

Commentary on: The Syphilis Pandemic Prior to Penicillin: Origin, Health Issues, Cultural Representation, and Ethical Challenges

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The excellent review of the pandemic disease brought to Europe by Columbus at the end of the 15th century brings into question the nature of the microbes (1).

Whole-genome sequencing (WGS) has revolutionized *Treponema pallidum* research. WGS has also been combined with paleopathology and recently broadened and deepened by the development and applications of paleogenomics. The recent retrieval of ancient syphilis and yaws/bejel genomes indicate that they are old diseases, spreading in Europe before contacts with the New World (2). Circumstantial evidence in historic contextual perspectives further showed that the crew members of Columbus brought a highly contagious and virulent

yaws/bejel treponematoses to Europe – recognized as the French sickness or the Pox – and that this became a very important contributor to the rampant onslaught of the late 15th century epidemic (2), by posterity considered as the first syphilis pandemic (1).

REFERENCES

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