

# Introduction

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## INTRODUCTION

Parasitic diseases discussed in the following are diseases caused by *Protozoa*, *Borrelia*, *Treponemes*, *Helminths*, and *Arthropods*.

In Europe and Asia they have been recorded from antiquity by numerous writers. Hippocrates (c. 460–375 B.C.) for example discussed in detail the various forms of malaria; the Sushruta Samhita (present text about first centuries A.D.) describes elephantiasis; in China Ch'ao Yuan-fang (fl. c. A.D. 610) mentioned small 'worms' (itch-mites) in scabies; among Persian-Arabic authors Rhazes, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakarīya al-Rāzī (died 923–924) and Avicenna, Abū 'Alī, al-Husayn ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Sīnā (980 to 1037) dealt with the Guinea worm, *Dracunculus medinensis*, mentioned already by Greek writers. Besides the few mentioned authors, there are others who throughout the centuries up to modern times provided by their works a rich documentation of parasitic diseases and parasites in Europe and Asia. (See also MOULÉ, 1908, 1911.)

In Africa the situation was different. Except ancient Egypt with records of diseases in papyri and the mediterranean coast which was under Roman rule and was referred to by Roman writers, there are no written records up to the Islamic conquest in the seventh century.

The *Rihla* of IBN BATTŪTA; Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh (1304 to ca. 1369) and the *History of North Africa* by IBN KHALDŪN, Abu Zaid 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) as well as the writings of some other authors from Islamic Spain and North Africa have been studied by writers with a knowledge of Arabic; it is, however, probable that there exist still some more Arabic texts which mention parasitic diseases in Africa and which at present are known to Arabic scholars only. Hasan ibn Muḥammad al-Waz-zān al Zayyātī, better known as LEO AFRICANUS (ca. 1485 to ca. 1554), born in Granada of Moorish parents, wrote at the time of the Renaissance his valuable *Descrittione dell'Africa*, published by RAMUSIO in the second half of the sixteenth century<sup>1</sup>.

Beginning with the fifteenth century, the exploration of the African West Coast, the discovery of the New World and the

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<sup>1</sup> The transcription of Arabic names and the use of accents in Spanish names are not following strict rules.

Spanish conquest in America provided new information regarding parasitic diseases.

The slave trade is in this connection of special importance. It drew increased attention to some diseases which were frequent among the slaves, such as dysentery, yaws, scabies, hookworm-anemia and Guinea-worm infection. It also demonstrated the transmission of certain diseases, among them parasitic infections, from Africa to the New World. On the other hand, some diseases which were at first believed to have been imported by the slave trade were found to be autochthonous in the New World (Carate, Mal del Pinto). Furthermore, transmission of a parasitic infection in a reverse sense, from America to Africa and Europe, was discovered (*Tunga penetrans* infection). These various problems are closely connected.

In the first part of the present study the different kinds of 'Early Documentation' are pointed out and a brief outline of the 'Slave Trade' is given.

The second part deals with the main subject: The early documentation of parasitic diseases in Africa and the New World and their transmission by the slave trade. Considered are only early known parasitic diseases and parasites which were reported from Africa and the New World. They obviously only form a very small part of those which are known to-day.

In the third part diseases and mortality of foreigners on the Guinea coast at the time of the slave trade are recorded for comparison. In a final chapter the representation of parasitic diseases and parasites in early African and pre-Columbian art is briefly described, and a conclusion of the whole work is given. This is followed by a subject index, an index of names and illustrations on twenty-three plates.

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