

## Book Reviews

**Dietrich von Engelhardt** (ed.), *Biographische Enzyklopädie deutschsprachiger Mediziner*, 2 vols, Munich, K G Saur, 2002, pp. xii, 992, €258.00 (hardback 3-598-11462-1).

Between 1995 and 2000 Walther Killy and Rudolf Vierhaus published in twelve volumes the *Deutsche Biographische Enzyklopädie*, which comprises about 56,000 biographical entries pertaining to all walks of life, the arts and sciences. Drawing upon this work, the present two-volume set, edited by the Lübeck medical historian Dietrich von Engelhardt, includes about 4,600 short biographies of German-speaking doctors, and persons closely associated with medicine, from the late Middle Ages up to 2000. Still living persons were excluded. The entries have been revised, and numerous doctors have been additionally included in this edition, which benefited from the contributions of fifty-four expert authors.

Access to the alphabetically ordered biographical articles is further facilitated by a chronological table and indices according to medical occupations and disciplines, places (illustrating the importance of university towns), and of all persons mentioned (also specifying occupation and years of birth and death).

The brief articles provide factual biographical information, usually without much evaluation, and include, where applicable, the title of the doctor's inaugural dissertation and Habilitation thesis. Quotations of other key original works,

and sometimes of secondary literature, conclude the entries.

This biographical encyclopaedia is strongest on nineteenth-century physicians. I was pleased to find brief entries on figures who are less known in the history of medicine today, but who made substantial contributions in their own day: for example, the Würzburg pharmacologist, Michael Joseph Roßbach (1842–1894), or the Berlin psychiatrist, Siegfried Placzek (1866–1946)—though the latter's book on medical confidentiality (1893, third edition 1909) is not cited. Of course, as in any work of this magnitude, readers will spot omissions. I was disappointed, for example, that there is no article on Rudolf Boehm (1844–1926) of Leipzig, one of the founders of modern experimental pharmacology; and that the entry on Johann Jakob Wepfer (1620–1695) quotes no secondary literature at all, although at least four monographs have been published on the life and work of this eminent Baroque physician and researcher (Hans Fischer, 1931; Henry Nigst, 1947; Pietro Eichenberger, 1969; A-H Maehle, 1987).

Nevertheless, the very comprehensiveness of this encyclopaedia makes it an indispensable tool for anyone working on German medical history. Despite its relatively high price, it clearly belongs in the reference section of any library collection committed to the history of medicine and science.

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