

Book Reviews

G. A. LINDEBOOM (editor), *The letters of Jan Swammerdam to Melchisedec Thévenot*, Amsterdam, Swets & Zeitlinger, 1975, pp. x, 190, illus., D.Fl.80.00.

The contributions of the Dutchman Swammerdam (1637–1680), to experimental medicine have been consistently underrated, partly because of his shyness and reticence, partly because his short life ended in religious fanaticism, and partly because his manuscripts were not published until 1737. Another reason is the delay in making known to a wide audience his correspondence with his French friend and patron, Thévenot (1620–1692).

Professor Lindeboom, the renowned Boerhaavian scholar, now provides us with an edition of forty of them, 24 September 1665 to December 1679 or January 1680. Each has a brief introduction, the original letter in Dutch, Latin or Greek, and an English translation. Annotations are given where necessary, and the original illustrations. They are introduced by an excellent sketch of Swammerdam, a bibliography of articles on him and a brief 'Introductory note'. At the end there is a useful list of biographical sketches of persons mentioned in the letters, some of whom would be otherwise difficult to trace.

These letters contain a great deal of information about Swammerdam and his work, and it will now be necessary to reappraise the accounts of both of them already available. Reconsideration of certain topics in anatomy and physiology as they evolved in the seventeenth century must also be re-evaluated in the light of this new data. Professor Lindeboom's book is a most welcome addition to our knowledge of seventeenth-century medicine and science; its excellence outweighs and excuses the typographical errors and occasional quaint phraseology. It reveals again how important the Dutch school was at that time, and a composite work in English detailing with this prowess in both the seventeenth and the eighteenth century is much needed. In the meantime this book can be strongly recommended.

BERTHOLD L. ULLMAN and PHILIP A. STADTER, *The Public Library of Renaissance Florence. Niccolò Niccoli, Cosimo de Medici and the Library of San Marco*, Padova, Antenore, 1972, 8vo, pp. xviii, 369, illus., L.8000.

The main part of this book (pp. 123–267) consists of an A.D. 1500 catalogue of the Library of the convent of San Marco in Florence, the first public library of modern times. It was established by Cosimo de Medici between 1436 and 1444 and contained the books of his friend, the great book collector Niccolò Niccoli (died 1437). It was extraordinarily rich in classical and patristic texts. It is, therefore, an important source of information for the classicist and Renaissance scholar, and it represents a new contribution to our knowledge of the intellectual life of fifteenth-century Florence.

There is included here a detailed history of the Library of San Marco, which gradually declined between 1509 and 1883 and was disseminated. There is also an account of Niccoli's library.

The authors have identified the items in the old catalogue, most of them being manuscripts. The importance of this scholarly book to the medical historian lies in the medical texts present, and also the general background it provides for the student of Renaissance medicine.