

Cambridge University Press

0521840783 - *Plagues, Priests and Demons: Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old World and the New*

Daniel T. Reff

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## PLAGUES, PRIESTS, AND DEMONS

Drawing from anthropology, religious studies, history, and literary theory, *Plagues, Priests, and Demons* explores significant parallels in the rise of Christianity in the late Roman Empire and colonial Mexico. Evidence shows that new forms of infectious disease devastated the late Roman Empire and Indian America, respectively, contributing to pagan and Indian interest in Christianity. Christian clerics and monks in early medieval Europe, and later Jesuit missionaries in colonial Mexico, introduced new beliefs and practices as well as accommodated indigenous religions, especially through the cult of the saints. The book is simultaneously a comparative study of early Christian and later Spanish missionary texts. Similarities in the two literatures are attributed to similar cultural–historical forces that governed the “rise of Christianity” in Europe and the Americas.

Daniel T. Reff is an associate professor in the Department of Comparative Studies at Ohio State University. He is an anthropologist and ethnohistorian who has done research in northern Mexico, the American Southwest, Spain, and Portugal. He is the author of numerous articles on colonial Mexico in journals such as *American Anthropologist*, *American Antiquity*, and *Ethnohistory*. He is the author of *Disease, Depopulation, and Culture Change in Northwestern New Spain, 1518–1764* (1991), and editor and co-translator (with Maureen Ahern and Richard Danford) of the first critical, English-language edition of Andrés Pérez de Ribas’s *History of the Triumphs of Our Holy Faith Amongst the Most Barbarous and Fierce Peoples of the New World* (1999 [1645]). He has been a resident scholar at the School of American Research and is the recipient of major research grants as well as a University Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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# Plagues, Priests, and Demons



## Sacred Narratives and the Rise of Christianity in the Old World and the New

DANIEL T. REFF  
*Ohio State University*



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*For Nancy and Zachariah*

## Contents

List of Illustrations	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
one	
Introduction	i
two	
Disease and the Rise of Christianity in Europe, 150–800 C.E.	35
three	
Disease and the Rise of Christianity in the New World: The Jesuit Missions of Colonial Mexico	122
four	
The Relevance of Early Christian Literature to Jesuit Missionaries in Colonial Mexico	207

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Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

CONTENTS

Conclusion	237
Bibliography	245
Index	281

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in the Old World and the New

Daniel T. Reff

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## List of Illustrations

1.	The Western Roman Empire in 200 C.E.	<i>page</i> 39
2.	Distribution of Cities in the Western Roman Empire.	44
3.	Invasions and Migrations of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries.	56
4.	Sketch of the Gallic Shrine at Gournay.	60
5.	Plan of St. Gall.	102
6.	Plan of the Monastic Ruins of Inishmurray.	113
7.	Area of Mexico Affected by Disease by 1550.	126
8.	Areas of Mendicant Missionary Activity to 1570.	128
9.	Ethnic and Linguistic Groups of Northwestern Mexico.	139
10.	Floodplain along the Rio Sonora Near Baviacora.	141
11.	Stone Idol from Northern Mexico.	151
12.	Approximate Routes of the Coronado Expedition (1540–1542).	158
13.	The Spanish Mining Frontier and the <i>Camino Real</i> .	159
14.	Jesuit Missions to 1660.	161
15.	Ruins of the Mission of Nuestra Señora del Pilar y Santiago de Cocóspera.	164
16.	Epidemic of 1593 in Sinaloa.	169
17.	Epidemic of 1594 in Northern Durango and Southern Chihuahua.	171

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