Amerindian customs) and *The Christian doctrine* (a long missionary poem). The remaining translations are extracts from different incarnations of Hernández's natural history observations: the first published version, *Quatro libros de la naturaleza* (Mexico, 1615); the famous edition produced by the Accademia dei Lincei, *Rerum medicarum Novae Hispaniae thesaurus* (Rome, 1651); the publications of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors in England and the Low Countries, among them Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, Georg Marcgraf, John Ray, Hans Sloane, and James Petiver; and the Spanish edition of 1790. The decision to translate such a diverse range of texts was a fortunate one, both in terms of the wealth of material it provides for readers and the way in which it conveys the scholarly culture to which Hernández belonged, where *materia medica*, religion, and philosophy were closely connected subjects. The translations are precise and clear, and while certain passages might sound somewhat stilted in their strict adherence to the original diction, the choice of precision over style is one that readers will appreciate.

Searching for the secrets of nature brings together a collection of short essays describing the cultural and political setting in which Hernández lived, the conditions of medicine in New Spain at the time he arrived there, and the reception and dissemination of his work. The first section of the book introduces the interaction between science and empire during the reign of Philip II and discusses the importance of humanism and the classical tradition within the intellectual landscape inhabited by Hernández and his contemporaries. A second section is devoted to medical knowledge and practices in sixteenth-century New Spain, including the regulation of practitioners, the functioning of hospitals, and the onslaught of deadly epidemics that ravaged indigenous populations, truly biological weapons at the service of colonization. A third section traces the dissemination of Hernández's findings, analysing the reception of American drugs in Europe and the incorporation of Hernández's description into publications from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. A postscript addresses continuing traditions of Mexican medicine and the popular legacy of Hernández in the present day. There is much here to interest readers from a wide range of backgrounds, and the texts are remarkably rich in detail and information in spite of their brevity. These essays hold great potential for the classroom, and will prove a valuable resource for teachers interested in enriching and diversifying the curriculum with discussions of transcultural contact and non-European knowledge.

A project covering so much ground will inevitably give short shrift to certain topics, and some readers will find their particular interests dispatched summarily or missing altogether—there is, for instance, very little discussion of Hernández's working methods, and the fascinating images he collected are regrettably ignored (although sixty-four woodcuts from the 1651 Rome edition are reproduced). But to grumble about what these volumes lack would imply a failure to recognize just how much material is provided, how well and richly it is

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analysed, and how many connections are drawn. In making these important materials readily available to Anglophone readers, and in explaining and contextualizing them so well, these two books constitute an immensely valuable resource.

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Patrick Wallis, *London Livery Company apprenticeship registers, volume 32: Apothecaries' Company, 1617–1669*, The London Apprentices series, London, Society of Genealogists, 2000, pp. vi, 69, £6.00 (paperback 1-903462-04-5). Available from: Society of Genealogists Enterprises Ltd., 14 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, London EC1M 7BA, UK.

The general introduction states that "this series is designed to provide family and other historians with the basic information provided by the records of apprenticeship of a number of the Livery Companies". Comprising four indexes, namely apprenticeships, masters, places and trades/occupations, it is, interestingly, the only volume in the series to date that has not been compiled by Chris Webb. Clearly Patrick Wallis has had to conform to a standard format in terms of the content, structure and style of each index, and users are expected to be familiar with livery-company terminology. In some respects the apprenticeships index constitutes an early version of the Medical Students' Register but, despite the brief explanation for their exclusion, freedom admissions (where known) would have been a useful addition. Cross-referencing between the apprenticeships and masters indexes does not yield a foolproof means of establishing the career path of an individual apothecary: between 1617 and 1669 the Society permitted only shop-owning freemen to take apprentices (when the ratio of apprentices to freemen was about 2:1), but not all did so. Also, Patrick Wallis's choice of end-date appears anomalous and arbitrary. The Society's Apprenticeship Binding Book was opened in 1694 so it would have been helpful to extend the exercise another twenty-five years, or even to 1700, which is the starting-point of *Eighteenth century medics*, ed. P J and R V Wallis (Project for Historical Biobibliography, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1988, 2nd ed.). Although the information is limited, the data painstakingly extracted by Patrick Wallis has significant research potential, possibly more so for academic rather than family historians. Indeed, the emergent social profile of apothecaries' apprentices based on their parents' occupations is fascinating, for it explodes both the myth of apothecaries' humble, artisan origins and the lowly professional rating usually accorded this trade.

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The Worshipful Society of
Apothecaries of London

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