

Book Notices

Sander L Gilman, *Seeing the insane*, with a new afterword, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 1996, pp. xvi, 253, illus., £28.50 (paperback 0-8032-7064-X).

Originally published in 1982, Sander Gilman's pioneering cultural history of the "face of madness" is here reprinted in a paperback edition. *Seeing the insane* is still the essential reference point for our understanding of changing visual representations of the mad; its scholarship and scope, spanning the period from the Middle Ages into the early twentieth century, remain impressive. The book also provides an important and convincing thesis: "art quotes art", as each age borrows from existing representational systems to refashion the face of madness, and thereby reorders its own world. Continuity is as striking as change. This intertextuality is made vividly apparent in the dialogue between the traditional iconography of painting and the new medium of photography in the nineteenth century. Those already familiar with the book should take note of the author's new afterword, a mini-essay which utilizes a new set of nineteenth-century images to highlight their multiple, simultaneous, and even contradictory meanings. Inevitably the reproduction of images is of varying quality, and the absence of colour is to be regretted, but the sheer visual pleasure of reading a book dominated by over 300 illustrations is welcome and makes it excellent value.

Peter Beighton, Greta Beighton, *The person behind the syndrome*, Heidelberg and London, Springer-Verlag, 1997, pp. xviii, 231, illus., DM 89.00 (3-540-76044-X).

This book follows on from *The man behind the syndrome*, which the Beightons wrote a decade ago. It has the same structure: 170 people who have given their names to genetic

disorders or syndromes are included with brief biographies, commentaries on the development of the nomenclature, and references. One hundred biographies are illustrated by large photographs or portraits and this is the most valuable part of the book. Information on personal characteristics has been extracted mostly from obituaries. The title was changed ("man" substituted by "person") to avoid an accusation of male chauvinism, but the majority of eponymic syndromes were established in the late nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth centuries when medicine was a male-dominated profession. The authors were able to find portraits and biographical data of only nine women whose names are generally accepted as syndromic designations. The second section of the book provides brief biographical sketches of a further 70 people, the majority of whom still lead active careers. In fact many individuals made only a contribution to the understanding of the genetic syndrome which bears their eponym. The authors give valuable advice to those who aspire to eponymous immortality: "the trick is to identify a 'new' syndrome" and then use an extremely cumbersome descriptive title in the initial report. If co-authorship can be avoided, so much the better. A single eponym, particularly if it is harmonious or curious, will stand a better chance of being perpetuated in further publications than a long obscure title!

Joyce Filer, *Disease*, Egyptian Bookshelf, London, British Museum Press, 1995, pp. 112, illus., £9.99 (0-7141-0980-0).

It is hard to tell at which audience this book is aimed, but it would no doubt be absorbing for school-leavers contemplating a career in human-remains archaeology. The author herself underwent a change of career from audiographer to archeo-osteologist.

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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).