

preserved only in Greek. Furthermore, examples can be cited of parallels between the early Hippocratic (or so-called “Cnidian”) medicine and contemporary Babylonian medicine, such as the absence of a theory of humours and reliance upon *materia medica* as a primary form of therapy. In fact, the problem with trying to compare Greece and China is that geographically intervening societies—such as Mesopotamia and India—have been catapulted over without much notice. The authors, in fact, make a single reference to this omission in their argument: “The cosmic order that Chinese imagined also differed greatly from that of the Greeks. Like the functionaries of Mesopotamia before them, those of early China believed that irregularities were ominous, meant by heaven to warn rulers. The Greeks did not build their astronomical models atop this conviction, although they borrowed much else from the Middle East” (p. 215).

Nevertheless, although one can take issue with the basic conceptual framework, there is much of value in this book. Each individual essay on Greek and Chinese science (and philosophy) is succinct and clear in its own right, without reference to comparisons. There is much that will engage the reader interested in ancient medicine, both Greek and Chinese. The Hippocratic Oath is described with its primary purpose—not as an ethical code for physicians in general—but to specify that the relationship of a pupil towards his teacher resembles that of son to father, with all the obligations this implied as well. In fact, the exclusive nature of this relationship is cited from the Oath, that the pupil pledges to pass on medical knowledge only to his own sons, his teacher’s sons, or to pupils who are also bound by oath, but to no one else. It is worth adding that similar oaths between teacher and pupil, prohibiting revealing professional knowledge to the uninitiated, were known in both Mesopotamia and in Egypt, and that the intention of the oath was to define the obligations of a pupil towards his master as well as to render professional knowledge inaccessible to the general public.

Furthermore, there is a clear discussion of differences between the medical philosophies of the Dogmatists, Empiricists, and Methodists, and

the intellectual rivalries between these groups. There is an important discussion regarding attempts to model medicine on the more exact sciences of astronomy or mathematics. On the Chinese side, one finds helpful explanations of difficult terminology, such *ch’i* (or *xi*), which can mean “air, breath, smoke, mist”, etc., as well as physical vitalities derived from food and breath and climactic influences. The authors do not assume much prior knowledge in trying to explain the philosophical bases for medicine and healing. Nevertheless, it must be said that even readers well versed in Greek medicine may find corresponding Chinese terminology and concepts difficult to comprehend.

One admires this book for its breadth, scope, and for demonstrating the courage to try and adopt a new approach to discussions of ancient science. It does, however, turn out to be a graft of two separate studies of essentially different corpora, although the same questions have been asked in both cases. In the end, this stimulating and thought-provoking volume shows that a comparison is not necessarily a similarity.

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Sumit Guha, *Health and population in South Asia from earliest times to the present*, London, Hurst, 2001, pp. vii, 178, £25.00 (hardback 1-85065578-2).

This is an interesting book, written by one of India’s most highly regarded economic historians. Apart from a persuasive introduction, the book contains six chapters, which, in keeping with its title, deal with a wide range of themes. The first is, to use Guha’s words, an exploration of the population history of South Asia, from the first to the twentieth centuries. Setting a trend for the rest of the book, it provides us with a detailed, critical analysis of the existing literature, followed by Guha’s own postulations. His concluding comments, dealing with the nature and effects of population rise in the sub-continent, encourage us to consider the environmental effects of the levels of this

demographic growth. It must be noted that he pays greatest attention to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries here, possibly reflecting the relative paucity of the secondary material available on the earlier period. The following chapter is a preliminary enquiry into the mortality decline witnessed in early twentieth-century India; another important theme. Here Guha highlights the role of climatic change in reducing mortality, whilst acknowledging that public health measures might have contributed to falling death-rates from diseases like kala-azar, cholera and smallpox.

The third chapter, which advertises itself as the beginning of an exploration of household size and structures between *c.* 1750 and 1950, is just that. And yet, Guha is able to deal with a very important theme here—the myth of the widespread existence of the joint family, which he identifies as being “merely [a] traditional myth propagated by power-seeking patriarchs”, noting that “the real world was intrinsically far more individualistic in its behaviour” (p. 107). This insight should be carefully considered by medical historians, as it has significant analytical implications—Indian society did not respond to medical interventions as an unthinking, “hegemonized” mass (nor did it respond in unison, driven by some generalized, universalistic religious fervour, which some historians too easily invoke when explaining a complex phenomenon like civilian resistance). The next offering deals with nutrition, sanitation, hygiene and the British army in India, roughly between 1870 and 1920. Guha uses this case study to raise questions about the ability of officially-sponsored medical regimes to bring about substantial and lasting changes in mortality decline. He underlines, instead, the roles also played by nutritional and genetic factors in improving the health of the Raj’s army. Many of his arguments are compelling, but not all of them completely persuasive. I wondered, for instance, whether the new “science” of political economy that Guha refers to was not more closely linked to the other “sciences” that began to flourish at the same time, but which

he does not really examine—public health and epidemiology.

