

## Book Reviews

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*Medical Ceramics in the Wellcome Institute. Volume I: English and Dutch*, by J. K. CRELLIN, London, Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1969, pp. 304, illus., £6 6s. 0d.

Serious students of the history of medicine, chemistry and pharmacy have already cause to thank Dr. F. N. L. Poynter, Director of the Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, for the publication of three Catalogues of the principal contents of the Wellcome Library. Now we have the first of a projected series of Catalogues of the contents of the Museum, built up with lavish prudence by Sir Henry Wellcome and added to by successive Directors.

This is not a Catalogue for scanning: the careful descriptions of the 3,000 or so objects, all of medical and pharmaceutical interest, written by John K. Crellin of the Wellcome Institute demand close study. The numerous illustrations, almost 500 figures in all, are splendid examples of what skilful photography can do to add point to the descriptions of the objects themselves. The printers too have played their part admirably in the presentation of a book that is a pleasure to handle.

Primarily this is a catalogue of ceramic objects: not a treatise on the development of styles of decoration of shapes though much of what the author has given us by way of comparative examples taken from wide reading and consultation with art historians may well prove to be the accepted source book *par excellence* of future writers dealing with the classes of ceramics described and of forms of decoration.

The English and Dutch drug jars will have first claim upon the reader, if only because of the variety and similarity of design and the present-day zest for collecting. The author is not afraid to pose problems where his own study cannot settle queries. One example is his question whether the 'pipe-smoker' finials to the labels on the first English jars were really intended to be that or not. His observation might have been strengthened had he seen the fragments of early sixteenth-century plates in Malaga Museum where the finials of the labels denoting the ships' names are similar to those on the English drug jars.

So many objects are mentioned that not in every case can the details be complete. What adds to our interest are the special figures of shapes of English jars, fig. 1, the band decorations on storage jars, fig. 2, the tassel designs on Dutch jars, fig. 3, and the convenient summary of Dutch makers' marks, p. 50. This reviewer would certainly echo the author's thought that not enough has yet been done or if done, not published, on the interchange of designs between the makers and decorators of English and Dutch jars. Surprisingly there appears to be no Spanish influence in the Netherlands pharmaceutical pottery, either in shape or decoration, although Spain held the Netherlands for long years. All the external influence seems to have come from North Germany or Italy. Attention is called to the many 'Dutch' jars which may well have been made, as Wittop Koning and others have suggested, in what is now Belgium, e.g. Antwerp jars. Are those jars with floreated 'I.H.S.' of monastic or convent origin (fig. 158)? Is the jar labelled 'SAECHAR: RUB:' so spelt because of the German flattening of the vowel 'A'? Amidst so much valuable material it would be surprising if a few minor items did not raise questions. e.g. Is not 'paraph' normally so spelt and not as printed (page 19). Are the 'wings' at the base of the basket of

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fruit (fig. 100) really wings or supports for the basket itself, as would appear likely from the details on similar jars? Jars labelled 'P' for 'Pilula' must surely have been intended to contain the pill mass made up ready for rolling into pills when a prescription called for pills of that particular formula and seldom if ever, to hold dozens and dozens of the pills ready-made.

The informative notes on the Dispensing Jars help to place these in their proper context. Judging by the number still found on all city excavation sites, these pots must have been the contemporary 'throw away' containers.

Creamware and stoneware pots have a special place in the development of drug jars since they were almost the last of the traditional ceramic ware containers before the common glass shop rounds invaded the apothecary shops and pharmacies of the early nineteenth century. The types shown in figs. 233–5 show that pottery jars continued well into the present century. The change in the shape of syrup jar spouts of the creamware jars is noteworthy—the more elegant delft spouts giving place to much uglier ones on the creamware vessels.

It is good to see the whole of the Wellcome collection of tin-glazed tiles (seventeen in all) brought together. This is the largest collection known and it comprises most though not all types and designs. Much has been written about the use of the 'Pill Tile' but apart from their decorative value as indicating that the possessor was a member of the Society of Apothecaries of London, any other use to which the tiles may have been put is purely guesswork.

