

Book Reviews

Hildegard E Keller (ed.), *Jakob Ruf: Leben, Werk und Studien*, 5 vols, vol. 1: *Mit der Arbeit seiner Hände: Leben und Werk des Zürcher Stadtchirurgen und Theatermakers Jakob Ruf (1505–1558)*, pp. 319, second edition, audio-CD; vol. 2: *Jakob Ruf: Werke bis 1554, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Teil 1*, pp. 779; vol. 3: *Jakob Ruf: Werke 1545–1549, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Teil 2*, pp. 707; vol. 4: *Jakob Ruf: Werke 1550–1558, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Teil 3*, pp. 1019; vol. 5: *Die Anfänge der Meschwerdung: Perspektiven zur Medien-, Medizin- und Theatergeschichte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, pp. 723, and multimedia-CD; Zürich, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2008, total pp. 3550, 450 b/w illus., €184.00, SwFr 295.00 (boxed set 978-3-03823-415-9).

This impressively comprehensive five-volume series presents and analyses the life and work of Jakob Ruf (c.1505–1558), who rose to become the city surgeon of Zürich and for a time its unofficial pre-eminent physician, though he is thought to have been born into a family of bakers and lacked university training in medicine. Ruf—also known as Ruef, Rueff and other variants—wrote a series of successful plays and medical and astrological texts that drew upon and reflected his professional life, religious identity and humanist interests. He was close friends with humanist physicians including Christoph Klauser and Conrad Gessner, who formed part of his circle of acquaintances in Zürich. Ruf's professional and social mobility was partly fostered by the turbulent changes that had taken place in the city following the Reformation under Huldrych Zwingli, and the *Kappeler Kriegen*, or inter-cantonal wars: Ruf first took up the position of Zürich's *Stadtchirurg* after the previous incumbent had been killed in battle in

1531. His most successful and influential work was undoubtedly his *Trostbüchlein* of 1554, a book on human generation and birth. Yet despite Ruf's wide-ranging and exceptional achievements, he has had a relatively low profile in modern scholarship. This series of five volumes prepared by Hildegard Elisabeth Keller and a group of accompanying specialists should go a considerable way towards overcoming that neglect.

The core of this large-scale project is to be found in volumes two, three and four, which comprise chronologically-ordered editions of Ruf's work (the Latin works with parallel German translations), and with accompanying detailed essays. Many of Ruf's publications were illustrated, and these volumes indicate where images were placed, although the reader must go to volume five to actually see the images. Ruf's writing fits within a number of genres. His religious and folkloric plays will be of particular interest to literature specialists, and include *Etter Heini*, *Weingarten*, *Adam und Eva*, *Wilhelm Tell* and a Passion play (this last a very unusual genre for a Reformation author). The texts of the plays *Zürcher Hiob* and *Zürcher Joseph* are also included, as they have regularly been attributed to Ruf, though the attributions are here convincingly dispatched. Ruf also wrote two published songs, a poem on the best fish to eat in different months (an anonymous work firmly attributed here to Ruf), texts for several broadsheets, and various entries for annual calendars identifying the best time for various simple medical procedures amongst other activities; Ruf's work in this genre also includes more extended discussions of planetary conjunctions.

A considerable number of Ruf's publications and the accompanying essays will be of interest to historians of medicine. In one early example, medical and astrological themes were explicitly brought together in

Ruf's 1543 broadsheet on conjoined twins born in Schaffhausen, near Zürich. Ruf's broadsheet on this misbirth or monstrous birth was unusual in its use of Latin rather than the vernacular, its attention to the physical causes underlying the birth, its unusually realistic mode of illustration, and its focus on the astrological conjunctions that underpinned the birth. As such, Hubert Steinke argues, Ruf was using the publication to raise his own status amongst an elite audience, though he also used it to call for better training for midwives. Similarly, his 1544/45 Latin manuscript *Ärtze- und Astrologenverzeichnis* is a list of significant doctors and astrologers from the course of history. The accompanying essay by Keller provides a fascinating window onto the genre, onto tensions in the medical publishing scene in Europe during this period, including Ruf's critique of authors and physicians that he sees as incompetent or plagiarizing others' work. In 1545/46 Ruf prepared a three-part broadsheet publication (the *Astrologentafel*) listing, and in verse form praising, forty-eight figures from the history of astronomy and astrology, with accompanying illustrations by Heinrich Vogtherr the Elder. While Ruf's medical work clearly reinforced his decision to take on this project, the cycle of broadsheets is most notable for Ruf's clear placement of himself as a commentator on an intellectual tradition.

