

## Book Reviews

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MIRKO D. GRMEK, *Les maladies à l'aube de la civilisation occidentale*, Paris, Payot, 1983, 8vo, pp.527, Fr.160.00 (paperback).

This a large and ambitious work which draws together and attempts to balance a range of information pertinent to an understanding of patterns of disease in early mediterranean societies. Grmek calls on relevant comment from Aristotle and arthritis to Hippocrates and hyperostosis. While the Greek world holds his interest in particular, he makes use of material and literary evidence well beyond this narrow classical domain. Sigerist and others have, of course, attempted this kind of treatment before, but it seems to me that Grmek's survey is especially successful, and he has been wise enough to restrict himself, when possible, to the Greek world. His emphasis has also been on disease, not medical history as a whole.

Of the thirteen chapters, about half thus have a considerable palaeopathological and palaeodemographic content. Tuberculosis, leprosy, and treponemal disease are discussed in special chapters, and Grmek rightly gives much consideration to the problem of possible inherited anaemias, associated skeletal changes and malaria (a subject well debated since the early writings of 'Malaria Jones' and the more recent skeletal work of Larry Angel).

It was interesting to see Grmek's evolutionary scheme for the mycobacteria, and the modest amount of time (well under 25,000 years) he allows for the differentiation of tuberculosis varieties in larger mammals and also for the separation of murine and human leprosy. Are these in fact more likely to be linked to very different human cultural development and rodent infestation? This question of the micro-evolution of parasites is without doubt one of the most interesting, yet neglected, aspects of medical history. It could in fact have been developed further when considering the evolution of the treponematoses, a recent study in the *International Journal of Systematic Bacteriology* (1981) showing that alternative hypotheses are possible.

As it stands, the book is a synthesis of a wealth of variable information, and it is understandable enough that his bibliography is representative but not exhaustive. Nevertheless, the bibliography is extensive, and my one grumble is that for those of us who will want to refer to it on various occasions, we have the job of plodding through it as footnotes, instead of as a properly assembled reference list at the back. Why on earth do publishers still do this? Perhaps for cost reasons, there are no illustrations, but the book would have benefited from a good selection of them.

Possibly the main contribution of this work is to emphasize that a balanced evaluation of ancient disease must be far more than simply finding neat equivalents in ancient and modern literature. The situation is far more complex and problematical than that. For instance, ancient symptoms can be tied up with the wrong diseases and disease names, and a condition might have been far more devastating in the past. So the evaluation and interpretation of ancient diseases needs really to be ecologically based, calling on environmental, social, and micro-evolutionary factors, with due attention to the limitations of early descriptions and possible changes in the modern situation.

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WILLIS J. ELWOOD AND A. FÉLICITÉ TUXFORD (editors), *Some Manchester doctors. A biographical collection to mark the 150th anniversary of the Manchester Medical Society 1834—1984*, Manchester University Press, 1984, 8vo, pp. xiv, 228, illus., £17.50.

The Manchester Medical Society's foundation in 1834 was part of a broader, national movement towards more structured professional organizations among rank-and-file doctors. Two years previously, Charles Hastings, a Worcester practitioner, had launched the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association, which for twenty-five years campaigned for legislative

## Book Reviews

reform of the profession on behalf of general practitioners, especially those in the provinces. In contrast, the Manchester society was not overtly political in its activities. Its principal aim was to promote professional improvement by providing access for members to a library and reading room. Its library has remained one of the society's central features ever since.

From 1858 until 1883, under the direction of the bibliophile and eye-surgeon, Thomas Windsor, the library increased from about 2,500 volumes to a staggering 31,000 volumes. We can only regret the pettiness of the committee which caused Windsor's resignation. Historians of medicine should take note of these Manchester holdings. When the local proprietary medical school became part of the rapidly expanding, neighbouring university college in 1872, the Medical Society seized the opportunity to house its burgeoning collection in the new medical school buildings. Today, historians have access to what must be one of the finest nineteenth-century collections in the country. The society continues to play an active role in developing and maintaining its library through a generous grant to the university.

The society was not, of course, simply a library, as this account amply demonstrates. Throughout its history, the society has formed a focus for the local profession, acting as an exchange for ideas and a forum for social and professional intercourse. I found the chapter outlining the development of those organizations which merged in 1950 to form a much broader-based organization particularly interesting. Although given virtually no context, the chronology gives an interesting indication of the differentiation of professional practice: the Pathological Society and Odontological Society were founded in 1885, the Manchester Surgical Society in 1922, and the Manchester and District Society of Anaesthetists in 1946.

The purpose of this volume, however, was not to analyse and assess, but to record the past and pay respect to important figures in the history of Manchester medicine. This is best achieved through the biographies of distinguished members written by a number of contributors, some of whom have drawn on personal knowledge. Sir Harry Platt's description of Sir John Charnley's achievements is a poignant tribute from a master to an exceptional pupil and respected friend. Professor Easson paints a sympathetic pen portrait of Ralston Paterson, one of the founders of modern radiotherapy, based, in part, on his own involvement with post-war developments at the Christie Hospital.

There are several excellent biographies of nineteenth-century Mancunians also. Joan Mottram ably describes the breadth of interests which concerned the man-midwife and hospital reformer, John Robertson. Robertson was an innovative and caring physician who is best remembered as the advocate of the pavilion system of hospital design. Professor Stirland's outline of Sheridan Delépine's life and work also indicates the important examples that have been set by Manchester initiatives. Delépine moved to Manchester from London in 1890 to become Professor of Pathology in the medical school. He quickly set up a public health laboratory, which eventually provided a wide range of diagnostic services for local authorities. This was the first commercially run laboratory of its kind.

Inevitably, the editors have had to be selective. Only twenty-four biographies are included. They have attempted to provide additional information in an appendix which lists office-holders, giving brief personal details. I was disappointed that Dr William Brockbank was omitted from this list and only included, as a mark of respect on his death, in an editors' addendum. During his long career, he contributed much, both as a physician and as a medical historian. I also felt that the volume would have been a more complete record if the editors had not limited themselves to the dead. Sir Harry Platt, alongside his friend Geoffrey Jefferson and his colleague John Stopford, helped shape Manchester surgery in the 1920s and 1930s. That he remains active, at ninety-nine years old, is no reason to neglect his achievements.

At £17.50, this book is not cheap. Yet, clearly, production costs have been kept to a minimum. I found the "word-processor" type-face unattractive, and some of the illustrations poor in quality. Nevertheless, this is an appropriate commemoration of 150 useful years. I am sure that society members will enjoy the glimpses of their past, and that historians of medicine will find many gems of information.

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