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This book explores the links among ecology, disease, and international politics in the context of the Greater Caribbean - the landscapes lying between Surinam and the Chesapeake - in the seventeenth through early twentieth centuries. Ecological changes made these landscapes especially suitable for the vector mosquitoes of yellow fever and malaria, and these diseases wrought systematic havoc among armies and would-be settlers. Because yellow fever confers immunity on survivors of the disease, and because malaria confers resistance, these diseases played partisan roles in the struggles for empire and revolution, attacking some populations more severely than others. In particular, yellow fever and malaria attacked newcomers to the region, which helped keep the Spanish Empire Spanish in the face of predatory rivals in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the late eighteenth and through the nineteenth century, these diseases helped revolutions to succeed by decimating forces sent out from Europe to prevent them.

Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914 Details

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From Reader Review Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914 for online ebook

Nora Ilacqua says

When I saw the listing of books the first one that caught my attention was "Mosquito Empires", because of its description which explained malaria and yellow fever and its affect on history. One of my favorite topics of ancient history is the Black Death, from the symptoms and actual deaths to seeing how culture like art and religion changed. Also having read a book previous to this called "Fever 1793" a fictional story about how yellow fever impacted a young girl in Philadelphia, and I felt that Mosquito Empires would give me a bigger picture on how the diseases affected everyone in the world.

The author J.R. McNeill showed throughout the book how the world of humans and the nature around them couldn't coexist for too long before they were thrown back together again because of humans affects on the environment. Once multiple groups obtained territories in Europe a climate change caused the perfect temperature for mosquitoes which spread the diseases of malaria and yellow fever. This hurt human development but also helped it. The Spanish army physically killed less people than the mosquitoes that brought disease in the lands they conquered giving them an edge over other civilizations. J. R. McNeill also explains how plantations spread disease because the conditions were perfect for mosquitoes including , rat infestations, soil erosion, and sugar from crops. Many great examples of how disease affected everyone across the world were shown in this book.

I gave this book four out of five stars because even though it contains great facts and showed the expansion of malaria and yellow fever throughout the world, but it was very dry and the author only really expressed excitement when trying to prove the relations between ecological and political affairs.

Tom says

An eye-opening and strongly recommendable read.

The book aims to prove the strong influence of rapid demographic and economic change on the tropical environment of the Greater Caribbean. McNeill shows that (game theoretical) mass-immunity could be a shield for the uninitiated against tropical disease, especially the slow crawling Malaria and the rapid and merciless Yellow Fever. This status quo of the necessity of mass-immunity strongly influenced European competition and empirebuilding in the Caribbean.

McNeill eventually reaches two major conclusions.

(1) The Spanish empire used tropical diseases as an addition to their coastal fortifications, which made the weakened Spanish empire last at least a century longer than it should have against the pressure of younger powers like the Dutch, France and Britain.

(2) To make sure the own ranks didn't get infected, mass-immunity was vital. Men, locally born and immune (either completely against Yellow Fever or partly against Malaria), were the vital backbone of any successful European army in the Caribbean. Any European power that gained a foothold in the Caribbean could put tropical diseases to good use as a defense, and any European power that succeeded in doing so saw itself reliant on locally born, immune men, to guarantee herd-immunity. McNeill uses this status quo to convincingly point out how the American revolutions (spearheaded by Washington, Toussaint Louverture and Bolivar) were at least partly the colonial immune turning on the Europeans, who couldn't bolster European bred army in the hostile environment and be victorious.

This book also gives a interesting overview of the racial history of the Greater Caribbean. Some peoples, more than others, were more immune to especially Malaria. McNeill also maps the spread of industrial slavery, which often had a devastating effect on the local environment, and influenced the conditions for diseases greatly. But McNeill also does this to point out which people had which stakes in supporting the Europe-based overlords, and in what places the European powers would find either support or disloyalty among the immune inhabitants.

In general, McNeill gives an valuable insight into how environmental context can shape history. Everyone who wants to know more about environmental history, John McNeill, who's father too is a renowned environmental historian, is a reliable starting point.