From medical and pharmaceutical use to Nursing and Hygiene: this section lists feeding cups, pap boats, food warmers, posset pots, spoons and measures. The food warmers in particular, many exhibiting the cut-out patterns so characteristic of Leeds pottery, must have derived in large part from the French *veilleuses*, the companion of every genteel invalid room and nursery from the mid-eighteenth century. There is no suggestion of their use in any earlier period. Posset pots, English in great variety and a few Dutch, are depicted, from the plain white tin-glazed to the crowned Bristol polychrome, the latter almost the height of the Bristol artists' achievement in fanciful form and decoration. The reader who is uncertain whether the term 'posset' meant the liquid or the curd is strongly recommended to read the author's discussion of this point in *Notes and Queries*—see footnote, p. 54, No. 254. Alas that the medicine spoons provided under the present Health Service cannot reproduce in plastic the elegance of the scroll-handled porcelain spoons illustrated and which our great-grandmothers used. They need have had no difficulty about the exact quantities to be measured for these were clearly indicated by the limits of the rings inside the spoons.

Fortunately we are not left without a record of the more humble utensils that form part of the sickroom equipment. Spittoons, chamber pots, urinals and bidets were all collected by Wellcome and rightly they find a place in this Catalogue. Chamber pots and urinals have been the subject of a recent publication by P. Amis in the *Journal of Ceramic History*.<sup>1</sup> To an extent the two sets of records are complementary though Amis is less confident about dating those he describes. It will come as news to

<sup>1</sup> P. Amis, 'Some domestic vessels of southern Britain: a social and technical analysis', *Journal of Ceramic History*, No. 2 (gen. ed. A. R. Mountford), Stafford, 1968.

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many that the same type of pot was, and is still, in use in the paint and colour industry.

A final miscellaneous group embraces bleeding bowls. Not all those objects sold as bleeding bowls by antique dealers have held blood though coming within the author's description as 'single-handed'. Those graduated in fluid ounces are without doubt the real thing: it might be prudent to consider all others suspect unless there is a satisfactory origin or provenance for them as bleeding bowls: they would have to hold at least four to five ounces. Curiously, the barbers' bowls, at least those with only a small indentation in the rim, seem more suitable for such a purpose than to be fitted to the neck when being shaved. Still under the heading 'Miscellaneous', the reader will find himself consulting notes on such diverse items as inhalers—now to be found on most second-hand stalls—and phrenological heads. Those patented by Fowler of Ludgate Circus, London, had as long a life as any.

It is a heartening statement in the Foreword by the Director of the Institute that a further volume will deal with other ceramic material. We may hope that there will be further volumes that in time will cover the greater part of the vast Wellcome Collections. John Crellin has set a high standard by this first catalogue. Not only will students of the history of medicine and the allied sciences benefit by it but 'pottery people' everywhere will need the book and the collecting public will have a good part of their insatiable appetite slaked by the perusal of this well-produced and scholarly volume.

LESLIE G. MATTHEWS

*A Catalogue of Sixteenth Century Printed Books in the National Library of Medicine*, compiled by RICHARD J. DURLING, Bethesda, Md., U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1967, pp. xii, 698, \$5.25.

The decision to publish specialized catalogues of the early collections in the National Library of Medicine is a logical development from the creation of the History of Medicine Division, though in fact it continues a process begun at an earlier date with Dr. Dorothy Schullian's *Catalogue of Incunabula*. Now in this volume devoted to the sixteenth century (to be followed by another for the seventeenth century) the imprints previously embedded among subject entries and scattered through many alphabetical sequences in the Index Catalogue and succeeding volumes have been brought together, revised and amalgamated with newly-catalogued material. For the first time the contribution of this century to medical science and to the development of medical printing, as represented in this great library, can be viewed in its entirety.

The catalogue includes among its 4,818 items undated incunabula which might be assigned to 1500 or later and books published in 1600. The proportion of new entries is not stated but comparison of sample sections with the previous catalogues suggests a figure of approximately 40 per cent. Such comparisons also provide impressive evidence of the care devoted to the revision of existing entries, involving fresh transcriptions, changes in form of headings, identification of anonymous works, correction of erroneous attributions, authentication of authors' dates and the provision of additional footnotes. From this one would be entitled to predict a high level of accuracy throughout the catalogue.