

problems and possibilities of the genre. In chapter ten, Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent presents biography as bridging the gap between cultural memory and history. Next, Jacalyn Duffin's engaging essay describes her reasons for writing biography, her struggles to be published, and her belief in the value of biography as a complement to theoretical and social history. Rena Selya reflects upon the particular problems of biographical work on a subject who has actively participated in the construction of his own myth, especially by producing an autobiography. This highlights the tension between biographical constructions with different purposes, an issue that is also raised by Vassiliki Betty Smocovitis who discusses in chapter thirteen the peculiar pros and cons of her relationship with her living subject.

Finally, Beth Linker and Thomas Söderqvist contribute two chapters on the historical relations of biography with history of medicine and history of science. Linker gives a US-centric analysis of the fall of medical biography, yet to be rehabilitated, with the advent of social historical approaches in the 1970s. Söderqvist tells of the changing fortunes of scientific biography, certain forms of which have remained a respected mode of scholarship. Both these essays are reminders of the role that fashion plays in shaping our approaches to historical material.

This volume is evidence that those historians who write in a biographical vein are convinced of its worth. They have found good scholarly reasons, as well as personal ones, for adopting this approach. Biographies, perhaps precisely by engaging with the question of the importance of context, are capable of producing subtle and intelligent history. And ultimately, the trend for or against biography is no different from the shifting vogues to which all historical methodologies are subject.

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Mark Borisovich Mirsky,
*Мирский М.Б. Медицина России
X–XX веков: Очерки истории*
(Medicine in Russia from the Tenth to the
Twentieth Centuries: Essays on History),
Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2005, pp. 632, illus., no
price given (hardback 5-8243-0603-6).

Professor Mark Mirsky is a well-known historian of Russian medicine and surgery, and a prolific writer. He is head of the Department of History of Medicine and Public Health of the National Research Institute for Public Health (formerly the Semashko Institute for Social Hygiene and Healthcare Organization), Moscow.

In 1996 Mirsky published *Meditsina Rossii XVI–XIX vekov* [Медицина России XVI–XIX, ВЕКОВ] a history of medicine in Russia from the sixteenth to nineteenth century. The book reviewed here is an enlarged version of this and according to the publisher's blurb it is "a modern interpretation of the history of Russian medicine as an integral part of world culture".

The book is a collection of nineteen essays beginning with medicine in Old Russia (tenth to thirteenth centuries) and ending with a history of surgery in the twentieth century. Russian medicine is divided into two periods: "pre-scientific" (tenth to sixteenth centuries) and "scientific" (sixteenth century onwards). The watershed is the organization in the second half of the sixteenth century of the *Aptekarsky prikaz* (Apothecaries' department), which dealt with the health care of the tsar and his court. According to Mirsky, from then on medicine and health care in Russia was developed by the state. The state character of medical service is "a great advantage" and represents "the most progressive form of organization". "This should be borne in mind today, when differing opinions on the present and future of Russian medicine are expressed, but often its historical experience is not taken into consideration" (p.7).

Almost half the book deals with the twentieth century. It includes essays on the

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People's Commissariat of Health (the first ministry of health in the world, established in 1918 by Lenin's aide Nikolai Semashko), the repression of physicians, Soviet science and pseudo-science, and Russian medical émigrés. A chapter on physicians persecuted during Stalin's dictatorship provides interesting examples of changing roles. For example, one of the leading Soviet physicians Professor Dmitry Pletnev and several other doctors were accused in 1938 of poisoning their patients, including Maxim Gorky. Pletnev's pupil Vladimir Vinogradov was one of medical experts who confirmed that his teacher intentionally administered poison to Gorky. Later, Vinogradov became Stalin's personal physician. During the so-called "doctors' affair" in 1953 Vinogradov himself was accused of having—under orders from British Intelligence—administered toxic substances to high ranking Party members. Vinogradov's pupil Alexander Myasnikov was an expert who, it is assumed, later gave evidence against his teacher.

The chapter on Russian medical émigrés contains several biographical sketches of famous medical scientists, physicians and surgeons who left the country after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, among them I P Alexinsky, K A Buinevich, G Y Troshin,

A M Maximov, A D Pavlovsky, G E Rein, and L M Pussep.

In his Introduction Mirsky calls for a new approach to the history of Russian medicine and new ways of studying the subject.

Previous efforts are labelled as one-sided and ideologically distorted.

Some concrete examples of this would have been useful. Mirsky is concerned by the present lack of interest in the history of medicine in Russia, the decreasing number of Russian medical historians, and the low standard of scholarship. For him medical history involves a study of the past in order to illuminate the present, and lay the basis for the future of medical science and practice. Through an analysis of a wide range of primary sources, including previously unknown archival material, as well as secondary sources, Mirsky sheds new light on important periods in the history of medicine in Russia and traces the directions that medicine has taken. In the process he rediscovers many forgotten physicians and scientists, and evaluates their impact, stressing the interactions between various cultures and countries.

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