Ess Kay says

J.R. McNeill's environmental history examines the role of disease bearing mosquitoes as a determining factor in imperial ambitions in the Greater Caribbean, which he defines as the islands and the Atlantic coastal regions of the Americas, from 1620 to 1914. Through careful examination of travel and medical accounts he reconstructs how environmental factors such as weather, sugar cane manufacturing processes, bovine and monkey populations, and population demographic and density would align and create ideal breeding grounds for the mosquito genii *Aedes aegypti* and *Anopheles quadrimaculatus*, carriers of malaria and yellow fever. Once the mosquitoes began their reproductive cycle, which for the females requires a blood meal, imperial ambitions could be thwarted or bolstered as the carriers of yellow fever and malaria transmitted disease to armies that were often already weakened by scurvy and dysentery.

McNeill's examination is broken down into three sections. In the first section he outlines his argument that, "quests for wealth and power changed ecologies in the Greater Caribbean, and how ecological changes in turn shaped the fortunes of empire, war, and revolution in the years between 1620 and 1914" (2). He admits the difficulties in classifying his work as, "it is not quite an essay in mosquito determinism, or even environmental determinism" (6). In the second section McNeill does an amazing job at breaking down the ecological factors that created the optimum conditions for the vectors of yellow fever and malaria. He initiates the novice masterfully into the scientific and vernacular realm of the biologic variables he will be discussing. Readership with no exposure to this world is admitted into the Caribbean with an easily gained understanding of the elements of McNeill's argument and how the variables must align in order to produce the conditions under which imperial ambition is being influenced. He examines the obvious factors such as heat and rain, but also how the human impact made in the manufacturing of sugar cane contributed to creating ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes by producing both a sugary food and receptacles for standing water, be it in pieces of broken clay pottery or the process of planting, hauling and building that accompanied population redistribution in the region. Immunities within the population of African slaves and others born in tropical climes, as well as European survivors of yellow fever and malaria, also impacted the successful transmission of the viruses. When the majority of the population is immune, the transmission cycle is interrupted and abates until a significant population of individual without immunity is introduced. McNeill calls this differential immunity, and the concept is explored in great detail in the third section of the book.

In addition to the environmental factors, McNeill examines the medical practices of the era that exacerbated the infected more often than they cured them. Galenic practices that originated in the second century were still the prevailing medical theories some fourteen hundred years later, and with little advancement beyond the humoral theory that promoted exsanguinations as cure, further weakening those afflicted with fever and helping to assure they did not survive. The chapter entitled Deadly Fevers, Deadly Doctors is, by McNeill's own admission, rife with modern criticism and judgment that, "are not up to the standards of the historical profession" (63). That being said, the humor he injects in this chapter keeps the reader from setting aside what could easily devolve into a depressing clinical narrative of the brutish death that accompanied yellow

fever. The tone may not be up to academic standards, but the research is, at least for the European contribution. His commentary on local medical treatment is a bit thin. This is understandable for a population that had immunities to yellow fever, but malaria, once contracted, exhibited itself throughout the lifetime of the infected. The greater take away from this chapter is that confusion how the diseases were transmitted works to explain why imperial armies were sent over and over again in spite of the infectious doom that repeatedly cut through the ranks, at great expense both in men and resources.

The third section explores the importance of differential immunity in times of revolution and how yellow fever, and to a lesser extent, malaria, became dependable defenses, if given enough time to infiltrate non-immune invaders. He uses examples from the American Revolution and several Central and South American rebellions. His analysis of the military maneuvers and strategies feel a bit underemphasized, but given the focus of the book, this is not surprising.

Overall the structure of the book works well to bolster McNeill's thesis. He starts each chapter with an introductory statement of purpose and ends each with a tidy conclusion. Given the repetitive nature of the work, and this is, to an extent, unavoidable as the vectors and environmental conditions need to be established for each case study and the conditions for outbreak are fairly specific, with little room for variable, make for useful check ins to pull the reader back on point. However, chapter eight, Conclusion: Vector and Virus Vanquished 1880-1914, feels a bit tacked on. He covers Gorgas' abatement efforts in Cuba and Panama in few pages and then tries to extrapolate the process of disease control and power into a modern setting in which health, scientific research capacity and power are interconnected. He does not really develop this idea; it just lies there in the last few paragraphs of the book, as a possible thesis for another work, tenuously connected to Mosquito Empires.

McNeill's contribution to colonial and environmental studies is significant. Disease is often glossed over when it ravages European powers and highlighted when it decimates indigenous populations. It is an important contribution to our understanding of just how important these colonies were to world power and how countries were willing to send waves of citizenry to their death in an effort to obtain territory.

