

Book Notices

Like the others in the series, this book is beautifully illustrated. Seven chapters, 'The environment', 'Sources of evidence', 'Modern technology and ancient diseases', 'Congenital disorders', 'Acquired disorders', 'Trauma, and dental health', deal with random morbidity examples from Egypt and the Sudan over a 5,000-year time span. Generalization inevitably occurs. Chapter I on 'The environment', would hold true for any of the early riverine populations, e.g., the Indus or Mesopotamian civilizations.

Undoubtedly a fine worker in the field, Joyce Filer may have been ill advised by the publishers to hurry this elementary medical history survey to the Egyptian Bookshelf. Medical students might wince a bit at statements like "Nesamun . . . had an eye condition called peripheral neuritis", or "gout could be another unpleasant and longer-lasting consequence of excessive wine drinking". The claim for polio during the whole Pharaonic period, comes from the New Kingdom which had by then reached an estimated three million population. The evidence rests solely on a wall relief showing the suspect leg of Roma "atrophied after paralytic poliomyelitis". A second wall relief shown fails to convince.

Egyptologists are left with generalizations on specific conditions from the medical papyri with neither hieroglyphic nor translated sources cited. The possibility of steatopygia as a differential diagnosis for the Queen of Punt is dismissed on the assumption that Punt was in the East rather than Southern Africa. Evidence is still eagerly awaited on this vexing question. The frontispiece X-ray picture of Tutankhamun's skull may "not indicate any cranial disease", but the anatomist R G Harrison's (1963) view, recently confirmed by the trauma specialist, Gerald Irwin, was that there is evidence of an occipital injury.

María José Ruiz Somavilla, *"El cuerpo limpio"*. *Análisis de las prácticas higiénicas en la España del mundo moderno*, Textos Mínimos, Universidad de Málaga, 1994, pp. 146, no price given (84-7496-248-X).

In this little book, María José Ruiz Somavilla analyses the medical, religious and social ideas upon which habits of personal cleanliness were based in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain. Using contemporary medical, theological, and literary texts, the author investigates how traditional Galenic rules about bodily hygiene were adapted to changes in religious thought and social attitudes brought about by the counter-reformation. A healthy body implied an inner healthy (clean) soul, and therefore a person who would maintain the necessary equilibrium between the spiritual and the physical, and uphold the social order. While cleanliness was necessary for physical health, water entering through the pores could be damaging, and dry-washing—rubbing the body with a towel—was recommended, as well as clean linen to which the dirt expelled by the pores would adhere, making frequent bathing unnecessary. In polite society, the only parts of the body which required daily washing with water were the face, hands and legs. As a result, in the highly mobile society of Spain at the time, clean linen, face and hands came to indicate good social standing.

BOOKS ALSO RECEIVED

(The inclusion of a title does not preclude the possibility of subsequent review. Items received, other than those assigned for review, are ultimately incorporated into the collection of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine.)

Roberto Cardini and Mariangela Regoliosi (eds), *Umanesimo e medicina. Il problema dell' 'individuale'*, Rome, Bulzoni Editore, 1996, pp. viii, 97, no price given (88-7119-950-2).

Nigel Saul (ed.), *The Oxford illustrated history of medieval England*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. xii, 308, illus., £25.00 (0-19-820502).

Carson Strong, *Ethics in reproductive and perinatal medicine: a new framework*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1997, pp. viii, 247, £19.95 (0-300-06832-8).