

Book Reviews

The volume is limited, reasonably enough, to the early Buffon and to the critical writings he provoked. And the main aim is to place the early Buffon in his context. But, of course, any future efforts to reinterpret Buffon's career and his *Histoire* as a whole will be aided by this view of the man and his *magnum opus*.

The translations by Lyon and Sloan quite rightly put accuracy before stylistic appeal. Buffon himself often sacrificed precision of argument for fluency of prose, and it would only have compounded the difficulty raised by that tendency were his translators to have done likewise.

Altogether, then, the book is a very welcome addition to the Buffon literature. One can only hope – although the editors are silent on this – that there may be a sequel to it covering the rest of Buffon's long life and extensive writings. Meanwhile, readers may like to know of a much briefer collection in translation that appeared too recently to be noticed by Lyon and Sloan. It is called *Buffon's Natural history* (Open University Press); it forms Units 17–18 of the Open University course on the Enlightenment and is prepared by David Goodman.

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NANCY M. FRIEDEN, *Russian physicians in an era of reform and revolution: 1856–1905*, Princeton, N.J., and Guildford, Surrey, Princeton University Press, 1981, 8vo, pp. xvii, 378, illus., £22.80.

Apart from the names of a few of the more illustrious of its members, little is generally known in the West about the medical profession in pre-Revolutionary Russia, and this pioneering study by a social historian is welcome and timely.

After an interesting section on the social background of medical students and the lowly status of doctors, reflected in pay and rank (a medical degree ranked lower than any other university degree) in mid-nineteenth-century Russia, a major part of the book examines the crucial role of the Zemstvo system, which sought to bring medical care within reach of the poorest and most remote inhabitants of those Russian provinces where it was introduced, in strengthening professional solidarity among its doctors. A lively medical press and several medical societies, notably the Pirogov Medical Society, guided and inspired the doctors in their struggles against what they considered to be maladministration and injustice on the part of the central government.

The increasing bitterness of this conflict dominates the final part of the book, and although the author denies that the actions of delegates to the congresses of the Pirogov Society were politically motivated, it is easy to see how the situation was ripe for the political infiltration of this and other professional organizations that occurred later. As always in pre-Revolutionary Russia, however, only the opposition is articulate. Despite censorship, all the available documentary evidence is against the Establishment and impartiality is strained. Nevertheless, the evidence is fairly presented and the reader will reach his own conclusions.

In some respects this book is premature, for it deals with a body of men whose primary professional activities are not widely enough known. A history of Zemstvo medicine, for instance, is long overdue.

The bibliography is excellent and reveals the thoroughness with which the subject has been researched. The problem of what to provide in the way of illustrations has been ingeniously solved. A minor criticism is the habit of translating, rather than transliterating, the names of Russian periodicals – as if one were to refer to “Pravda” as “Truth”. I. I. Mechnikov is introduced early in the book as a “pioneer in comparative embryology” whereas it is for his work on the pathology of inflammation that he is remembered today.

The book can be recommended as a valuable source of factual information on the medical profession and its aims and aspirations in pre-Revolutionary Russia.

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