David Nichols says

Human beings imagine themselves the masters of their environment, but in changing that environment they sometimes create ideal conditions for creatures that in turn master them.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Western Europeans transformed much of the Caribbean into a giant sugar factory, a source of profits and cheap (if empty) calories for the colonizing countries. In so doing they turned those colonies into ideal homes for mosquitos, both the ubiquitous anopheles and the fragile newcomer aedes aegypti, and for the pathogens - respectively, malaria and yellow fever - these prolific insects carried. Replacing the indigenous human inhabitants (whom they killed) with African slave laborers, Europeans provided an ocean of warm human blood for female mosquitos to drink and infect. Cutting down the forests, they destroyed the habitat of birds and small mammals who fed on mosquitos. Planting cane fields, digging ditches, and building cisterns, the colonizers and their bondsmen created the pools of stagnant water where mosquitos bred. By 1700 the Caribbean and its shorelands had become not only a domain of wealth but a place of death: yellow fever can kill upward of 60 percent of its victims and malaria, while less lethal, is both debilitating and chronic. Only "seasoned" settlers and slaves who had survived prior exposure to these diseases, and had built up resistance, could hope for more than an early grave.

McNeill argues that these basic biological facts became the principal determinants of the region's subsequent history. Europeans coveted the Greater Caribbean for its hugely valuable exports, but their efforts to found new Caribbean colonies or conquer older ones almost inevitably failed in the eighteenth century. Newly arrived colonists and soldiers, attempting to found a Scottish settlement at Darien, build a French colony at

Cayenne, or conquer Spanish ports like Cartagena and Havana, instead died by the tens of thousands, succumbing to fevers their bodies could not fight. By the end of the 1700s colonial defenders had learned that mosquitos (or at least the infections they carried) were their best allies against European armies. If a seasoned local garrison force could hold out until summer, disease would destroy their adversaries.

In the Napoleonic era, revolutionaries throughout the hemisphere turned their differential immunity to advantage. Toussaint L'Ouverture, Simon Bolivar, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, and Antonio Maceo all used delaying tactics and strategic retreats to keep metropolitan armies in the lowlands until the mosquitos bit and the dreaded agues and "black vomits" began. The norteamericanos managed to conquer Mexico in 1847 only by scrambling out of their lowland supply port (Veracruz) and into the Mexican highlands before the mosquito breeding season began. Half a century later, Cuban rebels' and Cuban mosquitos' debilitation of the Spanish garrison in Cuba helped the United States conquer that island and defeat the Spanish empire. The Americans could only hold their imperial gains, however, by applying newly discovered sanitation and mosquito eradication techniques, first in Havana and then in the Panama Canal Zone. With these serendipitous discoveries, a discrete epoch in Caribbean and imperial history came to a close.

John McNeill's book benefits from a creative thesis, a clear writing style, and deep research. It attains its greatest successes by telling a story we all thought we knew - the early Caribbean was a place of profits and death - in a new and better way. Essentially, McNeill historicizes the Caribbean's supposedly natural and eternal attributes. The deadly Caribbean disease environment was created not by God or evolution but by human intervention. Humans eventually discovered that they could turn that environment into an asset if they had manpower - seasoned colonial laborers (slave or free) with acquired immunities - who could withstand the fevers that killed invaders. This huge defensive advantage turned the Caribbean into a graveyard of imperial ambitions, even Napoleon's. In a contemporaneous study of European empires (AFTER TAMERLANE, 2007), John Darwin argued that we should remain mindful not only of those empires' conquest but also of the huge resistance they faced, chiefly from people who wanted to avoid being colonized. To the noble ranks of these anti-imperialists, John McNeill concludes, we should add a few members of the animal kingdom, particularly the despised but efficacious mosquito.

Bryan Schwartz says

A few days ago, I was discussing this book with a fellow Georgetown student in the history department over some coffee and lunch. My colleague was not nearly as convinced by McNeill's approach as I am. My friend noted that McNeill unjustly inflated the impact of mosquitoes (and the diseases that they communicated) on the course of Caribbean history. Though my friend may have a point, I felt that McNeill offered a thorough exploration of how a number of factors (e.g. culture, politics, economics, and even the illogical "human factor") interacted with the focus of his argument. What's more, McNeill spends some time (a whole sub-chapter at the beginning of the book) outlining the limits of his vector based theory of Caribbean history (p. 5-8).

