

Book Reviews

den Boogert has shown his many talents in this work, he has based this well-written work on meticulous research, and though it is a highly academic work, the book is written in an elegant and delightful way and the various issues and historical events it deals with are interwoven into a piece of solid literary and academic research.

Aleppo Observed is graced with plenty of well researched, handsome contemporary coloured images: maps, plants, animals, Aleppo sketches, Middle Eastern daily scenes, Ottoman and Arab people of all genders and classes. These images, together with the many quotations from the Russells' books, resuscitate the essence of the period in a way that almost enables the reader to sense the smells of the Arab markets, the Ottoman hookah pipes, and the local flowers; to hear the singing of the birds, the humble noise of women gossiping in the harem, and the squeal of the city's gates being closed for the night or due to the plague. Though it clearly seems that Maurits van den Boogert greatly appreciates the Russell brothers' research, writings and deeds, for very good reasons; he properly addresses in *Aleppo Observed* the criticism their book faced in their lifetime and during the two and a half decades following publication.

As we learn while reading *Aleppo Observed*, being practitioners affected the writings of the Russell brothers in many ways and contributed much to their ability to gather knowledge, medical as well as social, and to assess and analyse it in a scientific way; however, they published it in an accessible and readable way, that surely expanded their reader's horizons at that time. Indeed, the Russell chapters that deal with natural history – mainly the flora and fauna – and medicine, are shown by Maurits van den Boogart as being innovative for their time and supplying unique and important information on medicinal uses of plants and animals, and knowledge regarding diseases, treatments and particularly about the plague.

When writing the biographies of the Scottish brothers in part one of *Aleppo*

Observed, while assessing their life stories and important deeds, Maurits van den Boogart presents the readers with the reasons of their successes. He clearly shows how their experience, passion for knowledge, brave actions, sense of delegation and dedication, that were all presented in the book they wrote, brought them fame, wealth, and scientific and social status in the most prestigious learned circles of eighteenth-century Europe in general, and London in particular. Part two of the book deals with four subjects that were the essence of the Russells' book: the city of Aleppo, its natural history, medicine (most importantly the plague) and Ottoman society and Arab culture. With regard to history of medicine, readers are warmly advised to read Miri Shefer-Mossensohn's new book *Ottoman Medicine, Healing and Medical Institutions 1500–1700* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2009), to complete the picture drawn by the Russells and analysed by Maurits van den Bogart.

Aleppo Observed is a clear and well-executed piece of research, and provides an essential edition for those interested in the history of the Levant, its early modern period, its natural history, and the history of Arabic and Ottoman medicine. It is also important for scholars and students of the social and intellectual history of the Middle East, especially during the Ottoman period.

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Joan Sherwood, *Infection of the Innocents: Wet Nurses, Infants, and Syphilis in France, 1780–1900*, McGill-Queen's/Associated Medical Services Studies in the History of Medicine, Health and Science, 37 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), pp. xiii + 214, \$75.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-7735-3741-5.

Until the advent of safe artificial feeding, a good wet-nurse made all the difference to the

survival of an infant whose own mother was unable to breastfeed. However, as detailed historical examination has shown over the past thirty years, the practice of wet-nursing was once widespread and by no means limited to emergencies. George D. Sussman's ground-breaking work in France brought out both the economic contribution that routine wet-nursing made to both nurses and mothers and its association with different attitudes to infants; interpretations taken up by other authors, particularly by Valerie Fildes in her comprehensive overview of the topic from classical Greece to the present. However, although there is currently increasing interest in medical involvement in wet-nursing, there has been little examination of a small but significant aspect, the transfer of infection between nurse and nursling, the theme of Joan Sherwood's new book. *Infection of the Innocents* uses detailed examinations of the records of the Vaugirard Hospital in Paris, and of nineteenth-century legal cases, to focus on a failed experiment to treat congenital syphilis by mercurialising breastmilk and its long-term impact on French medicine.

Infection of the Innocents falls into two parts. The first locates the establishment of the Hospital in 1780 within contemporary understanding of venereal disease and its management. Government-sponsored, it was founded specifically to discover whether infants with congenital syphilis could be cured by being fed the milk of syphilitic nurses treated with mercury, then believed to be an effective treatment. As such, it was envisioned primarily as a 'clinical workshop', and displayed a stark attitude towards its patients, in contrast to contemporary British voluntary hospitals. Outside, women typically enjoyed an independent role in both healing and childcare, but inside Vaugirard, Sherwood stresses they were seen only as the 'technology' of cure, under strict medical control and following an almost military regime. Nonetheless, she argues that some moral rehabilitation was still expected; citing the Hospital's belief that supervised wet-nursing would encourage maternal feelings

and high-quality care. Sadly, the extremely high mortality among foundlings led rather to despair and even suicide among their young nurses, feelings presumably compounded by their own ill health. Detailed analysis of all patients from the first and final years of the Hospital's life in fact demonstrates wide variation in outcome – there was a contrasting higher-than-average survival rate among children cared for by their own mothers. However, this reader would have appreciated both a firmer guiding hand through the data, and the making of closer connections with events outside the Hospital.

By 1790, the revolutionary government considered the experiment a failure, and Vaugirard Hospital was closed. Yet its unsuccessful treatment lived on, and the second part explores the changing attitudes among the medical profession revealed through a number of compensation cases brought against their employers by wet-nurses infected with syphilis by their nurslings, some of whom had also been treated with mercury without their knowledge or consent. Here, Sherwood illustrates developing medical ethics, arguing that, although initially the doctor felt loyalty only to the family that retained him, and thus might not inform the wet-nurse either of the infant's condition or the nature of any medicines she was asked to take, by 1870, he was considered to have an over-riding duty of care towards public health in general. Such arguments combine with the earlier exploration of the Hospital to suggest that, while on the surface *Infection of the Innocents* describes a minor aspect of both wet-nursing and venereal disease, it nevertheless makes a much deeper contribution to the history of medicine.

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Brian Vale and Griffith Edwards,
Physician to the Fleet: The Life and Times of Thomas Trotter, 1760–1832 (Woodbridge: