

Book Reviews

ARTHUR E. IMHOF (editor), *Mensch und Gesundheit in der Geschichte* (Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften, no. 39), Husum, Matthiesen Verlag, 1980, 8vo. pp. vii, 415, DM. 69.00 (paperback).

This volume is the outcome of an international colloquium held in Berlin on 20–23 September 1978. A research project on the topic of ‘Men and Health in History’ by a group of social historians at the Friedrich-Meinecke Institute of the Free University of Berlin provided the impetus for the meeting. The colloquium was interdisciplinary, with speakers from various academic backgrounds, and it also broke national barriers by having participants from a variety of European countries, England, and Canada.

The broad theme of the conference gave those contributing considerable scope in their papers, but an examination of the volume shows that they were largely focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that a demographic approach to historical questions predominated. This, perhaps, reflects the special interests of Arthur E. Imhof, the organizer. Topics that receive such an approach include, amongst others, infant mortality in a French provincial town; mortality in the southern Swedish population; mortality from smallpox, measles, and whooping cough in Finland; and over two centuries of experience with smallpox in Geneva. While none of these analyses reaches startling conclusions, most are the result of careful research and provide useful material for the development of our understanding of historical mortality trends.

Several papers have themes relating to childbirth and infant care; Jacques Gélis, Marie-France Morel, and Françoise Loux elaborate on topics that they have illuminated before. Two papers by Inger Wikstrom-Haugen and Toby Gelfand provide insights into patient complaints at hospitals at Göteborg and Paris at the end of the eighteenth century. Jean-Pierre Goubert takes a suggestive look at the significance of water in hygienic concerns from 1830 to 1840, and the volume is rounded out by studies of pastoral medicine, the history of classification of causes of death and disease, and the importance of contemporary medico-biological knowledge in understanding the disease environment of the past. A useful bibliography and an index complete the book. As is to be expected in such volumes, all contributions are not even in quality, but it was clearly a stimulating conference for the participants and overall papers are worth having in this more permanent form.

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NICHOLAAS A. RUPKE, *The great chain of history. William Buckland and the English school of geology (1814–1849)*, Oxford University Press, 1983, 8vo, pp. xii, 322, illus., £22.50.

A broad survey of early nineteenth-century English geology in its cultural context would be welcome at any time, while a careful study of Oxford’s first reader in geology – the colourful cleric William Buckland – has long been a desideratum. Nicholaas Rupke’s readable and beautifully produced new book aims simultaneously to fill both these gaps in the history of science, with all the advantages and disadvantages that such a strategy implies.

Buckland was a fascinating, earthy, eccentric, and important figure, the kind of man never fully at ease with an audience until he had made them laugh. Known for his brilliant geological analogies between present and past, he would go to any lengths to illustrate a point: who else would pursue pioneering studies of the habits of ancient life forms by keeping a domestic menagerie of their nearest modern equivalents? For all the significance of Buckland, however, readers of *The great chain of history* may find that the focus on him produces a less balanced picture of English geology as a whole than might be wished. Many leading metropolitan men of science – Charles Lyell, John MacCulloch, George Greenough, Richard Owen, Henry De La Beche – receive insufficient attention in their own right. Geology after Buckland’s “Oxford school” ceases to occupy centre stage is misleadingly pictured in decline, and his scientific opponents are sometimes treated unsympathetically. Lyell’s non-progressionist version of uniformitarianism, for example, is condemned outright as being of “low intellectual calibre”. Without denying the idiosyncrasies of the author of the *Principles of geology*, a more fruitful

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approach might have shown (following S. F. Cannon) just how indebted Lyell really was to Buckland's own actualistic style of reasoning.

Once Rupke's orientation towards Buckland and Oxford is taken into account, his study has a great deal to recommend it. He gives excellent accounts of early cave palaeontology, of discoveries of monstrous fossil reptiles, and of the introduction of the glacial theory. The entire book is based on extensive archival research and wide-ranging reading in the primary sources. Rupke offers a particularly sensitive discussion of the cultural connexions of élite academic geology, stressing the links between sacred chronology and geology. He shows how the scientific studies of Buckland and his circle were designed as responses to the demands of the traditional curriculum; in another chapter, popular reactions to their work receive an equally revealing treatment. Buckland himself appears with added stature. Although Rupke's analysis does not give a full picture of this formative period in English geology, it skilfully quarries a rich vein of materials that contribute towards that end. Anyone interested in the history of geology, the relations between science and religion, or the development of science in the universities, can look forward to reading this book.

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CLAUDINE HERZLICH and JANINE PIERRET, *Malades d'hier, malades d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, Payot, 1984, 8vo, pp. 295, Fr. 99.00 (paperback).

It would be churlish not to welcome the appearance of this book, but it is also hard not to feel that it represents an opportunity dissipated. The authors have commendably set out to look at medical history from below, by asking what illness, disease, and medical intervention are like, not from the vantage point of medicine, but as they are experienced by sufferers. And they have sensibly decided that it is arbitrary to listen only to the voice of patients, but important rather to gauge the opinions and experiences of the laity at large, attempting to capture something like a set of "*mentalités*". Bravely, they have tried within the covers of one book to survey lay attitudes towards sickness both in past and present, looking back at least as far as the Middle Ages ("leprosy" and the Black Death loom large), and taking in evidence from other cultures as well as the French. And they have organized the book around a series of thematic questions designed to probe distinctions between attitudes past and present. Thus chapter 2, entitled 'De la phtisie à la tuberculose', opens with the early nineteenth-century myth of the Romantic consumptive and moves on to examine changing images of the condition, particularly between the world wars when it was ceasing to be such a scourge. And Chapter 10 ('De l'inactif au droit d'être malade') offers a historical survey of the prehistory of the "sick role": before the days of "medicalization", the Christian equivalent of the legitimating "sick role" was the idea of divine affliction and the holy beggar. *Au fait* with the concepts of modern medical sociology and familiar with the research of the *Annales* school, this book represents easily the most ambitious attempt till now to provide a broad interpretation of attitudes towards health and sickness down the ages.

Its value is, however, diminished by being overambitious. Too many topics (for example, the relation between moral values and perceptions of disease as punishment, or the idea of diseases of civilization) are dealt with in a handful of pages, in generalizations covering several centuries. The result can be extremely banal, with a lack of attention to the diversity of responses. The other problem is that the authors seem to treat historical evidence like picking flowers. Whenever they can find the choice bloom of a quotation or an anecdote that supports a conclusion they grab and use it, with little apparent regard for time or place, for whether it is fact or from fiction, for its original significance in context, or for counter-evidence. The problem of how source material may legitimately be made to speak the voice of the sick is never addressed. It is a problem made particularly serious when they attempt to relate past and present. For much of their material from the past is culled from literary sources; and most of their current evidence is from sociological questionnaires. The difficulties of using the two comparatively are immense but are never dealt with.

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