Though Geoffrey Parker and Robert Marks were also careful to explain the limits to their respective arguments, McNeill illustrates the transnational method both more clearly and more eloquently. Though it may sacrifice the global scope explored in *The Military Revolution* and *The Origins of the Modern World*, the tighter focus of *Mosquito Empires* leaves less room for holes and glaring omissions. Put another way, McNeill manages to make a convincing argument for the impact of disease on Caribbean history in the kind of focused and detailed approach that I craved from Marks.

In expressing his grievances, my colleague also noted that McNeill does not venture into the realm of global history. And yet, while I partially agree that McNeill could have applied his thesis to areas of Asia as well, it seems a stretch to criticize an author for not including an area well removed from the stated region of focus.

Even without Asia, however, I was impressed by the number of connections that McNeill explored between mosquitoes and the much of the world. By examining the affliction and death of British (Scottish and English) men and women, Spaniards, Frenchmen, Germans, Africans, and American colonists as well as South American natives, McNeill ties much of the world together through a collective experience of disease and death.

Andrea says

First, reading this book will make you very grateful that we have a vaccine for yellow fever. McNeill carefully traces the influences of mosquito borne viruses, primarily malaria and yellow fever, in the history of colonization on the American continents and in the Caribbean. Closely tied to plantation agriculture and slave labor, millions were killed by malaria and yellow fever introduced from the old world and quickly spread by mosquitoes and to a lesser degree monkeys in the region. Those who were exposed to the viruses in childhood in the Caribbean or Central America and survived had differing levels of immunity from newly arrived Europeans and from Africans who either developed immunity in Africa as children or may have had some genetic immunity. The differing effects of these diseases on the long established Spanish colonists versus the newly arrived British, for example, determined the outcome of many key conflicts. McNeill's style of writing is scholarly but carefully organized and illustrated with concrete examples so that it is easy for the general reader to follow. The level of detail may be more than some readers want. I found it fascinating. McNeill's book provided much of the material about the effects of mosquito borne illnesses used by the popular historian Charles Mann in his book 1493.

Cynthia says

This book is a beautiful, beautiful thing. It is so well-organized that I will aspire to this standard from now on. There's so much solid accumulated evidence to support the argument that things don't get crazy when he introduces a new, bold assertion (Like: Mosquitoes helped Americans win the Revolution!). Even the closing point that we have created our own differential immunity, essentially ensuring that (only) the wealthy aren't affected by communicable diseases, is bright and convincingly conveyed. Love it, love it, love it.

Luke says

I read this book around a year ago, but decided to pick it up again after reading the author's father's book, *Plagues and People*. I remembered this work being a particularly good example of why the history of disease is both desirable and necessary.

In short, McNeill argues that mosquitoes--through Yellow Fever and Malaria--were crucial to the history of the Greater Caribbean between the introduction of these diseases from West Africa in the 1640s to the outbreak of World War I. Essentially, he finds that those who lived in the Caribbean often had an immunity to these diseases as a result of facing them in their childhood. As a result, territory in the Caribbean rarely changed hands between empires, as outsiders would frequently fall ill to these diseases and perish. More than anything else, mosquitoes permitted a conserving of the political status quo. However, by the late 18th-early 19th century, those fighting against the Spanish empire (in a more particular case) were generally no longer outsiders, but imperial subjects. To quash these rebellions, Spain was forced to dispatch soldiers from Iberia

who did not have the same resistance as imperial subjects, leading Spanish might to crumble.

I have not read enough history of disease to evaluate how this work stands compared to that of other scholars, but it seems to me that this is a monumental work of environmental history. It really is crucial to understanding why the Spanish empire managed to last so long, as well as making sense of the environmental aspects of the American and Haitian revolutions.

Micah Medina says

Poor editing aside, this started out interestingly enough. Enjoyed the first half or so about the Caribbean dynamics, but lost interest around Chapter 6 and it was a slog to finish off. Probably just because I'm wholly unconcerned with the American Revolution, no matter which way you spin it.

