

### *Society Reports*

1. The pre-settlement exploration era.
2. The early colonial era, including the penal era and the period of economic and legislative dependence upon the United Kingdom.
3. The late colonial era, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, coinciding with the achievement of independence, social changes due to the discovery of gold, and, in particular, the dawn of modern scientific medicine.
4. The modern era, which will not be discussed.

Certain features of each of the three phases will be selected to illustrate the propositions outlined above. The subjects will include shipboard hygiene and the government medical service in regard to the first two periods, and, in the fascinating third era, the germ theory, 'Listerism', anæsthesia and relevant examples of the history of certain diseases.

## *News, Notes and Queries*

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### THE ANATOMY OF ZEIDLERN (1686)

It is curious how little is known of the text-book of anatomy written by Sebastianus Christianus à Zeidlern, and published in Prague in folio in 1686. It was entitled *Somatotomia Anthropologica seu Corporis Humani Fabrica Methodice divisa et controversarum quaestionum discussionibus illustrata*. It was a posthumous publication edited by the author's son, Bernardus Norbertus à Zeidlern, described as a licentiate in surgery and a candidate in medicine. Another edition also in folio was published in Vienna in 1692.<sup>1</sup>

The title reveals that the author was a doctor of medicine and of philosophy at the University of Prague and physician to the Emperor and to the King of Bohemia. He was also professor of anatomy and of medicine, and was one of the few reasonably distinguished scientists who worked in Prague during the seventeenth century. He wrote another book entitled *Institutiones Medicinæ* published in Prague in quarto in 1687 and in Vienna in 1692.<sup>2</sup> Portal states that in it he 'fights on behalf of the Peripatetiques accepting their theory on the elements of the body and on the occult qualities and adding to their bizarre explanations several ridiculous remarks of his own. He would not allow people to lie on their backs because the blood in the vena cava becomes inflamed' (s'enflamme). Details of the book are given by Manget.

The anatomy and its author are not mentioned by Choulant-Frank or by most of the other medical historians. Even Hirsch has no mention of the author, and we can find no description of him in any of the biographical dictionaries.

The reason is clear. The anatomy is an unimportant work. Its illustrations are copied from works by Veslingius and from the plates of Casserius published by Spigelius in his *De Formato Foetu* and *Tabulae Anatomicae*. The only alterations made seem to be the addition of unnecessary beards, moustaches and hair to the faces of bodies displaying dissections of the trunk. Portal in 1770 described it as 'one of the worst works that appeared in the last century. The author reiterates the outmoded opinions of the most superstitious writers. He makes no observations of his own'. Three of the plates are obstetrical and one deals with monsters. One of these might well have strained even seventeenth century credulity. A human figure has a nose like an elephant's trunk, large flapping ears and animal faces replacing the patellae and at the anterior axillary and elbow folds. The hands and feet are webbed with three claws in front and one behind. There is a pair of eyes in the middle of the abdomen as well as in the normal position, also a long barbed tail.

Nevertheless the title page, dated December 1685, is curious and interesting. It displays the interior and exterior of an anatomical theatre presumably that at Prague, built at the Charity Hospital by Zeidlern himself.<sup>3</sup> It seems to have allowed plenty of room in which he and his demonstrators could work in contrast to the congested accommodation of the theatres at Padua and Leyden. But whether the audience could see much is very doubtful.

The tall figures on either side represent St. Simon and St. Jude, the former with a vicious-looking saw, the instrument of his martyrdom. Zeidlern is shown on the left with the demonstrator's wand in his right hand. On the other side of the body a prosector flourishes a scalpel. The dissection has not commenced, which may be the reason why only a few members of the audience are paying any attention to the proceedings.

The theatre was bought by the medical faculty in 1688, but there followed a decline in interest in anatomy and during a period of twenty-two years there were only three dissections. The building collapsed in 1731.<sup>4</sup>

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2. MANGET, J. J. (1731). *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Medicorum*, Genevae, 2, pt. 2, 686.
3. PORTAL, M. (1770). *Histoire de l'Anatomie*, Paris, 3, 84.
4. PUSCHMANN, T. (1903). *Handbuch der Geschichte der Medizin*, Jena, 2, 299-300.



Title page of *Zeidlern's Anatomy*, 1686