

Book Reviews

Bathing in Classical Antiquity (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 130.

Gregorio Piaia adumbrates the shifting world of late sixteenth-century Europe at a moment when medical and philosophical inquiry was characterised by a plurality of approaches: a strict dependence upon ancient authorities, an experimental method, and a reliance upon the 'magico-hermetic tradition' (p. 5). Like other medical humanists, Mercuriale made a practice, Arcangeli notes, of constructing his books 'from other books' (p. 115). He drew upon a stunning array of ancient, medieval, Arab and Renaissance authorities; his learning secured him the admiration of many, even though history shows him at times to have been greatly in error. One such instance, as brought to light in Richard Palmer's essay, occurred in 1576, when Mercuriale and his colleagues denied that Venice was victim, once again, to an epidemic of plague. Negotiating for privileged access to the sick, his team unwittingly spread the disease. But even after Mercuriale was forced to acknowledge his mistake, he maintained that the symptoms observed did not reflect the definition of plague established by the ancients. Paradoxically, with that formidable learning, Palmer concludes, he 'substantially recovered his standing and reputation within the academic community' (p. 64). Only exceptionally, as in his *De Venenis* (1584), do there emerge indications, as Alessandro Pastore demonstrates, that Mercuriale truly relied upon direct observation.

This volume sheds new light on the little-studied treatises *Nomothelasmus* (1552), *Variae Lectiones* (1571) and *De Decoratione* (1585), the last of which addressed the relationship between health and beauty, branching off to consider cosmetics. The essays by Enrico Peruzzi and Francesca Lazzarin on this treatise will undoubtedly spur further work in this fascinating and productive area.

Sought after by sovereigns, princes, and prelates, Mercuriale maintained an extensive intellectual network on both sides of the Alps,

which Nancy Siraisi sets forth, and he openly sought out books that had been placed on the Index (Jean-Michel Agasse). Here again, his learning apparently elevated him above any suspicion. Not all physicians at this moment of history were so fortunate.

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Victor Mallia-Milanés (ed.), *The Military Orders: Volume 3 – History and Heritage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. xvii + 306, £55.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-7546-6209-7.

This volume records the proceedings of the third international conference on the military orders held on 7–10 September 2000 at the Museum of the Order of St John, Clerkenwell, London. Once again the organising London Centre for the Study of the Crusades, the Military Orders and the East Mediterranean Region in the Middle Ages succeeded in uniting no less than thirty well-known experts who focused their discussion on the general theme of 'History and Heritage'. The thirty papers published in this collection reveal the continuing scholarly interest in the Military Orders as well as the large variety of topics that still demand further research. Eighteen articles concentrate on the Order of St John, six on the Temple and three on the Teutonic Order. Like the two volumes comprising the contributions of the previous conferences in 1992 and 1996, 'History and Heritage' will certainly be highly appreciated by medievalists specialised in the history of the crusades because of the outstanding quality of the assembled papers. They all cover recent trends of research and offer a strong basis for continuing study of the subjects treated. For those interested in medical history, however, this third volume has much less to offer than its predecessors. These put a special emphasis on *Fighting for the Faith and Caring for the Sick* (Volume 1) as well as *Warfare and Welfare* (Volume 2). The present volume, as its title indicates, mainly deals with the

Orders' historiography, questions concerning liturgy and fiction, and heraldry and piety. Furthermore, the major part of the contributions concentrate on the settlement of the Orders in different regions of Europe and the Holy Land, or on special aspects regarding the history of a single commandery and its dignitaries. Most of the papers do not pay any attention to medicine, healthcare or the functioning of the Orders' hospitals at all. It is, therefore, surprising that the book contains two studies of outstanding interest for medical historians.

Ann Williams' article (pp. 55–62) examines the final illnesses of the Grand Masters of the Order of St John from Pierre de Aubusson (d. 1503) to Nicolas Cotoner (d. 1680) and the development of funerary rites surrounding the burial of the Order's highest ranking dignitaries, who at the same time occupied the islands of Rhodes and Malta as 'rulers in their own rights' (p. 55). In some cases the accounts allow a detailed reconstruction of the Grand Masters' last days, burial practice and the reaction of the public. The author is conscious of the fact that on the basis of Hippocratic/Galenic traditions the descriptions of the mortal illnesses of the Grand Masters cannot be clearly identified. Yet, it is interesting to see what the sources reveal about the symptoms and the roles of the medical practitioners. Moreover, Ann Williams reveals that the double function of the Order's Grand Master as head of a religious community as well as head of state becomes particularly obvious in the way the burial ceremony is performed. The descriptions of the mourning inhabitants of Rhodes and Malta in the Order's accounts do not differ from those in royal records.

A more than valuable complement to the written source is the erudite bioarchaeological analysis of latrine soil from the thirteenth-century hospital of St John at Acre (pp. 213–23) presented by Piers D. Mitchell, Jacqui P. Huntley and Eliezer Stern. The authors demonstrate that the examination of latrine soil not only proves what kind of foods people were eating, but also what kind

of parasitic helminthes infested their intestines. In the special case of a hospital latrine such as that in Acre it is even possible to gain further information about the medical treatment of the patients. One of the remarkable results of the analysis is that the fish bones and scales present in the latrine soil confirm that the patients observed a diet. Fish tapeworm ova have been identified by the researchers in the same samples. A number of figures additionally exemplify the information given in the text. Among the altogether brilliant articles of the volume this one is really trend-setting.

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Louis Schwartz, *Milton and Maternal Mortality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. xi + 269, £50.00/\$90.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-521-89638-2.

John Milton is not a poet well known for his kindness towards women. Despite his engaging, arguably feminist rendering of Eve in *Paradise Lost*, the historical Milton and his well-documented antagonisms with the women in his life have often clouded readers' perceptions of this difficult, though brilliant, early modern writer. There is the fact that his first wife, Mary Powell, moved back in with her parents for three years after just two months of marriage with him; the long and bitter legal suit that he pursued with Mary's mother concerning a debt between her late husband and his father; his unclear stance on women's education (he taught his daughters to read several foreign languages, but not to understand them); and finally his famously vexed relationships with his surviving children, all women, each of whom he excluded from his will.

Given these much-discussed biographical issues, a book on Milton's interest in female childbed suffering may come as somewhat of a surprise. Indeed, Louis Schwartz is careful at