

Book Reviews

Diseases in Antiquity: A Survey of the Diseases, Injuries and Surgery of Early Populations, ed. by D. BROTHWELL and A. T. SANDISON, Springfield, Illinois, C. C. Thomas, 1967, pp. xix, 766, illus., \$39.75.

If mere statistics contribute to the excellence of a book, *Diseases in Antiquity* should become and remain a standard source. Its fifty-seven chapters have been contributed by forty-two authors drawn from five continents. Included in the volume are eight chapters which the editors consider to be among the classics of palaeopathological studies. Ranging in time from 1907 to 1952 (surprisingly late to need reprinting), they include a paper by R. L. Moodie on the palaeopathology of fossils, first published in 1917. The editors have obviously had great difficulty in selecting a contribution by Moodie suitable for inclusion in the volume. Rightly they have chosen and edited a paper which reminds us that disease and accident were a feature of life long before Man appeared. Five of the remaining chapters are either reprints or updated versions of papers originally published elsewhere. Though the editors state that the original place of publication is noted in the contents this is unfortunately not the case. They are shown only as footnotes to the chapter headings and whether or not a paper has been updated can often only be determined by comparing the original date of publication with the references given at the end of the chapter.

Following the Foreword (by Warren R. Dawson), and the Editorial, the book is divided into seven sections: Introductory Studies, Contributions to Parasitology, Geographic Studies, Somatic Diseases (Individual), Somatic Diseases (Regional and Systematic), Accidental Trauma and Surgical Intervention, and Mental Abnormality. Though some of the chapters are primarily of interest to workers in a particular field there is much of more general interest, though this is not a volume aimed at the general reader. It is difficult to criticize constructively the more specialized topics discussed; indeed the contributors do not always agree among themselves, but even the more abstruse topics are very readable. For the non-specialist, the most absorbing topics may well be the contributions in the first three sections, particularly those by Brothwell on the biocultural background to disease, Polunin on health and disease in contemporary primitive societies, Hare on the antiquity of diseases caused by bacteria and viruses and Hackett on the human treponematoses. So-called primitive medicine has a bearing on the study of palaeopathology and figures more prominently in the work than the title would suggest.

Inferences about the medical and surgical practices of antiquity are drawn primarily from three sources: from contemporary written records, from preserved human remains, and from man-made structures, tools and utensils that have survived from earlier cultures. The first two sources figure strongly in the discussions, the last less so though it is by no means ignored. Here is a field ripe for further investigation.

The interpretation of the evidence draws upon a knowledge of many disciplines, a fact brought out strongly in Lambrecht's study of Trypanosomiasis. Here the ecology and evolution of the tsetse fly is interwoven with the palaeogeography of Africa in Pleistocene times to support his thesis. The interpretation of past medical writings is fraught with many difficulties. Dawson's contribution on the Egyptian Medical Papyri reminds us of them. Much of the book (eleven chapters) is concerned with medicine and surgery in Ancient Egypt and there are numerous references elsewhere.

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But this is understandable; it is from mummified remains that the best preserved evidence has been obtained.

Like the written record and the art form (paintings, sculpture and the like), preserved remains are no less difficult to interpret, or are open to misinterpretation. As Wells states, 'It no longer seems extraordinary that palaeopathologists occasionally make a wrong diagnosis. The wonder is we ever make a right one.' In a most useful survey, Wells points out the pitfalls of pseudopathology with the many traps that lie in wait for the unwary. One danger not mentioned is the practice of placing newer mummies in older coffins to enhance their sale value. That this contribution should be the first sets the remainder in perspective and illustrates the careful examination that should be undertaken before any conclusions are drawn.

Palaeopathology is a rich and growing field for research, and as new techniques are devised older studies are re-investigated and freshly-discovered material submitted to more sophisticated examination. This places a large burden of responsibility on the archaeologist excavating in the field and the curator preserving the material in the museum. Again and again contributors refer to specimens housed in museums or, more rarely, to specimens which can no longer be traced. A specimen inadequately housed is often lost to science and indirectly this book is a plea that the whereabouts of specimens should be recorded and for the curator to document his specimens as fully as possible, a plea well substantiated by Morse in his study of tuberculosis. It is also a plea for most careful excavation, a plea well illustrated by Brothwell in his description of the finding of calculi in a Somerset Dark Age Cemetery. It is not only human remains that need careful preservation and documentation. The associated remains are often equally important as the only means of dating the site—the problem mentioned by Goff when dealing with the effect of syphilis on bones. Equally the palaeopathologist should be aware of the limitations in dating his material and of the information that museum records ought to reveal. This work can be read with profit by all three.

This is a well-produced book and a single reading has revealed less than a dozen typographical errors. The figures, being from many different sources, vary in quality but are generally good. Figure 5a, on page sixty-two, has been reproduced upside down, and some of the maps and graphs could have been improved. Each chapter has a good list of references though their typographical layout varies. Retailing in this country at £17 17s. 6d. it is doubtful whether its sale will be large, but it should be in every library where there is an interest in palaeopathology.

C. A. SIZER

The Lives of the Professors of Gresham College, by J. WARD, facsimile of the London 1740 edition, New York and London, Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1967, pp. xxiv, 156, illus., \$20.00.

The reprint series to which this volume belongs deserves the highest praise both for its standard of reproduction and quality of binding. Prices too are reasonable. Projects such as this enable libraries with limited budgets to avoid the ruinous antiquarian market and yet build up collections of scientific classics. Ward's *Lives* has always been, and remains, a classic biographical reference book in which one can