

Book Reviews

the bibliography section of each chapter, or in the chapter contents, for individual infectious agents and diseases. It should not detract from the enjoyment of a volume which otherwise impresses by its completeness, and which should be on the shelf of everyone writing on infectious diseases, past and present.

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GEORGE MORA (ed.), *Witches, devils, and doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, 'De praestigiis daemonum'*, assoc. ed. Benjamin Kohl, transl. John Shea, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 73, Binghamton, State University of New York Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1991, pp. xcii, 790, illus., \$33.00 (0-86698-083-0).

Widely acknowledged today as one of the key texts of Renaissance demonology, the publication in English translation of the sixth edition (1583) of Johann Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum* represents something of a landmark. The work itself, familiar to specialist scholars of the period, is both long (584 pages) and complex, and includes much material absent from the first edition of 1563. Now for the first time available in English, its value as a primary source will undoubtedly grow, and a large debt is consequently owed to the editorial team responsible for producing such a fine, free-flowing translation. In addition, the text is accompanied by copious notes on sources and subject matter, with a useful appendix containing a more substantial, though basic, glossary of authors and terms.

The most disappointing aspect of the volume however, which may stem from the group nature of the project, is the introductory essay which I found poorly organized and unconvincing. Apart from the plethora of unfortunate typographical errors, inconsistencies of nomenclature and eccentric or misleading comments, the overall attempt to place Weyer's life and work within the context of his age lacked conviction. Excessive introductory material—much of it out-of-date—detailing the theological, scientific and medical background of Weyer's thought could have been dealt with more succinctly, whilst far too little emphasis was placed upon the need to provide a fresh analysis of the nature and meaning of Weyer's work in the light of recent scholarship. For example, no attempt has been made to assess the contribution of Weyer to later debates on the subject of witchcraft. Nor do the editors make any attempt to elucidate or explain the glaring inconsistencies and lacunae in Weyer's arguments. The traditional depiction of Weyer as an enlightened sceptic and moderate Erasmian is taken at face value and, quite extraordinarily, little attention is paid to Christopher Baxter's persuasive reading of Weyer as an intolerant Lutheran polemicist who wrote *De praestigiis daemonum* as a thinly-veiled assault upon the superstitious practices of the Roman Catholic church.

Despite declarations to the contrary, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the authors here wish to preserve a rather traditional view of Weyer as an enlightened precursor of scientific and medical rationalism whose psychological insights anticipated the work, amongst others, of Sigmund Freud. Such an interpretation has its pitfalls, and I am left with the overall feeling that on this occasion the editors should have employed a specialist in the field to write an introduction to Weyer and his work. Despite such comments, however, nothing can undermine the tremendous achievement of the editorial team in producing such a readily accessible and decently-priced edition of Weyer's classic text. Not only will it prove invaluable to specialists working in the fields of early modern medicine, psychology and demonology, but equally importantly, it will provide a new generation of undergraduate and graduate students with easy access to a seminal text of the period.

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CARLO M. CIPOLLA, *Miasmas and disease: public health and the environment in the pre-industrial age*, transl. Elizabeth Potter, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1992, pp. x, 101, £16.95, \$25.00 (0-300-04806-8).

This latest of Professor Cipolla's tales of Tuscan epidemics offers less of his own interpretation and general context but more of the actual documents. Its core is a series of reports from medical health officials on outbreaks of disease in small Tuscan towns between