

## Book Reviews

“permitted” tasks of both physicians and apothecaries. Fischer-Mauch argues that the difficulties that arose from this and later attempts to define medical competencies with greater precision determined that tense, and sometimes bitter, confrontations between physicians and apothecaries would be the rule well into the nineteenth century.

The points of conflict that Fischer-Mauch identifies, however, will seem familiar to most historians of early modern medicine. Moreover, her presentation of the history of medical ordinances in Hesse-Darmstadt, the Germanies, and Europe, for example, while providing useful specifics on Frankfurt and Gießen, sticks closely to standard interpretations. For instance, no one is shocked to learn that the impetus for medical reform (starting in 1699) arose from the perceived need to control quackery better, and to achieve that goal physicians were to be placed at the top of the hierarchy of medical personnel. All other practitioners were to be subordinated to the academically-trained doctors. Not surprisingly, this relegation to a subaltern role drew howls of protest from the apothecaries. Likewise, the apothecaries resented the refusal to allow them any medical practice, which implied they were equated with barbers, midwives, bathmasters, and even unlearned empirics. A further, and especially vexatious, bone of contention was the physicians’ stubborn insistence on their right to dispense medicines, thus undercutting the economic livelihood of the apothecaries. These forms of subordination, or even, in the eyes of the apothecaries, degradation, were further exacerbated by a strict list of prices that did not always correspond to economic realities. In particular, the Gießen apothecaries protested at the unfairness of holding them to prices fixed for Frankfurt where raw materials and compounded drugs were cheaper. They forwarded all of these complaints in their gravamina to the Landgraf: they protested at the financial losses caused by quackery and self-dispensing; they sought a more equitable determination of prices; and most of all, they expressed their resentment at the diminution of their status vis-à-vis the physicians.

None of this is, of course, especially new, but Fischer-Mauch does a nice job of illustrating conditions in the setting of late seventeenth-century Gießen. Perhaps the most serviceable part of the book is the Valentini text that neatly exemplifies the play of forces—social, economic, cultural—involved in the tug-of-war between physicians and apothecaries for occupational standing and social respectability.

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**Paula Findlen, *Possessing nature: museums, collecting, and scientific culture in early modern Italy*, Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1996, pp xviii, 449, illus., \$18.95 (0-525-20508-1).**

The histories of medicine and museums are thoroughly intertwined. In our own century, the monomaniacal collecting passion of Henry Wellcome has left a material legacy that still preoccupies more than one institution. During the previous century and a half, the likes of William and John Hunter ensured that museums played significant roles in medical education; while at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Hans Sloane, whose massive collection partly formed the foundations of the British Museum, drew much of his inspiration and indeed wherewithal from a medical career. Paula Findlen, in this fascinating and important study, asks us to cast our attention back even further to the very earliest site of the museum movement—to Renaissance and Baroque Italy—where the instincts of curers and collectors were similarly found intermingled.

Not content simply to describe and analyse the practices and processes of naturalist collectors like Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605), Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) and a host of lesser figures, *Possessing nature* says much of significance about the emergence of modern science and medicine from the cult of ancient wisdom, the development of natural history as

a distinct discipline, and the integration of scientific culture and general politics.

Hard as it is today to move beyond the amusing mental images of piled unicorn's horns, dragon toes, mandrake roots, mineral specimens, herbs and animals, these extraordinary assemblages were accumulated with very serious intent, primarily for the generation of knowledge. These museums were, Findlen convincingly argues, laboratories in which nature could be experimented with, and just as importantly, spoken of and argued about. They were spaces for learning and for sounding off—Kircher introduced speaking trumpets into his repository for precisely this purpose.

Much of this learning and debate was medical in nature: there is some evidence of anatomy having been practised in museums, and much more of the testing of materials for their medicinal principles. Aldrovandi, like many who followed him, held the reform of *materia medica* to be a primary goal for his museum work. The medical disputes that museums played host to were often fought in professional terms. Renaissance museums then provided both the evidence to shore up an argument and the chamber in which to conduct the debate.

Findlen also looks in depth at the protocols of patronage, civility and prestige that were observed in museums, showing them to be “a microcosm of elite society as well as nature herself”. How could these accumulations of goods not have played a social role in a society that increasingly measured personal worth in terms of the conspicuous display of material objects? More than just crude presentations of wealth, however, museum collections were manoeuvred within complex economies of exchange, and to such an extent that, for Findlen at least, they represent “the quintessential product of the patronage culture of early modern Europe”.

*Possessing nature* thus provides important insights into a still relatively neglected part of the scientific revolution—natural history—and powerfully places them within a rich social context. It is not, however, a book without

problems. As with so many works spun out in “thick descriptions”, one looks in vain for a convincing sense of development—either as a story or a history. Structurally, the book feels more like a collection of essays than a single narrative. And while statements of change are periodically interjected, and an epilogue pursues the story up to the eighteenth century, the book does little to break up the impression of a fairly monolithic phenomenon.

Dense with detail and citation to the point of overload, this is neither an elegant, nor indeed all that readable a book. Most disappointingly, for this reader at least, the account seemed at times only dimly to reflect the glitter, sparkle and magic of the material under discussion. The work's strength in analysing what was written about the museums and the spaces they occupied is not matched when the collections themselves are being discussed. Findlen is clearly happier as an historian of texts than things, and for this subject that leaves a rather big hole. Essential reading for historians of science then, *Possessing nature* offers far less for students of material culture and its history.

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**H J M Symons, H R Denham** (comps), *A catalogue of printed books in the Wellcome Historical Medical Library*, vol. 4, *Books printed from 1641 to 1850 M–R*, London, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1995, pp xiii, 603, £45.00 (1–869835–75–1).

Nearly two decades have elapsed between the publication of this fourth volume of the Wellcome Historical Medical Library's *A catalogue of printed books* and the preceding volume. The first volume of the Catalogue series, a description of the Wellcome's pre-1641 imprints, was issued in 1962. The second volume, actually the first in the series describing books printed 1641–1850 (authors A–E), followed four years later. The third volume was issued early in 1977 (title-page dated 1976), and continued the author catalogue up to the letter L. Many in our