

Book Reviews

JOHN Z. BOWERS, *When the twain meet. The rise of western medicine in Japan*. (Henry E. Sigerist Supplements to the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, No. 8), Baltimore, Md., and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, 8vo, pp. xi, 173, £8.50.

This book shares the same characteristics as its predecessor, *Western medical pioneers in feudal Japan* (Johns Hopkins, 1970), in that it is encyclopaedic rather than analytic, heavy on detail but correspondingly light on illumination of the whys and wherefores. The earlier book covered the careers of Kaempfer, Thunberg, Siebold, and Pompe van Meerdervoort; here the story is continued with Otto Mohnike, who arrived in 1848, Van den Broek, Willis, Mueller, Baelz, and Hepburn. There is much of interest, not only in the personal lives of these unusual men but also in their writings on Japan: Mohnike's shock at the high incidence of blindness and leprosy, Willis's work with military casualties in such out of the way places as Aizu, and his intriguing friendship with Saigo Takamori, and Mueller's work in the first medical school, *Igakkō*, which was to prove its excellence in so short a time. Valuable as all this is, however, I have one caveat. The account is presented almost entirely through the eyes of these Europeans, whose diaries and books are extensively paraphrased. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, but the cumulative effect is to place the Japanese in the role of passive receivers of superior wisdom, and, of course, the matter is much more complicated than this. To tackle such a subject as this with no real control of the Japanese sources, despite the occasional use of highly qualified Japanese informants, is a dangerous business and shows us that the spirit of Orientalism is still alive and, unfortunately, well. I mention this not to lambast the distinguished author for his lack of Japanese, but rather to warn the unwitting reader that the title is in the ultimate analysis ironic. The overall assumption seems to be that this set of brilliant Europeans sacrificed the best years of their lives banging their heads against a door that was only opened with painful reluctance. The silly people just could not grasp what it was they were rejecting. There is, in fact, no meeting of minds in this book at all, because one of the two parties involved is not really allowed to speak. Let us hope that the inside picture will be drawn for us in due course. Meanwhile, use this work with this caveat in mind and it should prove to be of considerable value.

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ERNA LESKY, *Meilensteine der Wiener Medizin. Grosse Ärzte Österreichs in drei Jahrhunderten*, Vienna, Verlag Wilhelm Maudrich, 1981, 4to, pp. 251, illus. Ös. 980.00.

This book is completely different from the meticulously documented and closely argued works that one associates with Erna Lesky. Indeed, in the Preface she invites persons interested in footnotes to consult her other publications. In this book, which Lesky obviously enjoyed writing, she seems to be sharing some of the best stories she has accumulated in a life of studying Viennese medicine. As such, the book is a great success.

Lesky's object is to survey three centuries of medical history and to place important medical developments in their cultural and social context. More than half the page space is devoted to pictures; this leaves only about one hundred pages of solid text. One might expect that such a relatively short treatment of so broad a topic would ramble or be filled with generalities, but Lesky's book is not subject to either defect. The book treats a carefully selected sample of important developments; the discussion of each development consists mostly of relevant anecdotes and factual curiosities, with just enough historical narrative to maintain continuity and perspective. The result is intimate and richly detailed, and much more enlightening than one could reasonably expect. Moreover, the content is sufficiently interesting that one can open the book to almost any page and be fascinated by what one finds there.

Like most pictorial histories of medicine, this book will be most appreciated by those who already have a fair knowledge of the subject. But *Meilensteine* presupposes much more than most comparable works. There are frequent references to persons (Abraham a St. Clara, Schwarzenberg, Karl Lueger), places (Prater, the Graben, Karlskirche), and eras (Jose-

Book Reviews

phinische, Vormärz, Biedermeier) that are second nature to the Viennese, but unknown to almost everyone else. Occasionally, for example, when Lesky refers to Adolf Lorenz as “the father of our Nobel Prize winner, Konrad,” one has the uneasy feeling that one is reading something intended for someone else. In any case, to appreciate fully Lesky’s book, in addition to the history of medicine, one must know something about Viennese history and one must be intimately familiar with the city. For example, in discussing Viennese emergency medical services in 1881, she tells of an amateur gymnast who sustained a compound fracture of the leg. The accident occurred in a police station in the Schottenring. His friend, a medical student, spent two and one-half hours securing transportation and moving him to a clinic in Alserstrasse. This becomes meaningful and relevant only if one knows that these streets are virtually adjacent. For connoisseurs of Viennese culture, particularly of Viennese medicine, these details increase the book’s value and make it a fascinating and excellent resource; but the uninitiated will inevitably miss a good deal of what Lesky provides.

As in appraising other books of this kind, the illustrations in *Meilensteine* must be taken into account. Many of the photographs are familiar, but others are published here for the first time. About half the illustrations are in colour, and they are very finely reproduced. The illustrations were obviously intended to conform to Lesky’s general plan of relating medicine to its social and cultural context. In addition to the usual photographs of surgical instruments and wax models, there are pictures of eighteenth-century prostitutes buying wigs (their heads were shaved as a form of punishment), and of early nineteenth-century vendors selling drinking-water from carts in the suburbs of Vienna. However, as one advances through the book there are progressively fewer photographs that enlighten one about the social background of medicine, and progressively more portraits. This becomes particularly noticeable in the last several chapters, which concern the development of various specializations. In these chapters one finds mainly portraits of leading physicians, often surrounded by their assistants and students, sometimes chatting with famous political or cultural figures. These illustrations are qualitatively different from the earlier ones; they seldom reveal anything about the social context of medicine, about the theory or practice of medicine, or even about the particular specialization in question. In Lesky’s book, as in many other pictorial histories of medicine, the photographs become less interesting and less enlightening as one advances through the book. All in all, however, the illustrations are well selected and an important asset in this fine publication.

Erna Lesky’s *Meilensteine* is a beautiful and engaging book that is an excellent complement to her other writings on Viennese medicine. Anyone should find the book interesting; those with a special attachment for Viennese medicine (and who read German well) will find it to be a truly valuable addition.

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JOHN L. THORNTON, *Jan van Rymsdyk, medical artist of the eighteenth century*, Cambridge, Oleander Press, 1982, 8vo, pp. ix, 111, illus., £9.95.

William Smellie’s *Anatomical tables* (1754) and William Hunter’s *Gravid uterus* (1774), once perused, are never forgotten. Their effectiveness is due to the designer of most of their illustrations, Jan van Rymsdyk, who also drew for several works by John Hunter, for two now rare atlases, anatomic and obstetric, by C.-N. Jenty, and for a few other medical publications, all works of quality. But though Rymsdyk’s plates are still pored over today, his life is otherwise almost as if it had never been. John L. Thornton has carefully assembled and put in order for the first time what little evidence of his existence Jan van Rymsdyk left behind, and has integrated it with the lives of his better-known employers.

It emerges that Jan van Rymsdyk was born in the Netherlands, perhaps in the 1720s. Where he learnt his art is unknown. In 1750, he was in London, working, already a master draughtsman, for both W. Hunter and Smellie. In 1755–7, he produced the drawings for Jenty’s books. In 1758, although the *Gravid uterus* was still unfinished, he removed to Bristol and set up there as a portrait-painter. His one certain surviving portrait, of the Bristol surgeon William