

## Book Reviews

D. P. WALKER, *Unclean spirits. Possession and exorcism in France and England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries*, London, Scolar Press, 1980, 8vo, pp. 116, £9.95.

Professor Walker's exact and concise book – emerging from his Northcliffe Lectures at London University in 1979 – investigates demoniacal possession in theory and practice in France and England chiefly in the late sixteenth century. Professor Walker examines a handful of well-documented cases, both to illuminate contemporary attitudes to the phenomenon and to sketch a historical interpretation of his own: in France at Laon in 1566, at Soissons in 1582, and the extended performances of Marthe Brossier from 1599; in England the case of Catholic exorcism at Denham in 1585–6, that of the Throckmorton children of 1589–93 (the first to end in the execution of witches), and then a series of cases from 1598 involving the Puritan divine, John Darrel, as a caster-out of devils. In apparent instances of possession the dilemma facing religious and civil authorities was to determine whether the case was one of genuine diabolical possession, or of “fraud”, or of disease (epilepsy, melancholy, or hysteria). While a few doctors – e.g., Levinus Lemnius – sought to reduce all supposed possession to natural causes, most, such as Jean Fernel and Edward Jordan, would not rule out the possibility of genuine demonism, while counselling caution before pronouncing in favour of spirits. Tests were devised – e.g., speaking in tongues, or clairvoyance – to sift the genuine from the fraudulent.

Religious and political circumstances shaped cases differently in the two countries. In France, outbreaks were exploited by the Catholic hierarchy as literally heaven-sent anti-Huguenot propaganda, particularly as the favoured means of exorcism – generally successful – was through the Real Presence in the Host. Hence, though medical opinion pronounced Marthe Brossier a fraud (“nihil a Spiritu, multa ficta, pauca a morbo”), ecclesiastical leaders found her too spectacular a case of divine intervention to forego. In England, by contrast, it was Anglican dignitaries such as Richard Bancroft who were most sceptical of the reality of diabolism, not least because notable exorcisms were performed by Catholic priests or by Puritans (anxious to show that Papists had no monopoly of casting out devils). Bishop Bancroft engineered the trial of John Darrel, the Puritan exorcist, as part of his prolonged campaign against “enthusiasm”, and the “official” Anglican line was spelt out soon after in John Deacon and John Walker's *Dialogicall Discourses* (1601), where it was argued that most so-called demoniacs were in reality melancholics. In a concluding chapter, Professor Walker suggests this as part of the general “naturalization” of spiritual and diabolical phenomena which gathered momentum in the seventeenth century.

As to Professor Walker's own interpretation: ruling out, *qua* historian, the reality of demonism, he suggests we see possession as a mixture of initial illness and psychological opportunism (the possessed relished attention), which led to an element of fraud on behalf of both the possessed and of the exorcists, anxious to milk such events for religious propaganda. This little book does much to map out the disputed territory between the natural and the spiritual, the medical and the priestly, around the turn of the seventeenth century. One hopes it will encourage further detailed examination,

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carrying the story at least into the Enlightenment (when, for example, John Wesley's journals are full of similar material).

Roy Porter  
Wellcome Institute

AIDAN and EVE COCKBURN, *Mummies, disease and ancient cultures*, Cambridge University Press, 1980, 4to, pp. x, 340, illus., £25.00.

Mummies are always of widespread interest. This has been intensified recently by a series of unwrappings of Egyptian mummies: in America by members of the Paleopathology Association, in England by the Manchester Mummy Research Team, and this year by Bristol University. *Mummies, disease and ancient cultures* is a collection of twenty papers, written by contributors to the Paleopathology Association's *Newsletter*. It is divided into four parts: Mummies of Egypt, Mummies of the Americas, Mummies of the world, and The study of mummies.

*Mummies of Egypt* includes an outline of evidence for methods of mummification and funerary practice, an excellent survey of palaeopathology by A. T. Sandison, and a brief account of dental health studies. The rest of this section describes the unwrapping of four mummies – PUM II, ROM I, PUM III, and PUM IV. Each follows a pattern of preliminary radiographic examination, autopsy, and detailed histological and biochemical examination.

Part II, *Mummies of the Americas*, includes surveys of mummies found in the southwestern U.S.A., the Aleutian Islands and Alaska, and Peru. Autopsies and palaeopathology are described. *Mummies of the world* contains a rather mixed collection of material: the magnificently preserved Danish bog bodies, mummies from Australia and Melanesia, mummies of Japanese Buddhist priests, and a miscellany from Libya, Siberia, the Canary Islands, China, and the Amazon basin.

The final section, *The study of mummies*, comprises seven papers on methods used for examining the mummies autopsied by the Paleopathology Association: methods for determining sex and age from the skeletal remains, preparation of mummified material for histological examination, application of electron microscopy (describing the remarkable preservation of intact red and white blood cells from PUM II), radiographic examination, studies of the temporal bone, biochemical analysis, and blood group testing of mummified tissues.

*Mummies, disease and ancient culture* is a fascinating book. It is nicely designed and well presented. The papers cover a wide range of interests. Several papers are particularly useful summaries of a great deal of information and experience in applying new techniques. These will be invaluable for future research. Inevitably, much of the book is about Egyptian mummies, but the editors have made great efforts to include material from other areas of the world. The book does, however, suffer from the drawback of most collections of papers by many authors. Individual contributions are variable in quality and the collection as a whole leaves some notable gaps in its coverage.

It is becoming clear from studies like these how modern pathology and biology can be applied to mummified human remains. But mummies are in fact only a small part