

Book Reviews

GUIDO MAJNO, *The healing hand. Man and wound in the ancient world*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1975, large 8vo, pp. [xxvi], 571, illus., £13.75.

The commonest surgical procedure over the centuries has been the handling of the wound, and yet this is the first book to deal with the matter in detail. Dr. Majno, who is now chairman of the Department of Pathology at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, has spent ten years investigating how the wound was treated in Antiquity, ranging from the Mesopotamian cultures to Galen in the second century A.D., and including China and India. The result is an important contribution to the history of surgery.

In the first place it is based on extensive research into a vast array of primary and secondary sources; the bibliography runs to forty-four pages, the notes accompanying the text to sixty-six, and there are thirteen pages of notes on the book's 305 illustrations, fifteen of which are in colour. Throughout, Dr Majno gives adequate information about the culture or period he is dealing with, as well as his account of the wounds encountered and how they were treated. He writes well, although occasionally he can be accused of light-hearted irreverence, and at times a deficiency in historical sense and background medical history can be detected.

One of the outstanding features of his book is that the author is not content only to transmit knowledge concerning ancient forms of therapy, but he questions why certain substances should have been employed and if, indeed, they were efficacious. There is only one way of answering these queries adequately and that is by indulging in "practical history". Using this technique Dr. Majno is able to show quite conclusively by laboratory experiments that grease and honey used by the Ancient Egyptians and wine by the Greeks are both beneficial to wounds for they diminish infection and promote healing. Frankincense, myrrh, and other resins and balsams can also be shown to be bacteriostatic, and cinammon and cassia likewise. Metallic compounds, especially iron rust and bronze rust, were used on wounds by the Ancient Greeks, and these two are antiseptic in action. The technique of using the jaws of large ants to keep wound edges approximated might seem somewhat far-fetched, but Professor Majno has used *Eciton burchelli* to show that this is practicable and reliable.

Altogether, therefore, this is an outstanding work which sheds new light on an all-important aspect of early surgery. It can be thoroughly recommended and is well worth what seems to be a high price.

CLÉOPÂTRE MONTANDON, *Le développement de la science à Genève aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles. Le cas d'une communauté scientifique*, Vevey, Delta, 1975, 8vo, pp. 169, paperback, [no price stated].

The author provides an excellent study of the growth of scientific activity in a relatively small community during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She takes particular note of the external or social influences, partly as a reaction to previous investigators who have considered only the internal. She shows how science develops by a combination of all factors, and by the intellectual and political control of the scientists themselves. Scientific creativity is another factor and is determined by the interaction of hereditary (internal) and sociocultural (external) influences, together with the relative status of the individual in his scientific career.