



Medical Topographical Studies: An Unexplored Source Of Climatic Data In The Iberian Peninsula During The 18th And 19th Centuries

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Contemporary interest in the relationship between the environment and human health was an original preoccupation of Western science and medicine, Ancient Greek philosophers and medical thinkers seeking rational explanations for disease studied and discussed the relationship between health and environment. In the Iberian Peninsula, from the 18th century to the first decades of the 20th century, this medical paradigm gave rise to the appearance of “medical topographies”, local studies on the sanitary and environmental conditions. The authors of these studies (physicians, pharmacists) included in their works meteorological data and general comments on the climatic conditions of the sites they investigated. There are approximately 300 studies of this type covering the whole country with local meteorological data unexplored until now. Recently, the Spanish Climate Reconstruction Network from Documentary Sources RECLIDO (<http://www.ucm.es/info/reclido>) has begun the systematic analysis of these data sources. Steps in the research are the following: (a) to localize documents (many of them unedited) in archives and libraries; (b) to extract climatic information; (c) to analyze the spatio-temporal coverage and quality of data and (d) to establish a data base, especially for the decades previous to the establishment of a systematic network of meteorological observations in the country. Some examples are presented to illustrate the interest of these documents for historical climatology studies, their potential and limitations, and future challenges are outlined.