

Book Reviews

science in modern culture; while he professes to be neutral, he has laid his emphasis upon the beneficial influence of what he takes to be the scientific approach upon other intellectual (or quasi-intellectual) attitudes and developments from Mesopotamia to the European seventeenth century.

I say "what he takes to be the scientific approach" advisedly, for his view of science is idiosyncratic. He *defines* science as "a set of activities and habits of mind aimed at contributing to an organized, universally valid, and testable body of knowledge about phenomena," but, as he goes on to speak of science as "a search for order . . . underlying form . . . universally valid and testable knowledge" and as he applies these attributes to Mesopotamian and Greek society and thought, it becomes apparent that for him "science" is a word, used Humpty-Dumpty fashion, for any mode of organized logical thought. Hence Olson can happily find science setting the schema for religion, for example, in Mesopotamia, Greece, and even for some early Church Fathers.

Clearly, Olson is devoted to his subject and approaches it with enthusiasm, even love. The result is wide ranging. To anyone without any previous acquaintance with Greek thought, not brought up on Greek legends or stories from ancient history, this will be a lively and attractive introduction to such ancient times, with a good deal of history of science thrown in. To those familiar with ancient, and especially classical culture, it is all both alien and too familiar. Regrettably, this book contains much carelessness over minor facts and, annoyingly, about the spelling of proper names. There are notes, and many quotations from previous scholars in the text, but no bibliography.

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JAMES WATT, E. J. FREEMAN, and W. F. BYNUM (editors), *Starving sailors. The influence of nutrition upon naval and maritime history*, London, National Maritime Museum, 1981, 8vo, pp. xiv, 212, illus., £5.95 + postage (paperback).

This volume contains the proceedings of an international symposium on the influence of nutrition upon naval and maritime history, held at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, in Spring 1980. At the suggestion of Sir James Watt, maritime historians, nutritional scientists, and medical specialists from Britain, France, Germany, Spain, and the United States gathered to review the experience of the past in the light of present-day knowledge of nutrition. There are sixteen papers of equally good quality: most of them present new research; a few relate known aspects which are, however, well placed in the unusual context of this symposium.

Since we can but infer the food actually consumed and its quality, it may sometimes seem difficult to extrapolate from modern experience in order to interpret historical phenomena. Nevertheless, the historian will draw useful conclusions from the modern papers on nutritional, environmental, and neurological subjects, as the doctor and scientist will from the historical contributions.

The impact of the present volume lies in stringently illustrating the old truth that it is one thing to make a discovery but another to get people to act on it – and if they do so, to act reasonably well. The case of the sailors' nutritional problems past and present makes it clear that the implementation of scientific discoveries for the benefit of mankind was hampered by many non-medical and medical obstacles. The latter have to do with what Bleuler in 1919 called the autistic-undisciplined way of thinking. Yet even when such hindrances are overcome, history shows that nutritional problems are not solved for ever, as cultural and behavioural patterns change. As a result, both medical and historical research are constantly needed, and this symposium shows that they can cross-pollinate each other. Thus the present volume aptly concludes with the suggestion of a number of topics for further research, arising from the discussions of the papers (which are also summarized). An index completes this nicely illustrated paperback, which, as a whole, might be called a plea for a pragmatic approach to, and use of, medical history in a particular field of study.

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