

Book Reviews

Hans-Reinhard Koch (ed.), *Johann Conrad Stolls Abhandlung über den Grauen Star und dessen Heilung. Handschriftliches Manuskript eines Vortrags gehalten am 27. März 1791 auf dem schwarzen Garten* in Zürich, Als Facsimile und Transkription des Originaltextes, Introduction and remarks by Hans-Reinhard Koch, (Bonn: D. & L. Koch Verlag, 2013), pp. 312, €48. hardback, ISBN: 978-3981593532

The eighteenth century played a remarkable role in the history of ophthalmology. This was the time, when after several thousands of years the old technique of cataract couching received competition from a new revolutionary surgical concept, lens extraction. The inventor and protagonist of this technique was the Frenchman Jacques Daviel (1693–1762), who received wide acclaim from his contemporaries. In spite of this, numerous ophthalmologists remained faithful to the old technique, well into the nineteenth century. Amongst them was Johann Christian Jüngken (1794–1875), the ophthalmic chairman of the University of Berlin.

Hans-Reinhard Koch is one of the most committed historians of ophthalmology of recent years. He has published the transcription of a fascinating lecture on this subject that was given on 2 March 1791 in the ‘Schwarzer Garten’ (Black Garden), the Zurich guild house of the barbers and surgeons. In this house, barber surgeons and academic physicians convened to discuss latest medical trends. Author of this most interesting work was Johann Conrad Stoll (1766–1836), a Zurich student of Württemberg extraction.

The book published now is a little bibliophilic treasure. It shows the original manuscript pages and the transcribed text side-by-side. A flowingly written introduction presents the family and social background of Stoll, meticulously reconstructed by the editor. The relationship to Justinus Kerner’s circle of romantic poets in Weinsberg is interesting.

The situation of contemporary ophthalmology is also outlined. Striking is the social advancement of the non-academic surgical profession, favoured not only by the surgeons’ importance for the armed forces and their sovereigns, but also by the limited therapeutic efficacy of traditional ‘internal’ medicine, still much influenced by humoral pathology. In spite of a few outstanding physician personalities (eg. Hölderlin’s physician Autenrieth), this was also true for Württemberg. Halle, Jena and Leyden, where more modern approaches were attempted, were far away.

Of course, the transcribed manuscript itself is of special medico-historical interest. It begins with a somewhat long-winded retrospective of the Chirurgus Stoll, rather typical for his time. We understand that in 1791, and in fact even a century earlier, one was well aware of the patho-physiology of the ‘Grauer Star’ (grey cataract). Yet the term ‘Star’ (=cataract, eye disease) was still not well defined. Other forms of ‘Star’ are mentioned that the present-day reader (even the ophthalmologist) will find difficult to understand. Thus blindness is called ‘Schwarzer Star’ (black cataract), a term also describing a mysterious opacification of the eye, or an unclear inflammatory or post-inflammatory condition. ‘Güner Star’ (green cataract), on the other hand, was an ill-defined disease of the vitreous and/or the iris, eg. an iridocyclitis. Today the term ‘Grüner Star’ is used for glaucoma, a disease unknown and undetectable in Stoll’s day.

The two competing techniques of cataract surgery, depression and extraction, are precisely described and critically compared. This was the ophthalmic subject of the period. It is beneficial that Stoll's editor is an experienced ophthalmic surgeon himself. Thus, he is able to explain convincingly some of Stoll's surgical recommendations, eg. when he speaks of 'exerting a gentle and slow pressure' (pages 51 of the text and 82 of the introduction). The ophthalmic surgical equipment of Stoll's time is described in detail. The literature listed by Stoll in 1791 is also most interesting (261–9). Older works, such as Bartisch's 'Augendienst' of 1583 are quoted as well as the medical observations during a journey of Johann Nepomuk Hunscofsky in 1783. Latin treatises are quoted along with German, French and English publications. Scientific work in 1791 implied quite naturally a retrospective view.

The book introduces the reader to the scientific medical world of the late eighteenth century, covering both the facts and the atmosphere. Whoever is interested in the history of ophthalmology, will be supplied with the sources in a clear, vivid and readable way. And he will learn a lot about the methods and problems of this subject in the days of Goethe.

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doi:10.1017/mdh.2014.33

Charlotte Biltekoff, *Eating Right in America: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 208, \$22.95, paperback, ISBN: 978-0-8223-5559-5.

Although still dominated by food biographies, meal ethnographies and explorations of the cultural significance of cooking and eating, the field of food studies has begun to incorporate issues of health and medicine into studies of food and foodscapes. Historians of modern medicine, who until recently had largely ignored food and nutrition, have likewise developed a more substantial body of work on the intersections of food, diet and health. Given the prominence of dietary issues in contemporary medicine and public health, agriculture, commerce and politics, the efforts of scholars in both fields are sorely needed to help frame and investigate the highly complex problems of food and nutrition policy.

Charlotte Biltekoff, Assistant Professor of American Studies and Food Science and Technology at the University of California, Davis, contributes to this effort by exploring the history of 'the interplay of the moral and the quantitative that is at the core of modern ideals of dietary health'. Her goal is to 'reveal and understand' the idea that 'dietary advice is an objective reflection of scientific knowledge and that its primary aim is to produce healthier bodies', and she critiques this idea through case studies of four dietary reforms: the development of scientific cookery during the Progressive Era; the creation of the recommended dietary allowances (RDAs) during World War II; the alternative food movement that began in the 1960s; and the recent campaign against overweight and obesity.

The case studies are well chosen. *Eating Right in America* offers a concise, accessible introduction for undergraduates or readers who have little knowledge of the history and politics of dietary reform in the long twentieth century. That being said, the use of history in this book is highly problematic. After briefly characterizing histories written by nutrition