

male medical writers deplored quacks, empirics and popular ignorance, but she could also write in her *persona* as a woman of the ignorance of male medical expertise.

Perkins, who is an expert on French literature, has integrated into her account recent work of social historians on medicine: on the medical market place, on patient-doctor relations, especially between women and medical practitioners, and on the social construction of the body. She does so with skill and modesty, yet throughout the book there is an awareness "that Bourgeois—and others—were dealing with real clients who were often suffering and in need of assistance". The book gains from the dialectic interchange between the interpretation that views the practice of midwifery in terms of power relations, and one that sees Bourgeois' work, as she saw it, in terms of the alleviation of the intense suffering perceived to be involved in labour and of the safe management of a dangerous natural process.

Bourgeois' relations with medical men are examined through the case histories and comments in her writings. Often appearing subservient to the opinions of the learned physicians, and certainly well able to speak their language, Bourgeois, nevertheless, at the bedside saw herself as an equal to surgeons and physicians when the practice of medical skills was involved. She boasted that the King "when in the presence of the four perhaps most learned doctors in France, he gave me pre-eminence, enjoining them not to have the Queen take anything if I did not agree with it, and to listen to my advice and follow it". She also made it clear that as a woman she had better and more appropriate skills than those of men to treat women's ills and to manage childbirth.

Bourgeois was, in fact, expert both in the theory and in the practice of learned medicine. It is one of the merits of Perkins' book that the content of the learned theories on pregnancy are discussed and the remedies that were recommended are given some sense of coherence. Remedies are especially difficult for medical historians to write about, they are very

numerous yet they also appear to stand alone outside any connected social and intellectual context and Perkins should be congratulated for writing intelligently about them.

The death in childbirth of Marie de Bourbon-Montpensier, sister-in-law of Louis XIII in 1627 saw the end of Bourgeois' career at court. The autopsy report signed by the learned doctors of the court seemed, in Bourgeois' eyes, to blame her as chief midwife. Her response, the *Apologie de Louyse Bourgeois* (1627), defended her reputation on technical grounds which were argued using the same language and level of knowledge as the learned doctors, but with the added polemical refusal to see herself treated as a scapegoat. To the end, she balanced between the learning and authority of the physicians and the skills of a woman midwife who saw herself as potentially vulnerable in the male world of court medicine.

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Marian Fournier, *The fabric of life: microscopy in the seventeenth century*, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. x, 267, illus., £39.50 (0-8018-5138-6).

After a period of curious neglect by historians of science, the history of early microscopy is suddenly emerging as an important topic, with three books and several articles appearing in the last year or two. Of the books, only the one under review attempts to give a broad history of the microscope's development and use over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It is generally agreed that the heyday of early modern microscopy was in the late seventeenth century, the era of Malpighi and Swammerdam, Hooke and Leeuwenhoek. Fournier points out that the microscope continued to be widely used among naturalists in the first half of the eighteenth century as well, but she argues that the microscope had ceased to be a significant instrument of

discovery by that time. The relatively rapid rise and decline of microscopy between 1660 and 1700 forms the topic of her book.

Fournier states at the outset that her perspective is “resolutely internalistic” (p. 7). Her focus is on “the growth of scientific thought” (p. 7). While some historians would argue that the very definition of what constitutes science must be influenced by social factors, Fournier’s definition is apparently all-encompassing, since she includes virtually every bit of microscopic work performed in Europe. Her appendices list every article on the subject published in the major scientific journals between 1660 and 1750.

The appendices are indicative of her encyclopaedic approach. Rather than criticizing Fournier for not writing a more contextual work, let me assess the book she did write. Her account of the technical development of lenses and microscopes was, to this tyro in optics, both clear and informative. Similarly, her account of the earliest uses of the instrument revealed many things and people I did not know, and her account of the technical and theoretical difficulties encountered by early microscopists is masterly.

Fournier’s account concentrates on what she calls the “five heroes of microscopic science”: Robert Hooke, Marcello Malpighi, Nehemiah Grew, Jan Swammerdam, and Antoni van Leeuwenhoek. She offers both a survey of their work, and topical chapters on “living matter”, physiology, and anatomy, the three main areas of research in this era. For atomists, she notes, the microscope offered the potential of revealing the ultimate composition of matter. This was one of Robert Hooke’s goals in *Micrographia*; but Fournier’s account of this much-studied work does not reveal the impact of the mechanical philosophy on his research agenda.

Her accounts of physiological and anatomical investigations, however, show a sophisticated understanding of the problems and methods involved. Her broadly international perspective allows her to see interactions and connections among widely

dispersed researchers, both major and minor; even though her focus is internal, the social framework of seventeenth-century natural philosophy reveals itself as it were inadvertently.

The fabric of life is a useful addition to the historical literature on the life sciences in the seventeenth century. It is well written, and includes an extensive bibliography. To say that it will provide material for other historians to deepen the discussion of seventeenth-century experimentation is by no means to denigrate its significance.

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Sylvie-Anne Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbock: illness and death in Ashkenazi Judaism in sixteenth- through nineteenth-century Prague*, transl. Carol Cosman, Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1997, pp. xviii, 303, illus., £37.50, \$45.00 (0-520-08149-8).

The *Annales* school has a long and troubled history of dealing with the “Jews”. Unlike the Warburg school, which felt itself to be “too Jewish” so that it was only in the 1970s that one of its last members presented a study of the iconography of anti-Semitism, the *Annales* school is only now coming to terms with its own history. The shameful treatment of Jewish historians within this school by their closest colleagues during Vichy was quietly repressed after the war when every intellectual in France claimed membership in at least a moral resistance. The work of Sylvie-Anne Goldberg, most recently with the 1994 special issues of *Annales* on *Histoire juive, histoire des juifs*, has begun to remedy this. But, of course, her work, like that of the founders of the school, focuses on the early modern period of European history not on the Shoah. To complement this, we need a study of the social history of Paris intellectual life from 1930 to the present in which the “Jewish Question” and the “Jews” play a real role.