

Book Reviews

Thomas Bartholin, *The Anatomy House in Copenhagen*, Niels W. Bruun (ed.) (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2015), pp. 222, \$53.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-87-635-4259-3.

The period from about 1600 to 1680 was a golden age for Danish medicine and natural philosophy as cultivated by a small but powerful group of professors at the University of Copenhagen. A network of families known as the Fincke–Bartholin–Worm clan or dynasty had a dominating influence at the Faculty of Medicine and occupied nearly all the professorships during the seventeenth century. The most important clan member was perhaps Thomas Bartholin, who began his international career in anatomy and medicine with a revised and modernised version of *Institutiones anatomicae*, the textbook that his father, Caspar Bartholin, had first published in 1611. Thomas Bartholin's edition of 1641 was the first medical textbook to incorporate Harvey's theory of the blood's circulation. Eight years later he was appointed professor of anatomy in Copenhagen, a position he kept until 1661, when he was relieved of his teaching duties. During this period he established his reputation as one of Europe's foremost anatomists and medical authors. This reputation was based in part on two discoveries from the early 1650s, when he first demonstrated the existence of the thoracic duct in the human body and subsequently discovered the system of vessels that led lymph from the liver to the circulatory system. These discoveries were based on the dissection of human corpses made at the new *Domus anatomica*, the first medical institution in Scandinavia which offered public dissections of animal and human bodies.

The Copenhagen anatomy theatre had its golden days under the leadership of Thomas Bartholin, but it was established already in 1645 by the German physician Simon Paulli, who a few years earlier had been appointed professor of anatomy and botany (and who was *not* a member of the Fincke–Bartholin–Worm clan). The anatomical theatre functioned for about two decades as an important institution for medical studies, but soon after Bartholin's retirement it began to wane, only to be briefly revived in 1672–4 when Nicolaus Steno visited Copenhagen to give lectures and public dissections. In 1728, *Domus anatomica* burned down under the great fire that destroyed much of Copenhagen, and today nothing except a fragment of a memorial tablet is left of the past glory.

What we know of the anatomy house is to a large measure due to Thomas Bartholin, a most prolific author. In February 1662, shortly after his retirement, he published a small book entitled *Domus anatomica Hafniensis brevissime descripta*, which contained a concise description of the building and its associated museum with collections of natural specimens. The book was published together with the much larger *Cista medica Hafniensis*, a collection of historical sources, but Bartholin considered it an independent publication and not merely an appendix to *Cista medica*. It consequently appeared with its own title leaf and pagination. Oriented towards an international readership, *Domus anatomica Hafniensis* was composed in Latin, the only language that Bartholin recognised as worthy for a learned man and in which he wrote all of his many publications. While several of Bartholin's books and tracts have been translated into English, it is only with Niels Bruun's present edition that *Domus anatomica Hafniensis* appears in a scholarly annotated English translation. Bruun, a researcher at the Royal Library in Copenhagen,

originally made a Danish translation in 2007 but sensibly decided that to reach outside the Scandinavian countries an English translation was needed. The translation into English was made by Peter Fisher, and, in addition to Bartholin's main text, the book also includes a substantial introduction written by Morten Fink-Jensen in which he places the book in a broader historical context. As Fink-Jensen points out, this context was not only medical and scholarly but also included a strong religious element. For Bartholin and his contemporaries in Lutheran Denmark, anatomy was a way to get insight into the amazing power and wisdom of the almighty God.

Apart from Fink-Jensen's introduction and Bruun's detailed description of and comments to Bartholin's text, *The Anatomy House* includes brief documents relating to the state of the building as of 1676, at a time when it was slowly decaying. However, it is Bartholin's text of 1662 which is the central part of the book and what makes it valuable to historians of science and medicine. This text includes not only Bartholin's description of the anatomical theatre but also three lengthy prospectuses written by Paulli. The material is arranged throughout in the established scholarly fashion with the original Latin text facing the English translation. Apart from describing some of the dissections taking place in the anatomy house, Bartholin's little book includes catalogues of two museums or cabinets, one belonging to himself and the other to the University of Copenhagen, which received it as a gift from Bartholin's deceased cousin, the physician Henrik Fuiren. Next to the auditorium building, Bartholin had his own house, and there, he informs the reader, 'various items that attract the curiosity of foreign visitors may be viewed'. A long list of the museum's natural objects follows, some of them curious indeed. They include 'the skeleton of a large dog in which the lymphatic vessels were first discovered in Copenhagen', 'the horn from a Greenland unicorn' and 'the hand and rib of a mermaid'. The collections of Bartholin and Fuiren were interesting but unimpressive compared to the much larger museum established by Bartholin's uncle Ole Worm and described in detail in Worm's *Museum Wormianum* from 1655.

Bruun's edition of *The Anatomy House* is a welcome contribution to the growing scholarly literature on Danish medical history in the early modern period. It offers valuable insight into the Copenhagen anatomical theatre and into the work of Thomas Bartholin, the period's most distinguished Danish medical scientist. Not only is the book informative and carefully researched, it is also handsomely produced and includes a large number of fine illustrations. Bartholin would have been pleased. My only, and very minor, complaint is that the name index is mysteriously placed in the middle of the book, separate from the subject index, and includes only persons appearing in Bartholin's text.

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Isabelle Boehm and **Nathalie Rousseau** (eds), *L'expressivité du lexique médical en Grèce et à Rome. Hommages à Françoise Skoda* (Paris: Presse de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2014), pp. 512, €37.00, paperback, ISBN 978-2-84050-929-5.

There are many different ways of investigating medicine's past. One, which has been practised with great success by Françoise Skoda, the honorand of this volume, and her pupils in Nice, Poitiers and, for many years, Paris, has been the careful teasing out of the meanings of the words used by professionals and lay alike to describe all aspects of