

Peer Review

Review of: "Syphilis: A Review of the Controversies on Its Origins and Research of Its Arrival in Quebec, Canada"

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The authors conclude that their literature review "could not find any arguments for the presence of syphilis in Quebec, Canada, before the arrival of the explorers."

This conclusion is technically accurate based on the evidence presented. The historical records cited are all post-contact. The absence of specific mention in Osler's textbook and the lack of Canadian paleogenetic studies mean there is no direct evidence presented for pre-contact syphilis in Quebec.

This highlights a significant gap in the research. The strong evidence for pre-Columbian syphilis elsewhere in North America (e.g., Florida, New York, Ohio) makes it a plausible, though unproven, presence in what is now Quebec. The failure to find arguments is partly a function of the available literature, not necessarily a reflection of historical reality.

I understand that the purpose of this paper is to provide awareness that there is a sheer lack of evidence showing the emergence of syphilis in Quebec. The article compensates for the small amount of historical information with genetic mutative changes that took place from Africa through Asia to America, showing the transformation from yaws (Africa) to bejel (endemic syphilis) and venereal syphilis in America

In the introduction of the abstract, the paper mentions revisiting theories and current literature; what theories is the paper trying to look at? I feel this needs to be elaborated on.

This paper discusses the current literature on the emergence of syphilis in the Americas, particularly Quebec. There are a couple of points that need to be addressed; the first of which can be found in the second paragraph of the introduction. This point argues that the debate forementioned in the paragraph is closed due to a lack of skeletal evidence; however, the theory is still up for debate, especially when research parameters were not widened to include the possibility of skeletal remains showing osseous

changes. Citations should be included to show the argument for pre-Columbian syphilis in Europe. For this reason, it should not be treated as a closed argument but rather noted that it is still up for debate.

The second point is that the methods chosen for this research article could yield more results of obtaining information if you widen your search parameters. Considering the obvious lack of original research on this topic by firsthand sources of treponema in Quebec around 1773, there is a high chance of finding no further information; however, it's something to consider. As for sources for treponema in bones in North America, Powell ML, Cook DC. The myth of syphilis: the natural history of treponematosi in North America. 2005 is an excellent source of information.

In the second paragraph of the methods section, you repeat yourself when addressing the inclusion criteria.

In the results and discussions section, the second and third paragraphs are also duplicates of each other.

The last paragraph feels out of place; it doesn't relate or connect with the previous paragraphs discussing the genus treponema or genetic mutative changes to treponema.

The first paragraph of Detection of osseous signs of syphilis in pre-Columbian remains does not necessarily need to repeat the 8,000-year-old dating site.

The second paragraph describes evidence that treponema was present in Europe. You can't argue in the first paragraph of your article that there was an absence of skeletal evidence of treponemal disease in pre-Columbian Europe, then later in the article insert that there was genetic evidence for its presence in pre-Columbian Europe.

Lastly, the section on syphilis today feels disconnected from the purpose of the article, which is supposed to address the revisited theories and examine the current literature on the emergence of syphilis in the Americas, particularly Quebec. In this section, it discusses the problems faced by native populations around the world with syphilis, which, although an important issue in its own right, is not addressing anything towards the emergence of syphilis in America or Quebec.

It is good that any information was found regarding early records of syphilis in Quebec. Their hypothesis that syphilis was present in Quebec before the settlers would be an interesting development to investigate for finding information on. It would prove that treponema evolved independently from the Old World.

Ideas for future investigation: since Quebec was a colony of France, there is a chance that some information got archived there. Oral histories are another possibility; Natives may have vague stories of

experiencing an epidemic around 1773.

Attachments: available at <https://doi.org/10.32388/5BHIJH>

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.