

Book Reviews

title pages and woodcuts. Detailed indices are supplied: one to names, titles, and geographical subjects, and one to printers, publishers and places of printing. Bibliographic descriptions in the entries themselves are very detailed, including full collations and STCN fingerprints, as well as contents, bibliographic references and the shelfmark of the library's copy. Each entry includes references to the other editions of the same work listed elsewhere in the catalogue, since the strict chronological arrangement of the whole means that editions are separated.

This method of ordering is very enlightening, as it gives a panoramic overview of the historical development of the subject.

Not surprisingly, the seventeenth century predominates: the Low Countries, like other parts of Europe, suffered repeated waves of the plague during that century, and barely a decade went by without a major outbreak in one of the principal cities. However, there is also a significant number of works from earlier periods. The earliest is a Dutch translation of Joannes de Ketham's *Fasciculus medicinae*, published in Antwerp in 1512, and a striking illustration from it is reproduced, showing a plague sufferer being examined by a doctor.

The only drawback to the chronological approach is the confusing proliferation of separately-listed editions. For example, the entry for the 1539 Antwerp edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on the first page boasts no less than forty-six references to other editions. Since the entire catalogue contains around 750 or 800 entries, this means that roughly one in seventeen of them is for a passage of half a dozen pages ("Juno causes a pestilence") in Ovid. It could be a little too much of a good thing.

The book has a pleasantly leisurely feel: one senses that great care has been spent on writing and indexing, as well as on the designing of text and illustrations. The result is well worth the effort. It is a most enjoyable catalogue to handle and to browse through.

For anyone concerned with the history of the plague in general or with the medical history of the Low Countries, or for historians of the

book, this is an indispensable new addition to the bookshelf.

Sarah Bakewell,

Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine

Jaap Harskamp (compiler), *Dissertatio medica inauguralis . . . Leyden medical dissertations in the British Library 1593–1746: catalogue of a Sloane-inspired collection*, London, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1997, pp. 270, £9.00. Orders to: Tracy Tillotson, The Wellcome Trust, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE.

In the preface to this *Dissertatio medica inauguralis . . .*, the keeper of the Western printed books in the University Library of Leyden expresses his satisfaction with this publication. Indeed, the catalogue of 1709 titles, dating from 1593 to 1746, is most impressive and the information a welcome addition to the collection of dissertations, kept in the Leyden University Library. (There is a "black hole" in the collection of Leyden disputations and dissertations between 1610 and 1654.) Sir Hans Sloane's collection, containing a large number of medical dissertations, submitted at Dutch universities between 1593 and 1746, is kept in the British Library. The catalogue is published in this work with excellent attention to the important aspects of the publications, such as the different ways of presenting a *disputatio* or *dissertatio*, an index of the authors, an index of the printers and a geographical index.

There is a lot to learn from this work. The indices are very informative, especially the index of subjects made by Vivian Nutton. The geographical index gives information on the astonishing number of German students, often migrants during the Thirty Years' War, who presented a *disputatio* in this period.

As far as the subject matter is concerned, one could expect the theme of circulation of the blood. Roger Drake's *Disputatio medica inauguralis de circulatione naturali* (1640) introducing Harvey's theory to Leyden

University, is present in Sloane's collection, as well as twenty-seven *exercitationes* on the circulation of the blood, supervised by Johannes Antonides van der Linden (1609–1664), presented between 1659 and 1664.

Furthermore, scurvy, pleurisy, dropsy and dysentery seem to have been preferred subjects, especially during the first decades of the seventeenth century. Dissertations on these themes were frequently supervised by Aelius Everhardus Vorstius (1565–1624).

This is an essential book for medical historians and scholars interested in the history of universities.

A M Luyendijk-Elshout, Oegstgeest

William Pruitt and Roger Bischoff,
Catalogue of the Burmese-Pāli and Burmese manuscripts in the Library of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London, Wellcome Trust, 1998, pp. 187, illus., £20.00 (1-869835-87-5).

For more than sixty years this collection of manuscripts from Burma, purchased by Sir Henry Wellcome, has been housed in the library of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, well cared for but not catalogued and hence little known. Now, at last, two scholars have undertaken the laborious task of sorting and identifying the manuscripts, and the Wellcome Trust has generously supported the publication of their work in a handsome volume enhanced by the inclusion of 27 black and white and 31 colour plates.

It is not clear why Sir Henry purchased from Burma so many manuscripts which had no connection with the history of medicine. A few of those written in the Burmese language do include medical recipes; one includes long lists of Burmese flora and fauna which could possibly have been used by indigenous medical practitioners; but of the nearly 150 items in the catalogue, the great majority are Burmese-Pāli manuscripts, that is religious texts in Pāli, the language of the Buddhist scriptures, written in

the Burmese alphabet. Of these, fifty-five are *kammavaca* manuscripts, usually commissioned specially by lay donors and prepared for Buddhist monks to read from when reciting important texts at key moments in their lives.

Patricia Herbert (in *Buddhism: art and faith*, ed. W Zwiß, London, 1985, p. 172) succinctly describes these as ritual texts “used at meetings of the Order for the valid performance of certain ceremonies”. The most important and commonest *kammavaca* text is the one used for higher education. Others are concerned with bestowing of robes, electing elders, dedication of monasteries, settling boundaries for fast-days, and release from monastic vows. The most usual texts are those on ordination, admonitions to the newly ordained monk and bestowal of robes. The ordination section is always included and eight or more other sections are known. The catalogue has a useful index detailing fourteen different texts or sections and in which *kammavaca* manuscript they occur. Today these ornate lacquered and gilded manuscripts are of artistic rather than textual interest; this is well shown by the many illustrations included in the catalogue.

Other manuscripts in Pāli written in Burmese script contain religious texts from the Buddhist scriptures (known as the Pāli canon), commentaries on the canon, post-canonical works, and Pāli grammars. These are all fully indexed in a way that will be most helpful to scholars of Pāli in Burma, as also are the remaining twenty-seven manuscripts written in the Burmese language. The most interesting texts as well as the finest illustrations are to be found among these manuscripts in Burmese. Of these, nos 23, 24, 25 and 26 are noted as being texts on Burmese medicine or as containing “medical recipes”, and no. 23 consists of ninety stanzas of Burmese poetry on medicine. Tantalizingly, that is all we can learn of Burmese medicine from the catalogue.

Thanks to the careful description of each manuscript, including its outward appearance and condition, and also details of provenance and dates of purchase given in the catalogue, it is possible to make a surprising historical link between the Burmese-Pāli text no. 117 and the