

Book Reviews

Introducing the new Book Reviews Editor

This will be my final issue serving as book reviews editor for *Medical History*, though I look forward to a continuing role on its editorial board. Beginning in 2013, book reviews for the journal will be edited by Professor Akihito Suzuki, of Keio University, and a new section on new media reviews will be edited by Professors Stephen Casper and Mariola Espinosa, of Clarkson University and Yale University, respectively. These developments are important steps in the broadening the global reach of the journal in an era of digital scholarship, and promise to yield great benefits for readers, scholars, and the field as a whole.

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W.J. Bishop, *Knife, Fire and Bolling Oil*, The Early History of Surgery (London: Robert Hale, 2011), pp. 192, £9.99, paperback, ISBN: 978-0-7090-9155-4.

Bishop's *History*, albeit under a different title, reappears like an old friend, indeed I bought my copy over forty years ago. It has many merits. It is inexpensive, clearly written and gives a good general account of the history of surgery from prehistoric times until the 1890s in a brief and accessible form. As a short guide to its subject, it still retains some value, for it straddles the gap between chapters in general surveys and more extended treatments of individuals or the subject in general. It is primarily orientated towards a medical audience and is more concerned with exposition than with analysis.

But there are also glaring weaknesses. History has moved on and surgery has developed out of all recognition since this book was written. Whether we are talking about transplantation or traumatology, cancer surgery or damaged spines, so much has happened that one can only feel short-changed by a narrative that ends at the end of the nineteenth century and, even more so, when the book's trajectory is one of relentless progress. The final chapter, on Lister and after, becomes little more than a hurried list of famous names and 'firsts', useful as a preliminary orientation, but without any guidance as to how one might proceed further.

Even in the earlier chapters much has changed to render many of Bishop's judgments out of date. The evidence of archaeological finds, whether of instruments or skulls showing trepanation, has added considerably to our knowledge of ancient surgery, both its triumphs and limitations, and the evidence of surgical texts in vernaculars other than English, many published only in the last thirty years, has modified the gruesome picture painted by the book's new title. Similarly, the notion of a widespread opposition between physician and surgeon in the Middle Ages and Renaissance has become vastly more nuanced thanks to the work of Michael McVaugh and Margaret Pelling, among others, while the study of