The fifth chapter, dealing with some early official publicity for vaccination in western India, is the one I enjoyed the most, as it makes available to us a translation of an important text. Guha’s analysis of the text is insightful and valuable, but one wishes here that he had relied less on secondary material, especially as some of this contains very little evidence for the region his text deals with. New work is, after all, beginning to show that widely differing methods of variolation and vaccination were in existence across the sub-continent, which, in turn, evoked a range of civilian attitudes. The final chapter is a quite hurried review of health and environmental sanitation in twentieth-century India. Guha suggests that efforts concentrated on re-shaping macro-environmental patterns are likely to be only partially successful, as pathogenic micro-organisms have the capability of re-adapting and finding other pathways through which to spread. It is an important reminder, both for scholars involved in assessing the effectiveness of policy measures, as well as more academically orientated historians, that it is impossible to find simple solutions for a large, diverse country like India.

All in all, this is a very welcome review of themes that will interest students of the history of medicine, environment and population in South Asia. Sumit Guha’s breadth of reading makes this book work extremely well—less erudite scholars might have struggled to make the text flow in the way it does. One general criticism might be that a historian of his talent could have profitably conducted more primary research relating to all the important topics that he deals with here. Monographs based on carefully detailed research and analysis as well as on a combination of English and Indian language sources—are still relatively rare in South Asian medical history and I cannot think of a better scholar than Sumit Guha to perform the task. This book is tantalizingly filled with preliminary explorations: let us hope that it indicates Guha’s intention to produce a detailed study of the medical history of western and central India, on whose

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economy he has already written so much ground-breaking work.

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Ken Arnold and Danielle Olsen (eds),
Medicine man: the forgotten museum of Henry Wellcome, London, The British Museum Press, 2003, pp. 397, 500 colour and 50 black and white illus., £19.99 (paperback 0-7141-2794-9)

This book, which accompanied the Wellcome Trust exhibition at the British Museum in 2003, seeks to convey something of the spirit and atmosphere of Henry Wellcome's lifelong accumulation of objects relating to medical history, which he conceived very broadly. It does not really aim to be a history of that collection, or of Wellcome himself, so much as to give a flavour of both, in a more impressionistic way. The book fascinates, not least because of the illustrations, which one can only describe as lavish and copious, however clichéd the phrase. It is very fully illustrated throughout, but the most important images are organized into six visual essays, on themes such as 'The beginning of life', where a number of photographs of anthropological and historical objects, drawings and paintings on a broad theme are gathered together. There is no particular chronological or geographical order to these essays, which seems to suit the, to put it mildly, eclectic and unsystematic collecting of Wellcome himself. They were chosen to "delight the eye or challenge the mind" (p. 45); they do not actually convey a story, rather they highlight the variety and range of societies' responses to the human body and its life cycle, diseases and injuries, which they do very well (despite representing only 0.1 per cent of Wellcome's entire collection!). It is refreshing to have the contents of a book dictated, as the editors freely acknowledge, by a sense of wonder and fascination, rather than a particular argument to be developed.

The visual essays alternate with written essays by a variety of contributors, mostly from

museums, with a few medical historians. These contributors have a difficult task—to bring some framework or coherence to this great gathering of things—which they approach in different ways. Among the most straightforward, and useful, is Ghislaine Lawrence's article on the development of Wellcome's Historical Medical Museum, setting it in the context of the anthropological and museological thinking of the day, though it is abundantly clear that Wellcome went his own way. Other articles look at the Wellcome Library and at Wellcome's forays into archaeology. John Mack's article seeks to uncover how Wellcome understood the relationship between medicine and anthropology, asserting that there was some system in Wellcome's bewilderingly omnivorous collecting practices, which stretched the category of "medicine" to the breaking point; Wellcome followed the paradigm of late nineteenth-century anthropology, especially of A H Pitt-Rivers, in developing an evolutionary sequence which followed technical development in various object types, rather than looking at an entire cultural context, as twentieth-century anthropologists were increasingly doing. John Pickstone writes more generally of the ways in which the history of medicine can be approached, while Ruth Richardson gives a more personal response to encountering the collection.

The various contributors, then, attempt to set Wellcome in the context of the intellectual framework of his own day—though the conclusion seems to be that he was somewhat isolated from that framework—and to ask what his collection might mean for us today; they also attempt to invoke the atmosphere of the collection. However, this is more successfully done by the images than the words; there is a certain unevenness of tone among the articles, from a quite conventional academic style to a much more personal, emotional one. While the book as a whole is fascinating, and lends itself to browsing or more focused reading, it is the illustrations that make it so remarkable.

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