

S. Delage

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 12 May 1998

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Dan'I Danehy Oakes — 12 May 1998, 14:52

William: the smallpox bit won't wash, not in a quilt from American Revolution times. While the idea of leprosy coming through infected items might have occurred to some colonists (via the Biblical precepts thereon), it's unlikely that anyone would have tried to pass smallpox on through germ warfare in those pre-van-Leewenhoek days.

Craig:

Good points, but how about this well-known quote from Hamlet?
"Neither a borrower nor a lender be"

Umm, no. That was Polonius; the way it's phrased it's clear that we're talking about something Hamlet himself says.

Actually, Hamlet has a number of quotables. Some of these will be a bit vague on exact wording, it's been _years_, but I'll bet you'll recognize them all.

"The time is out of joint; o cursed spite
that ever I was born to put it right!"

"I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams."

"...smile, and smile, and be a villain..."

"Get thee to a nunnery!"

"I am mad only north by northwest; when the wind is [in the east?] I can tell a hawk from a handsaw."

Need I add that any of these, except possibly the first,
might be brought to bear on S.D. ... ?

Roach

William H. Ansley — 13 May 1998, 23:28 · follows Dan'I Danehy Oakes

From "Dan'I Danehy Oakes":

William: the smallpox bit won't wash, not in a quilt from American Revolution times. While the idea of leprosy coming through infected items might have occurred to some colonists (via the Biblical precepts thereon), it's unlikely that anyone would have tried to pass smallpox on through germ warfare in those pre-van-Leewenhoek days.

Uh, well, actually it washes quite nicely, thank you very much.

Since Anton van Leeuwenhoek lived from 1632 to 1723, I don't see how his discovery of micro-organisms rules out "germ warfare" being used in "American Revolution times" (remember, in the story this was any time up to 1799) even if we postulate that only a person who knew germs existed could conceive of trying to use bedding from smallpox victims to pass the disease on to others, a postulate I find very doubtful.

But, I was motivated to find where I had read that this had happened and, fortunately, it wasn't hard. It is on p. 251 of _Plagues and Peoples_ [1]:

The ravages of smallpox among Indians may in fact have been assisted by deliberate efforts at germ warfare. In 1763, for instance, Lord Jeffery Amherst ordered that blankets infected with smallpox be distributed among enemy tribes, and the order was acted on. Whether the result was as expected seems not recorded.

Now, this is a fairly well-known work and it seems likely to me that Wolfe has read it, since he seems to be a history buff (to put it mildly) and it provides a unusual interpretation of history.

In any case, I stand by my theory. (Although my original post about it was much too long, rambling and maudlin. Sorry. Fatigue affects me that way. I need to observe my bedtime more strictly from now on.)

[1] William H. MacNeill, _Plagues and Peoples_, 1976, Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, New York. ISBN: 0-385-11256-4

William Ansley