

## Book Reviews

**Mary Lindemann**, *Health and healing in eighteenth-century Germany*, The Johns Hopkins Studies in Historical and Political Science, 114th Series 4, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, pp. xiii, 506, illus., £41.50 (0-8018-5281-1).

Contrary to what one might expect from the very general title, this book is a detailed, archivally-based study of a small, mostly rural state in northern Germany, the duchy of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel. A subtitle might perhaps have been in order here, to warn the unwary student expecting a general textbook covering the whole of Germany. Yet Mary Lindemann's substantial new work is anything but an obscure research monograph destined to be read only by the specialist. Perhaps only those who have worked on similar materials can appreciate the skill and industry that the author has put into deciphering and interpreting the voluminous manuscript sources on which the book is mainly based, and the learning and scholarship that have enabled her to put these sources into a broader context. But everyone interested in the social history of medicine, or in the history of eighteenth-century Germany in general, will read this fluent and stylishly written book with profit.

Within the compass of the state she has chosen to study, Lindemann's approach is comprehensive. She begins with a general account of social and administrative structures in the duchy, then moves on to consider the role of the state-appointed local medical officers of health, the *Physici*. Here already Lindemann's archivally-based approach pays dividends, as she is able to penetrate beyond conventional wisdom to show how difficult it was for many of these officials to win acceptance among the local community, which often resisted their activities with good reason. The case of Dr Christian Loeber, whose insensitive decision to exhume his own child's body to perform an autopsy and obtain anatomical specimens led small-town locals to

accuse him of dark practices such as painting the corpse blue and turning it into a mummy, was only one example of many in which the pretensions of the Enlightenment ran up against ingrained popular habits and attitudes. Local people's criticism of Loeber for wasting valuable land in erecting a formal garden with monuments to his favourite poet expressed a practical attitude to health which had much to recommend it, for land in their view should be used for food production, which after all was the foundation for health and well-being.

Lindemann's third chapter, at nearly a hundred pages the longest in the book, turns to a wide variety of other medical practitioners, from barber-surgeons and midwives to snake-charmers and executioners. This was a period when definitions of "quackery" hardened and the state passed numerous medical regulations to try and drive it out. Spiced with many detailed and often entertaining examples, Lindemann's account shows how "quacks" of various kinds were rooted in the local community, which could so easily be disrupted by denying one of its members a living that the state was in reality very cautious about giving practical expression to its verbal hostility.

Chapter 4 examines broader questions of illness and society, using contemporary registers and statistics to show how respiratory diseases were the major killers, with childhood diseases, fevers and digestive disorders not far behind. Plague had vanished from Germany by the early eighteenth century, and cholera was yet to come, so apart from the occasional mass outbreak of smallpox, this was not on the whole an age of great epidemics. The disastrous effects of military conflict were evident during the Seven Years' War, but in general this was a more peaceful age than the century before. Lindemann's study is therefore particularly valuable in its coverage of the role of illness in everyday life. Perhaps this absence of major epidemics helps account for the relative lethargy of the authorities in trying to improve health standards. Statistics and diagnoses were

## Book Reviews

uncertain, and the state lacked the resources for major infrastructural reform. "Medical policing", one of the Enlightenment slogans of the day, thus remained more ideal than reality.

In her final Chapter, Lindemann looks at the choices people took when they were confronted with the problem of illness. Fatalism and resignation were relatively uncommon. Most people preferred being well to being ill, and did not need the authorities to persuade them of the virtues of health. They usually tried a variety of treatments and went to a variety of sources for them; in this process, they neither scorned the university-trained physician nor relied on folk remedies and magical cures, which were far less widespread than many historians have assumed.

What Lindemann's absorbing and very readable book achieves, therefore, is to use detailed archival study of the grass-roots of medical practice to undermine widespread notions in German historiography of the eighteenth century as an age of nascent professionalization and sharp divergence between popular and elite attitudes to medicine and health. Medical practitioners of all kinds, including university-trained physicians, employed a variety of techniques in which the popular and the academic were often intermingled. As exemplified by a small town or rural district *Physicus*, "Enlightenment" could often degenerate into crankiness which local people were well advised to regard with suspicion. The idea of an "Enlightened" state trying to impose proper standards of health and hygiene on an indifferent rural society is revealed as myth. Lindemann backs up these persuasive arguments with a mass of fascinating detail. Her splendid book is not only a triumphant vindication of a broad-based, theoretically and historiographically informed approach to the social history of medicine, but also shows how much can be achieved when historians marry theory and historiography to detailed empirical research by rolling up their sleeves and getting to work on dusty and unread files in obscure provincial archives.

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**Thomas Neville Bonner,** *Becoming a physician: medical education in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States, 1750–1945*, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. xii, 412, £30.00 (0-19-506298-1).

This ambitious survey fills a real need. Not only do we lack a historical overview of medical education informed by the findings of recent scholarship; apart from the American case, even individual national experiences have suffered from relative neglect. Bonner's study, based on original research in the U.S., Britain, France, and Germany, as well as a thorough acquaintance with the secondary literature, allows readers to trace the key developments in four of the countries that most profoundly influenced the training of physicians in the modern West. Nor is this a narrow institutional history, though the transformation of institutions lies at its core. Bonner has much to say about student life and about the larger cultural, social, and political factors that impinged on the education of medical practitioners; he gives a very useful summary, for example, of the struggle by women for access to medical training, a subject that he has treated authoritatively in a separate monograph.

The book's most original feature is its attempt to produce a genuinely comparative account by interweaving the discussions of national cases into chapters arranged by topic and time period, rather than placing them in separate sections. To be sure, the demands of the narrative made it difficult to carry out the sort of detailed synchronic comparisons that might have helped explain the differing patterns observed in his four principal cases; although the chapters are not divided along national lines, the sub-chapters typically are. But the approach is particularly effective at highlighting both the major similarities, such as the widespread acceptance of the need for practical clinical training by the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the distinctive features of each national experience, such as the long dominant position of the university as the centre for medical education in Germany.