Historians of medicine will be most interested in Ruf's range of medical treatises. These include the Latin *Augenheilkunde* of c.1545, a very early ophthalmological work reflecting Ruf's interest in classical scholarship as well as his desire to affect the provision of useful information to practitioners. This Latin work is only known in manuscript form, although it seems that a printed edition was planned. Only two of the four books listed in the table of contents are now known, and these treat the anatomy of the eye, the instruments used and the care, handling, and various inflammations of the eye (more specialized eye problems were to be addressed in the missing two books). Certain sections are illustrated, following Vesalius to

some extent, with anatomical images and images of various surgical instruments. Much better known, primarily thanks to earlier scholarship by Huldrych M Koelbing, is Ruf's 1554 *Trostbüchlein*—the most important and influential of his medical texts. This new work on the *Trostbüchlein* is a welcome addition to earlier scholarship, not least because both the Latin and German editions are included, later editions and translations of the *Trostbüchlein* are considered in some detail, and there is a very useful appendix comprising several contemporary documents on the training and monitoring of midwives (including a fascinating question-and-answer model text). Keller, Müller and Steinke stress that Ruf prepared the book in his capacity as overseer of the instruction and testing of Zürich's midwives; a point that is developed in more detail in an additional essay in the final volume. Ruf's book was intended not only for midwives, but also—as the dual language editions demonstrate and the essays discuss—for physicians and humanists interested in the generation of human life, the practicalities of birth, and more unusual topics including the occurrence of monstrous births and the potential capacity of the devil to engender children. Ruf's other most significant medical publication in print was his 1556 Latin *Tumorbüchlein*, which concerned various medical conditions classifiable as “swellings”, including pustules, warts, gangrene, and other skin conditions. Ruf's book classifies these conditions and includes recipes for treatment. Steinke and Müller argue that this work again brings Ruf's interest in classical authors together with his desire to affect the daily practice of medicine; in particular the work done by the lower status barber-surgeons, amongst whom he counted himself.

Volumes one and five include supplementary materials and a range of essays that complement and extend the narrower contextual essays accompanying Ruf's work in volumes two, three and four. A number of these additional essays will be of considerable interest to historians of medicine and examine

issues including the training and testing of midwives; the training and respective status of “stone-cutters”, surgeons, and physicians; and the connections between humanism and medical publishing during the sixteenth century (including a series of entries on Ruf’s contemporaries). Volume one—reflecting its slightly earlier publication in 2006 to accompany an exhibition on Ruf staged in Zürich—also contains a richly-illustrated, somewhat eccentric mini-dictionary of objects, events, people and concepts associated with Ruf, ranging from dramatic political and religious upheavals to colourful details about daily life in Zürich. The material in volume five includes several glossaries of terms used in Ruf’s medical recipes. The latter half of the volume is devoted to reproductions of images from the works edited in the previous three volumes. Volumes one and five are accompanied by CDs: the first an audio recording of readings of various texts by Ruf, and the second filled with visual material including documentation of the 2006 exhibition, colour reproductions of the images that appear in black and white in volume five (and some extra material, like the 1554 Latin edition of the *Trostbüchlein*), as well as an interactive map of sixteenth-century Zürich.

This complex, detailed and meticulously prepared project does suffer from some relatively minor drawbacks. While understandable in terms of expense, it is unfortunate that images appear only in the first and last volumes, particularly as some scholars will consult only individual volumes of the series. This divorces the images to a large extent from the texts with which they were intrinsically linked—a particular shame given that publications like the *Trostbüchlein* and the broadsheets so deliberately and strikingly combined text and image with graphic and conceptual impact. There is an extensive and very useful index in the last volume only, so scholars will need frequently to consult volume five for both index and images. However, the footnotes are careful and for the most part extensive, and each volume includes a bibliography of works cited.

The team of authors cumulatively and persuasively argue for Ruf as an important contemporary of better-known figures like Conrad Gessner, and they have succeeded in conveying the breadth of Ruf’s achievements: his integration of humanist interests into innovative medical (and other) publications, and—perhaps most significantly—the social and professional mobility that this work afforded him. While the strength of this publication lies in its extraordinarily detailed attention to the work and life of a single individual, many of the essays have much to tell the reader about important related topics, and above all sixteenth-century print culture, especially but not only in the medical sphere.

Jennifer Spinks,
The University of Melbourne

Michael Hunter, *Boyle: between God and science*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2009, pp. xiii, 366, illus., £25.00, \$55.00 (hardback 978-0-300-12381-4).

Hunter has admirably accomplished his aim of providing “in a single volume a comprehensive view of Boyle’s life from his birth on 25 January 1627 to his death on the night of 30–1 December 1691” (p. 8). Insights gleaned from studies of Robert Boyle over the past twenty-five years, cited in an extensive bibliographical essay, have been brought together with additional new material from Hunter’s exhaustive work on the Boyle archive as well as from the letters, diaries, and manuscripts of many of Boyle’s family members and associates. By doing so, Hunter has been able to fill in many of the gaps and correct the mistakes found in the previous main sources for the details of Boyle’s life, Thomas Birch’s *Life* (London, 1744, 1772) and R E W Maddison’s *The life of the Hon. Robert Boyle, F.R.S.* (London, 1969). Boyle’s works in medicine, chemistry, the mechanical and experimental