

Book Reviews

not an account which inevitably feels like a half-measure.

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Laurence Monnais-Rousselot, *Médecine et colonisation: l'aventure indochinoise, 1860–1939*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 1999, pp. 248 (2-271-05657-8).

The history of colonial medicine is a rapidly but unevenly growing field: the British colonies are covered more extensively than Dutch, Italian, German or French ones. Monnais-Rousselot's study, focused on the French colonial experience in Indochina, and on its insertion in the framework of the French view of the "civilizing mission" of colonization, is therefore a welcome addition to a growing corpus of studies in this area. Her book, a published version of her doctoral thesis, is grounded in a careful reading of available archive sources, including the Vietnamese ones, and it provides many fascinating details of the French health services in Indochina. The interest of Monnais-Rousselot's work is enhanced by her focus on interactions between locally elaborated knowledge and practices and Western medicine, and on the gradual development of the corpus of Westernized Khmer and Vietnamese doctors, nurses and technicians.

Unfortunately, the rich material collected by Monnais-Rousselot does not serve well her proclaimed goal of providing the first comprehensive overview of the development of French medical services in Indochina. Part of the problem may be the organization of her book. Monnais-Rousselot states in her introduction that she made important cuts in her thesis before its publication. Nevertheless, one has the impression that her study follows the structure of a doctoral thesis, that is, a

work which aims to persuade a small group of experts, and not to inform a less specialized public. Specific segments of her book provide illuminating details and open intriguing avenues for further research, but readers who are not thoroughly familiar with the history of the French colonization of Indochina may find it difficult to grasp the articulations between individuals, events, institutions and policies. Moreover, in the absence of a comparative perspective (with politics of other colonial powers, and with medical services in other French colonies) it is difficult to perceive the specificity of the Indochina experience.

The book does not follow a strict chronological order, but discusses selected topics: the role of the "transfer" model, the development of local medical practices, the advocates of medical science, and the role of laboratory sciences. The presentation of these issues relies on the readers' previous acquaintance with the main actors and main institutional developments. There is no chronological history of institutions such as the Pasteur Institute of Saigon or the Hanoi Medical School, and no well-organized debate on the role of Pharo (a school of tropical medicine in Marseilles) or of AMI (the Indochina Medical Corps). Key topics, such as the training of local doctors and technicians, the use of mobile sanitary units, the implementation of sanitary policies, the history of hospitals, the role of research laboratories, the organization of health campaigns, and the resistance to Western medicine are discussed in several chapters, and there is no coherent synthesis of the available information on each subject.

Monnais-Rousselot's book could have become the standard reference work on French medicine in Indochina and a key resource for historians of colonial medicine interested in a comparative approach. As it stands, it is useful mainly for experts on South-Eastern Asia and for those who seek precise information on selected topics. One hopes that the author will publish another study on the same subject, one which will

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do justice to her extended knowledge of the history of French colonial medicine in Indochina and make it accessible to a wider public.

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Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-century sexuality: a history*, Family, Sexuality and Social Relations in Past Times series, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, pp. viii, 295, £50.00 (hardback 0-631-20812-7), £15.99 (paperback 0-631-20813-5).

Angus McLaren's ability to provide an overview of as complex a topic as sexuality in the mercurial twentieth-century is truly outstanding. In this book, he summarizes—with wit as well as historical accuracy—many of the key issues that have shaped sexual identity throughout the last century. He does this by focusing on the stories that people tell about sex in court reports, newspaper clippings, medical texts, case histories, and birth-control manuals. Topics covered include contraception, psychoanalysis, decline in birthrates, sexology, homosexual sub-cultures, fascism and Nazism, born-again virgins, the “sexual revolution”, marital advice, “perversions”, the Kinsey reports, frigidity, and AIDS. All of these have been the subject of panics of one sort or another: Did women feel that they were good lovers? Is AIDS a gay plague? Are youth sexually active? Have a quarter of Americans had homosexual experiences? How can over-protective mothering affect the sexuality of the child? How much sex is too much? These questions are focused upon by considering a wealth of European and American evidence, always in its political, religious, cultural, social and ideological contexts—no mean feat, especially in a text designed to introduce the history of twentieth-century sexuality. And indeed McLaren has written

a very good introduction. While not all the issues are covered as fully as they are elsewhere, it is the synthesis of a wide range of material which makes his book so good.

As this review is written for a medical history audience, I will concentrate on this element of the volume. Unfortunately, I think that aspects of McLaren's medical historiography are the weakest in the work. In particular, he sometimes picks up on medical discourses, removes them from the context of their original production, and uses them to illustrate some item of the history of sexuality. For example, the section on abortion (pp. 74–79) considers discourses from the social reformer Stella Browne, an unplaced commentator Alice Jenkins, figures from Austria and Germany on abortion rates, Dr Janet Campbell, Marie Stopes in *The Times*, the physical culturist Bernarr MacFadden, a paper from W D Cornwell in the *Canadian Medical Journal* and a number of observations made by contemporary historians. Instead of this mishmash of sources used to discuss abortion, I would have preferred an account which mapped the lay of the land, and showed how different fields of discourse based their ideas on a number of different, field specific interests (which could, of course, vary within the field between different actors). In other words, I would have liked to have seen more of the mechanics of the construction which the author writes about in the introduction. This is not, of course, a problem limited to McLaren alone: many social and cultural historians remove medical discourses from their original contexts of construction in this way. While McLaren is interested in the construction of sexuality in a wider, social sense (what sex meant to the average person), he does not consider in nearly so much detail how the medical texts were themselves constructed. (The exception to this is the chapter on Freud where he situates Freud's work in the sexological tradition which numerous scholars have