Luis Jaquez says

McNeill, J.R., *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean 1620-1914*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010

Topic: J.R. McNeil's work *Mosquito Empires* gives seat to ecology as an actor on the geopolitical stage and observes how climate change and other environmental factors create an action/reaction observing how it can promote or hamper desirability, personal interest, or State prestige. Nature, and its species, is given voice to explain how disease, plants, animals, and insects mold humankind. This rectifies its being overlooked for centuries due to its inability to represent itself in chronicles written by the more sentient creatures of the earth. Human motives within the political theatre maybe contradictory and complicated, but those of the biosphere are observed to be simple, relating to the soul instincts of survival and reproduction.

Scope: McNeil focuses broadly on North and Central America during the period of 1620-1914, emphasizing the role of the Caribbean and West Indies. This emphasis gives the environmental, economic, and political actors in these locations agency that illustrates how they each affected the geopolitical theatre. It outlines how the Atlantic powers acted as rational actors, motivated by statecraft and old constructionist theory, to pursue realist interests of wealth and power. The Spanish Empire and Great Britain are observed as primary characters, vying for control of the Caribbean and the West Indies to spread their influence and tilt the balance of power toward their respective favors. This creates conflict due to Britain's interests in usurping Spain's control on its colonies and gaining access to the trade and resources of Central America. Mosquitoes, animals, and weather also acted on the geopolitical theatre, carrying the power of disease through the twin killers, yellow fever and malaria. These diseases created aspects like differential immunity and resistance, causing widespread death to whoever did not possess these qualities, which allowed Spain to keep control of areas like Havana and Cartagena, until debt and socioeconomic stressors primed colonial revolution.

Historical Question(s): *Mosquito Empires* observed humanity's interaction with the environment through colonialism, statecraft, conflict, medicine, and survival. It poses the following historical questions: how do the linkages between ecology and politics influence geopolitics, what powers do ecology and disease have on framing pursuits of empire and wealth, what are the political and military implications of immunity, and what impact can something as small as the mosquito have on molding world politics? The voices discounted from history, such as those of indigenous peoples or disease, are also considered to observe the potential for new historical contexts for societal development and human progression.

Thesis(es): McNeil maintains several arguments that propose that nature has agency and maintains an action/reaction relationship with human processes. These arguments also assert that power politics was a motivation of conflict between the Atlantic powers. They also affirmed that disease did not necessarily determine the outcomes of political standoffs, but it did heavily influence the probability for success or

failure. The power politics, pursuit of wealth, and settlements of humankind are all argued to have shaped the ecology of the Caribbean with an equally reciprocated effect of ecology shaping humanity. Immunity is observed to have tremendous political and militaristic consequences.

Sources: Mosquito Empires relies on numerous primary, secondary, and reference sources to detail the geopolitical decisions that were taking place around the world. Primary and secondary sources are utilized to illustrate the logic imperial actors and native inhabitants used to describe their situations, trade, fortify, and seek medicine. Reference sources are utilized to describe the stressors that disease caused through detailing deaths, and the effects that climate change had on imperial prestige through profitability of trade and resources.

Samuel says

Environmental history has the amazing potential of answering staggering research questions with surprising and interesting explanations for causation. For example, in this book, John Robert McNeill shows that mosquitos (carrying yellow fever and malaria) were the reason the militarily inferior nation of Spain was able to hold onto its colonies into early 20th century despite many attempts by the British to conquer their holdings.

By exhaustive research into both scientific pathology and 18th- and 19th-century historical records, McNeill shows that Spain got into the greater Caribbean region first. After benefitting from a few generations of "differential immunity"--in the case of yellow fever--and "differential resistance"--in the case of malaria--they were able to occupy and hold a few key ports and forts that the British could never quite overthrow due to setbacks in illness and decimation of their troops thereby. The importation of large mammals (and old world monkeys) to the area allowed for yellow fever to survive for long periods of time of islands and land masses with large enough forests. These forests also provided the fuel, which combined with free labor--slavery--accounted for why sugar production (which requires a lot of fuels to boil down the cane into sugar) was able to do so well in the region even in comparison to the crop's origin: south and southeast Asia. (Similarly bananas and citrus fruits would be successfully moved from Asia to south America and the Caribbean).

My professor assigned "the most interesting" portions of this book, but if you are loving it, read on. The simplicity of the title/thesis is beautiful and the evidence/ supporting arguments are well-crafted. It really has wonderful footnotes...

(*pp. 1-62, 304-314).

