suggestion, appropriately in the year of the bicentenary of the French Revolution, that unrest among peasants, triggered by symptoms of ergot poisoning, contributed to the events leading up to that revolution. This engaging theory is supported by a great many "puzzling facts", "clues" which purport to show that "in the summer of 1789 many French citizens may have suffered from ergot poisoning" ("may", "perhaps", and "maybe" appear with alarming frequency on page after page). Another favourite concept in this connection is "suppressed fertility", also caused by ergot poisoning, which the author thinks may have been largely responsible for stagnation of population growth in Europe prior to 1750. The problem with this last argument is an apparent difficulty of definition. Given the paucity of surviving records, how does one distinguish between early or late miscarriages, and failure to conceive? Worse still, how does one measure such values? Matossian does it all by statistics, invoking a near bewildering wealth of "economic and temperature variables". The reader's confidence in these proceedings is hardly enhanced by the gratuitous inclusion of facetious remarks concerning the sexual activities of French (p. 102) and Russian peasants (p. 26).

One must finally give Mary Matossian full marks for her enthusiasm and perseverance. It does seem a pity that she must reject all other explanations so decisively in order to promote her own, as when, writing of the mortality decline in Europe after 1750, she comprehensively dismisses the opposition by declaring that it is "reasonably clear that improvements in sanitation and medical care, the decline in war casualties and deaths associated with famine, or even smallpox inoculation [inoculation or vaccination—or both?] cannot be taken seriously as solutions". For readers unencumbered by one-track minds, it is, of course, possible to believe that more than one factor could have been in action at any one time.

Lise Wilkinson, Royal Postgraduate Medical School, London

VIVIAN NUTTON (ed.), *Medicine at the courts of Europe, 1500–1837*, Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine, London and New York, Routledge, 1990, 8vo, pp. x, 301, £35.00.

From the fine introduction through to the last essay, this anthology works very well. The Continental and early-modern focus, the common themes raised by most of the essays, and the importance of the clearly-defined subject matter make this an unusually coherent collection. As Nutton mentions in his introduction, historical questions about the influence of royal and princely courts on European culture have drawn some serious attention in recent years, especially because of the influential work of Norbert Elias. Now much more than the chronicling of the doings of great personages, such historical work—as in most of these essays—often seeks to analyse whether the concerns and patronage of the court might have influenced historical changes. Not all the authors of the volume answer the question affirmatively, some seeing court medicine as rather more reflecting than causing change in medical culture. But the various approaches to the subject taken by these authors are often suggestive of important historical movements, so that the best of them will be of interest to a variety of historians.

Two of the authors and the editor contribute essays that attempt to set out large themes and general patterns, bringing in examples to illustrate their points; the other seven concentrate more closely on the empirical details of particular courts, allowing generalizations to emerge. Nutton's introduction is an excellent overview of the general importance of the subject of court medicine, ranging from the Hittites to the nineteenth century, while Hugh Trevor-Roper's wide-ranging essay on the importance of royal and Protestant patronage for the spread of Paracelsianism is carried off with his usual panache. Werner Friedrich Kümmel's attempt to systematize the medical literature on disease found at court does not work quite as well, with its stress on the bourgeois "Enlightenment" as the cause of changes in the relationship between the court doctor and his patients, but he has much of interest to say about how the court doctors gained influence as the "State" developed, a development they whole-heartedly supported.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300052856 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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.

Harold J. Cook, University of Wisconsin-Madison

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.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300052856 Published online by Cambridge University Press