

Book Reviews

that had developed between Newtonianism, the Church and the State. Frances Willmoth has brought together an excellent set of papers which go a long way to establishing Flamsteed's importance for our understanding of his role in the history of astronomy. It will no doubt serve scholars well until a more multi-faceted study of Flamsteed appears.

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J Worth Estes and Billy G Smith (eds), *A melancholy scene of devastation: the public response to the 1793 Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic*, Canton, MA, Science History Publications/USA for the College of Physicians of Philadelphia and the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1997, pp. xii, 212, illus., \$35.95 (0-88135-192-X).

During the past two decades the fear of infectious epidemic diseases has resurfaced. The appearance of AIDS as well as familiar bacterial infections that have become resistant to antibiotic therapy has undermined the post-World War II optimism that epidemic infectious diseases were under control and no longer posed a threat to humanity. Moreover, growing recognition that potentially deadly viruses from virgin areas could spread throughout the world within a matter of hours has also added to public apprehensions. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that scholars would once again begin to explore the experiences with and social responses to past epidemics.

In *A melancholy scene of devastation* a group of scholars have turned their attention to the Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic of 1793. Although the outbreak of 1793 did not have the highest mortality rate, it nevertheless has fascinated both contemporaries and subsequent scholars. Mathew Carey's *A short account of the malignant fever, lately prevalent in Philadelphia*, published in late 1793, sold over 10,000 copies, an extraordinary figure for that period. John H Powell's classic *Bring out your dead: the great plague of yellow fever in*

Philadelphia in 1793 (1949) offered a dramatic portrait of an epidemic that resulted in perhaps 5,000 deaths and brought the mechanism of government to a virtual halt. Powell delineated a struggle between villains and heroes. The former included the disease as well as Benjamin Rush and his irrational therapeutic approach (bloodletting) that elevated theory over experience. The heroes were those members of the pragmatic middle class who took over from the nonfunctioning public authorities and ensured that vital services would be restored and care provided for the sick and dying. Powell's story was one of tragedy and redemption; in the end human heroes prevailed.

All historical interpretations, at least to a certain extent, reflect the milieu inhabited by their authors. It is not surprising that contemporary scholars choose to de-emphasize Powell's heroic themes and to offer quite different analyses. In the opening chapter J Worth Estes delineates the manner in which yellow fever was understood and treated in the context of late eighteenth-century medical humoral and solidist thinking. David Paul Nord argues that the *Federal Gazette* provided a window into the thinking of ordinary people and therefore served to reconstruct the community bonds nearly severed by the epidemic. Sally F Griffith's study of Mathew Carey's tract suggests that his tale of disaster and community redemption became a model that shaped the ways in which future Americans responded to natural disasters. Jacquelyn Miller maintains that Rush's therapeutic approach reflected his political ideology that emphasized balance and harmony and his fear of fragmentation. Michael McMahon notes that the preoccupation of historians with physicians has led them to overlook the role of public officials and others in dealing with urban public health problems. Phillip Lapansky details the role of the African-American community in the crisis and the dramatic rebuttal of Carey's allegation that many of its members engaged in profiteering. The volume also reprints (with a postscript) Martin Pernick's classic essay in 1972 dealing with the relationship between political ideology

and medical interpretations of yellow fever. A commentary by Billy G Smith, a shrewd statistical re-creation of the epidemic by Susan E Klepp, and a discussion of the historiography of yellow fever by Margaret Humphreys round out this volume.

To evaluate an edited volume always provides difficulties, given the variation of the individual contributions. Estes's chapter is valuable because it sketches eighteenth-century medical interpretations of yellow fever while at the same time summarizing contemporary knowledge. Nord's recapitulation of the role of the press in community reconstruction is less persuasive; the evidence to support his contention is lacking. Griffith provides a valuable analysis of Carey, but cannot demonstrate that his account set the stage for future responses. Miller's penetrating analysis of Rush does not take into account the long and venerable history of bloodletting (a therapy that cut across all political ideologies). Occasional errors also creep into the volume. Smith, for example, notes that such bacterial diseases as tuberculosis and polio are developing resistance to antibiotics. The latter, of course, is a viral disease and therefore not treatable by antibiotics. Such criticisms notwithstanding, *A melancholy scene of devastation* is an important and valuable collection that should serve to stimulate further research on the impact, response, and epidemiology of epidemic diseases.

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Ibn al-Jazzār on sexual diseases and their treatment: a critical edition of Zād al-Musāfir wa qūt al-hādir, Provisions for the traveller and nourishment for the sedentary, Book 6, original Arabic text with an English translation and commentary by Gerrit Bos, The Henry Wellcome Asian Series, London and New York, Kegan Paul International, 1997, pp. 471, £65.00, \$110.00 (0-7103-0569-9).

Gerrit Bos is to be commended for making Ibn al-Jazzār's *Zād al-Musāfir* accessible, at

least in part, to modern scholars. This is one of the most attractive medical textbooks written during the classical age of Islam. It became celebrated during the Middle Ages and was translated into Latin, Greek and Hebrew. But, thanks to the plagiarism of Constantine the African, its Latin translator, its true authorship did not come to light until the last century. The story of how this discovery came about is an interesting one and it is a pity that the present editor omits it in his introduction. *Zād al-Musāfir* is a typical example of a genre of medical work, called in Arabic *kunnashat*, which consisted of compendia designed to provide the reader with a comprehensive account of medicine. They were meant for the use of practitioners and students and all had a similar style and lay-out. Diseases were classified in a head-to-toe arrangement, literally starting with diseases of the head and going down through the body to the feet. Separate sections on external diseases (what we might call dermatology), on fevers and on pathology were usually included. In addition, they frequently cited previous medical authorities, usually Greek, in lengthy quotations. Many of the books emphasized therapeutics at the expense of medical theory, and the present work is no exception.

The book is divided into seven *maqalat* or sections arranged according to the diseases from head to toe. *Maqala* six is on "the diseases of the organs of generation" and it is this which constitutes the present Arabic edition and English translation. Most of the *maqala* is concerned with what Gerrit Bos terms "sexual medicine", but is in fact a mixture of penile and testicular conditions in men and obstetric and gynaecological disorders in women. The last two chapters deal with sciatica and gout, as might be expected in the context of the head-to-toe arrangement of the book. Several short chapters deal with male sexual disorders such as impotence, priapism and spermatorrhoea. These are followed by chapters on swellings and ulcers of the penis and testicles, and on hernia. Ten chapters follow on diseases of women, including uterine disorders and complications of pregnancy such