

Book Reviews

Taking the other tack, Richard Palmer explores the story of the papal physicians, a subject “killed . . . stone dead” by the erudition of Prospero Mandosio (1696) until resurrected by Palmer with his witty and pithy observations. The turn-of-the-seventeenth-century German Prince, Maurice of Hesse-Kassel, took a direct interest in the medical details of his court and country, which Bruce Moran explores thoroughly. Moran’s general remarks on why princes who identified with divine-right ideas also took such an interest in the new learning are especially important. Lawrence Brockliss explores the literary image of the French royal physicians, with surprising and illuminating results. The other essay on the French royal physicians, by Colin Jones, is a *tour de force*, rich in detail and clear about the Janus-faced enterprise and patronage of the court physician within the complex system of *ancien régime* offices and corporations. Johanna Geyer-Kordesch looks into the Prussian court and its medical patronage. In the latter half of her rather dense essay she takes up her favourite subject, Georg Ernst Stahl, as a way of exploring the dialectical tensions between a materializing view of the body that went hand-in-hand with the growing bureaucratic power of the centralized state, and what she identifies as the more holistic and integrated view of the Pietist dissenters and other drop-outs from the systematizing government. The medicine of Catherine the Great’s court is explored by J. T. Alexander, who finds the concerns about epidemic disease greatly influencing decisions about medicine taken at court. The final essay by William Bynum, on the English court doctors from 1688 to 1837, is the only one with a non-Continental focus, giving a refreshing reversal of the usual geographical orientation of English-language collections. Bynum’s essay covers a lot of chronological ground, but (as he himself states) remains something of a work-in-progress, being only allusive about an analysis of the physicians and their medical roles at court.

The almost uniformly high standard of the analyses and research in these essays may not be enough to convince all that court medicine was an important cause of change. Perhaps too, the impression is left of almost all court medicine being the province of the prince and his or her physicians alone. But many of the essays here introduce themes and approaches that will undoubtedly be followed by future investigators. And the volume as a whole convinces that either as a reflection of change or as a cause of it, further studies of court medicine of this quality will be illuminating indeed.

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ROGER FRENCH and ANDREW WEAR (eds.), *The medical revolution of the seventeenth century*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. viii, 328, £35.00, \$59.50.

This book forms a sequel to an earlier volume in matching format for which its editors (with I. M. Lonie) were also responsible, *The medical renaissance of the sixteenth century* (1985). But the content of the new book forms an instructive contrast with that of its predecessor. For one thing, whereas England barely appeared in the earlier book, the present one is heavily dominated by papers on English themes. Equally noticeable is the fact that the book is much more about the context of medicine than its practice—there is no equivalent here to the essays in the earlier volume on humanist surgery, for instance, or on Venetian pharmacy. We also hear less of the learned traditions which bulked large in the earlier work, except in so far as these were the victims of attack. Obviously to a large extent this reflects the interests of the scholars who were invited to contribute to the conference on which the current volume is based. But it also symbolizes the changes that occurred in the seventeenth century, when England came to the fore in the intellectual scene, and when medicine may be seen to have been reshaped primarily by changes occurring in ancillary fields.

Indeed, paradoxically, the one essay which is concerned with medical practice—that by Andrew Wear—makes a good case for a greater degree of continuity than is often acknowledged even in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, pointing out how essentially similar techniques could be “dressed up” in more fashionable interpretative garb.

Book Reviews

Arguably, this means that the book's title is itself slightly misleading: though the editors explain that the "medical revolution" that they are chronicling is the process by which "the classical renaissance of the sixteenth century gave way to the enlightenment of the eighteenth" (p. 8), it might be felt that "medicine in an age of revolution" would more aptly have described the work's content.

In the course of indicating the changes that occurred during this seminal period and the way in which medicine related to wider trends, the contributors adopt a variety of viewpoints. One or two represent the cruder end of the spectrum of contextualist approaches which currently flourish in the history of science. In general, however, the essays show considerable subtlety in their exposition of the trends under study, giving a sensitive and valuable view of the way in which medicine reacted to and was shaped by broader intellectual, institutional, and professional pressures.

One perennial theme is the role of the new science and the threat presented by its empirical ethos to the old tradition of learned physic. The way in which the Royal Society provided a formal outlet for medical empiricism in its early years is well illustrated by Roy Porter's study of its correspondence, while the disagreement among medical writers as to how physic should react to this mandate to empiricism is well explored in H. J. Cook's account of the protracted debate on the subject which took place c. 1670. Equally interesting is the relationship of medicine to the ideas of Descartes and Newton: Roger French gives an intriguing analysis of the debate triggered off by Descartes' misrepresentation of the ideas of William Harvey in support of his own philosophy, while the advocacy of mechanistic medical theories in the early eighteenth century by figures like Philippe Hecquet and George Cheyne is surveyed respectively in essays by Lawrence Brockliss and Anita Guerrini (who also illustrates how Newton's own increasing emphasis on the role of "ether" was adapted in a medical context).

No less important was the context of religious change. Thus Peter Elmer argues for the role of eirenicism rather than Puritanism in providing the setting for the challenge to medical orthodoxy in the mid-century, while David Harley considers the survival of thaumaturgical healing among Nonconformists at a time when naturalist explanations of mental illness were gaining favour among Anglicans. Equally interesting is John Henry's examination of the reasons why the implicit or explicit materialism of medical writings was only occasionally attacked by the guardians of religious orthodoxy, the sheer complexity of medical theory deterring all but a few theologians from getting involved with it. All in all, the volume gives a very useful account of the ways in which medicine interrelated with its context in this transitional period. A third volume taking the story on a century further would be welcome.

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ROBERT BURTON, *The anatomy of melancholy*, vol. 1, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicholas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair, with an Introduction by J. B. Bamborough, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. lxxii, 675, £70.00.

NICHOLAS K. KIESSLING, *The library of Robert Burton*, Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications, n.s., vol. 22, Oxford, The Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1988, 8vo, pp. xli, 433, £25.00.

Given the extraordinary richness of its learning, and its potential rewards for the scholar amply endowed with *Sitzfleisch*, it is peculiar that Robert Burton's *Anatomy of melancholy* (first edition, 1621) has attracted little precise scholarship. Most of the monographs which have appeared on Burton over the last generation have been the work of literary historians primarily concerned to use his views as backgrounds to Elizabethan and Jacobean literature (e.g., Lawrence Babb's *Sanity in Bedlam: a study of Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy* [1959], or S. B. Ewing's *Burtonian melancholy in the plays of John Ford* [1969]). Others have attempted to insert Burton into a "progressive" history of psychiatry, as, for instance, Berger Evans, in his