

## *Media Reviews*

**‘Malaria’, Ministerio de Cultura Español (MCE) and Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE) Madrid, Spain, available online at**  
[http://www.bne.es/es/Actividades/Exposiciones/Exposiciones/Exposiciones2009/Docs\\_Malaria/Visitavirtual/multimedia\\_2009\\_mix.html](http://www.bne.es/es/Actividades/Exposiciones/Exposiciones/Exposiciones2009/Docs_Malaria/Visitavirtual/multimedia_2009_mix.html)

For those of us living far from the grounds of the Spanish National Library (BNE) in El Paseo de Recoletos in Madrid, the online exhibit ‘Malaria’ is as tantalising as a virtual collection can be. This multimedia project was first developed in 2009 as a companion to the physical exhibit that took place at the library from 18 March to 14 June of that year. It is part of a contingent of virtual exhibits – thirty-six at last count – available on its website (<http://www.bne.es/es/Actividades/Exposiciones/>), the topics of which range from arts and history to science and medicine, including one currently on view at the BNE of Leonardo DaVinci’s codices owned by the library.

Like the rest of the virtual exhibits on the BNE website, ‘Malaria’ is presented exclusively in Spanish. While this could be a deterrent for non-Spanish speakers, the visuals of the website are striking and developed on an Adobe flash platform easy to access and follow, making navigation of the website intuitive even if the visitor does not understand the language. The project is intended for the general public, and the thematic descriptions provide short overviews of the different topics around which the exhibit revolves. Indeed, the exhibit forms part of a robust electronic multimedia and multi-platform effort targeted at the general public and developed by the library and the Spanish Ministry of Culture (MCE); these efforts entail, among others, a YouTube channel with 199 videos, including a twenty-nine minute virtual visit to the actual physical exhibit of ‘Malaria’ (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkh2JvcaMJ8>).

The virtual exhibit landing page features a short overview of the aetiology, symptoms and parasitology of malaria and a rotating set of pictures related to the exhibit. There are six tabs at the top of the page, all in Spanish, under which the exhibit is organised: ‘Intermittent Fevers’, ‘Quinine’, ‘The Discovery of the Parasite and the Vector’, ‘Fighting Strategies’, ‘The Spanish Anti-Malaria Campaigns’ and ‘Malaria in Recent Times’. Each tab has a drop-down menu that gives different sub-theme options. After clicking on one of them, a short (in most cases a paragraph) description of the topic at hand appears, together with a rotating set of images related to that specific sub-theme. For instance, for the first tab ‘Intermittent Fevers’ (the section dealing with pre-modern approaches to Malaria), the topics are: ‘Diagnosis and Prevention in Ancient Times’, ‘Therapeutic Practices’, and ‘Uses of Quinine’. Under ‘Diagnosis’, the images include frontispieces of translations of, for example, Hippocrates’ writings on the disease.

As a visit to the virtual YouTube video of the exhibit makes clear, the real treasures here are the books and objects that comprise it, rather than the information provided on the website. The bulk of the images are found under the ‘Exhibit’ tab at the bottom right part of the web page, instead of being listed under the thematic tabs. This is one of the shortcomings of the site. Once the visitor clicks on the ‘Exhibit’ tab, he/she gains access to 174 images divided under the same rubrics described on the landing page. There are three continuous sets of images, and every image has associated basic metadata that appear in a

pop up window once you click on the image itself. It also features two links to enlarge and reduce the images, although these were not working during a visit to the site in December 2012.

The collection contains frontispieces and isolated folios and pages of medical, natural history and botanic treatises, as well as fragments of scientific reports, public health campaign materials, and photographs from archives and libraries in Spain, France, the United Kingdom and the United States. Also represented is a rich collection of artefacts related to medical treatments for malaria, the production and storage of quinine, and the identification and classification of the mosquito vector. The original materials are housed in museums in Madrid, Seville, Barcelona, as well as the Wellcome Library in London, and private collections. Highlights of the exhibit include images of eighteenth-century bloodletting instruments including two beautiful bloodletting cups from Aragon. There are also pictures of plaster models used for bloodletting training involving leeches and lancets; eighteenth-century botanical cinchona samples from New Granada collected during the José Celestino Mutis scientific expedition in the eighteenth century; public health campaign posters from the 1920s in Spain; and a multicoloured array of medicinal product packaging from Spain and Italy.

The website certainly serves its main purpose as a general introductory catalogue to the themes and holdings of the BNE on the subject. The fact that the website is in Spanish limits its utility as an educational resource outside Spanish-speaking countries. At the same time, the striking images can be very useful in a classroom setting as part of lectures or workshops. Although it will disappoint specialists looking to access specific primary sources for their own research, the website does help in identifying initial points for exploring collections in less prominent Spanish archives. In summary, the 'Malaria' virtual exhibit is a concrete, well-organised, and beautifully designed general introduction to the subject. Even though it is in Spanish, it is readily accessible to educators in other languages and can be useful to historians working on the history of malaria during their first forays into Spanish archives.

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**The University of Virginia Claude Moore Health Science Library Online Collections**, available online at <http://www.hsl.virginia.edu/historical/exhibits2.cfm>

Scholars interested in early modern medicine will be rewarded by a visit to the website of the Claude Moore Health Sciences Library of the University of Virginia. For more than a decade, the staff of the Historical Collections and Services have been at work curating a series of digital exhibits that present and contextualise some of its resources. In some half a dozen exhibits focused on colonial North America and Europe, visitors are reminded of the creativity with which people coped with the precariousness of life in the pre-modern world.

Two exhibits are primarily catalogues of early editions of technical medical treatises owned by the Library. *Vaulted Treasures* offers sample pages from clinical and theoretical works from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, including path-breaking treatises on