JR Bricksfield says

When people talk about the imperial wars between England, France, and Spain in the Caribbean during the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, deadly diseases are mentioned, but usually as an aside. The number of people lost to malaria and yellow fever in a campaign are typically a footnote. But, in Mosquito Empires, McNeill thrusts the issue front and center. He effectively argues that yellow fever and malaria, which were spread by mosquitoes, proved to be ecological variables that devastated armies and frustrated the ambitions of kings and queens. He does not go so far as to argue that these diseases were the ultimate variables that decided who lost or won a campaign, but the evidence he provides undeniably shows how the effects of the diseases on European armies could be devastating.

Mercedes says

Fascinating, but repetitive

The premise of this book is very interesting. I loved learning about how disease shaped the world of the Caribbean. However, there is far too much information about battles that could be summed up in the sentence "Most of them died". McNeill obviously put an incredible amount of work and effort into this book, but it isn't the most enjoyable read because of all of this (sometimes superfluous) information. He also tends to repeat his thoughts, which can get annoying. Despite all this, I am very glad I read through it. I would recommend to anyone interested in environmental history or military history of the greater Caribbean.

Mark says

I knew in principle that the Caribbean in colonial times was a really unhealthy area but the details are staggering. Armies would arrive from Europe and 60% or even more would die within months. Disease was always more dangerous than enemy gunfire at the time but this was ten times the rate in Europe. Colonies in the area had deaths outstripping births deep into the 18th century. These wealthy islands and adjacent mainland areas ended up being inhabited mostly by slaves because few sane humans would voluntarily move there, and certainly not just for the promise of hard labor. Any fantasies I had from reading Horatio Hornblower stories as a kid now seem twice as ridiculous; neither valor, intelligence nor even modern ideas of hygiene would have been much of a protection to anyone visiting the area.

What makes this book more than just good is the amount of detail given to ecology, epidemiology and entomology, and the thesis. The detailed description of *A. aegypti* (the yellow fever mosquito) and how human settlers created an environment ideal for it is fascinating--the Caribbean was a relatively healthy place before the forests were cleared and ports and ships created a "super city" with clean fresh water for their eggs and enticing, non-immune humans. Herd immunity could help the random immigrant but fresh arrival of a mass of new victims--like an army of European veterans--pretty much guaranteed an epidemic.

The thesis itself also strikes me as perceptive and novel. McNeill argues convincingly that differences in disease susceptibility made a big difference. Survivors of yellow fever are immune, and if you got it as a child because you were born in the area you had a good chance of surviving your first bout. This meant that after 1650 or so established colonies (mostly Spanish) had a strong advantage because, even if their forces were small and relatively undisciplined, they weren't wiped out in the weeks following the first rains. By the 18th century the pattern of "Europeans will die soon after they arrive" was well established and taken into account in the plans of defense for cities and colonies.

It's also a very well skillfully book with covering a huge number of fields with great clarity. The subject matter is too grim to call it entertaining but it was educational.

John says

Fascinating book. I am really starting to like environmental history- it is such a great way to forget about national borders and think about bigger picture history. This book is about mosquitoes, and how they know

no borders. McNeill argues that in the 17th century the powers of Europe changed the ecology of the "Greater Caribbean"- everything from Virginia to the north coast of Brazil- and made it the perfect environment for mosquitoes to thrive. Lots of sugarcane, rice, crowded port cities, cattle...it was buggy as hell. Then, because mosquitoes carry yellow fever and malaria, those diseases became endemic. This had huge historical consequences. People who were born and raised in this places became resistant to the diseases, but outsiders died in huge numbers, so sending an army to conquer anyplace proved practically impossible. Thus, even though the Spanish were weak, it was very hard for the English to conquer any parts of New Spain. The poor Scots tried to carve out a new colony in Panama and died in droves. During the Haitian revolution, Toussaint L'Overture knew that he could outlast his enemies because any army sent to defeat him would start dying of yellow fever. In America, the British trying to defeat the Americans in the revolution had a terrible time with malaria. It just goes on and on. Mosquitoes were so important! Why didn't I know this already?

Plus, McNeill is witty. In this part, he is writing about the King of England getting sick..."The King faded. As a final measure [doctors] administered bezoars, crushed stones from the intestines of a Persian goat. The King- prudently, one is tempted to add- died...In the West Indies, European doctors followed similar practices when they could. Bezoars were no doubt scarce." Ha! Bezoars...
