

J Worth Estes, *Naval surgeon: life and death at sea in the age of sail*, Canton, Mass., Science History Publications/USA, 1998, pp. xii, 266, illus., \$39.95 (0-88135-194-6).

The author's interest was aroused when he came across a large leather bound volume in the museum of the USS *Constitution*, which turned out to be the *Physical and chirurgical transactions of Dr Peter St. Medard on board the US Frigate New-York* from 1802–1803. It provided him with “a unique opportunity to study the effect of day-to-day medical practice on an early modern population”. In that respect, it is disappointing, for it proves to be an unremarkable analysis of the diagnosis and outcome of common eighteenth-century illness, lacking the insights, innovation, conclusions and recommendations characteristic of British naval medical journals of the period, though more perceptive observations appear in St Medard's reports to his captain. The great value of the book, however, lies in the way Dr Estes has exploited its historical and maritime context to provide a fascinating account of the life and times of Peter St Medard. In this task, he has been supported by an army of collaborators to whom he pays generous tribute.

Pierre St Medard was born in 1755 on the Île d'Oléron, France, and followed family tradition by joining the French merchant marine after a surgical training, probably as an apprentice of his uncle supplemented by teaching in local hospitals. In 1774, like many of his British counterparts, he entered the slave trade to gain invaluable experience and financial reward. It was a time when both slave and crew mortality rates were declining and, as surgeon's mate, St Medard appears to have had little to do. After two voyages from West Africa to the Caribbean, he sailed as surgeon of a cargo vessel which was captured by the British off the coast of Virginia and spent almost six months in a prison hulk in New York harbour.

His experiences under French and British administration were enough to persuade St Medard to enter the young American navy on his release at Boston in 1778, and he served in the frigates *Providence* and *Deane* until 1781

when he married a local girl and took up private practice at Boston. In 1798, he was recalled to service in the *Constitution* during America's undeclared war with France and was discharged with the peace of 1801 only to join the frigate *New York* for America's war against the Barbary states from 1802–1804. His journal for that sixteen-month period provides the main basis for his medical practice.

The early American navy followed British naval tradition in terms of routine, diet, hygiene, medical regulations and records and the list of St Medard's drugs and instruments would have been equally familiar to British naval surgeons. The only surprise in the sick list is the dearth of ulcers and hernias which had a high incidence among the British and perhaps indicates a more robust American physique. The treatment of common diseases was similar and enables the author to introduce an admirable review of eighteenth-century concepts of illness illustrated by helpful diagrams. He fails, however, to explain some fifty cases of scurvy six years after it had been eliminated from the Royal Navy.

Although the reader will find little of clinical interest, the book provides a valuable commentary on the contemporary American scene, the spirit of the emerging nation, its resolution, public-spiritedness, and politics, together with an appraisal of the medical climate and early medical societies.

Peter St Medard emerges as a conscientious, honest and honourable man, a conservative surgeon interested in medical advances and an upholder of family values. He died in 1827 at the age of sixty-seven years.

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Jeremy Wollock, *The noblest animate motion: speech, physiology and medicine in pre-Cartesian linguistic thought*, Studies in the History of the Language Sciences, vol. 83, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins B.V., 1997, pp. xlix, 462, illus., Hfl 320.00, \$160.00 (90-272-4571 [Europe]; 1-55619-620-2 [USA]).

Book Reviews

The author's account of the gestation of this book will ring bells for many readers. Stimulated by an interest in speech disorder and the modern practice of speech therapy, he looked for theoretical beginnings in the seventeenth century. This led to his questioning the assumption that nothing "useful" existed before then. Once he found the early modern precursors themselves had a mass of precursors in the previous century, he wisely decided not to carry on running up a down escalator but to go straight to the classical sources instead—the Hippocratic *Aphorisms* 6.32, the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* 11.30 and a number of Galenic texts—and to research their ensuing transmission and receipt from there. Two classificatory systems for speech defects emerge: one according to the alteration of sounds conceived as elements of a grammatical system, and another conceived organically on the basis of injured constitutions. Similarly, Wollock identifies alternative methods of treatment, one social-psychological which concentrates on training and the treatment of symptoms (from which speech therapy grew), and another which was that of the physicians who used medicine instead because they saw speech defects as symptomatic of underlying diseases.

Speech disorder is situated in the unstable no-man's-land between body and mind in the dualistic routines of modern medical thought. Its earlier conceptual history is therefore a territory which all serious practitioners as well as students of the organic origins of speech—especially "normal" speech—ought to explore. Our response to Wollock's painstaking mapping of it, a project which looks like half a lifetime's work, should be gratitude. The scholarship is worn lightly, and Wollock has an enviable ability to make the texts accessible, whether he is describing the grand scheme of humours and temperaments or the fine detail of interpretative problems over terminology.

Theoretical problems arise. Some may argue that the frame of contemporary theoretical reference (limited to Chomsky and Cartesianism versus behaviourism) is too narrow. Wollock's concluding judgement—that

the ancient tradition is "more appropriate to its object" than the Cartesian one—sounds like golden age utopianism as long as it is not connected to any further investigation of contemporary possibilities. Secondly, although the author gives every indication that he wants to avoid positivism or presentism, he does not really dig speech disorder in itself (as opposed to the various diagnostic approaches) out of the hole allotted to it by modern medicine. Partly this is an inevitable concomitant of choosing to organize material according to sources: no smoke without fire, no source-text without a stable referent. Perhaps too, in spite of the sterility of the medical model and the origins of therapy rather in a rhetorical model of "elocution", it is just common sense that speech disorder is socially constructed to a less radical degree than (say) mental disorders. Be that as it may, Wollock limits the force of his own anti-positivist intentions by not looking much beyond melancholy to illustrate the way discourses on speech disorder became "blurred" with others during the late Renaissance and early modern period. A look at the monstrosity literature would reveal speech disorders there too, associated with an even wider and more diffuse set of abnormalities and cultural significances. Perhaps they still are?

Few people can claim to have solved similar problems of historical method, and the praise is not intended to be faint. Such problems will emerge from the debates which can now take place thanks to Wollock's foundational work.

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Armelle Debru and Guy Sabbah (eds), *Nommer la maladie. Recherches sur le lexique gréco-latin de la pathologie*, Mémoires XVII, Centre Jean-Palmerne de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 1998, pp. 244, FFrs 120.00 (2-86272-128-X).

The Centre Jean-Palmerne adds another useful volume of medical history to its distinguished series of *Mémoires*. Most of the new arrival's