

Book Reviews

astrology and Neoplatonism—is to misrepresent and misunderstand this whole transitional period. As he explains, “Despite pronouncements that historians must study the past in its own terms and avoid ‘whiggish’ judgement of early modern thinkers on the basis of how modern their science seems, the agenda of who and what to study in the scientific revolution remains anchored in a developmental sequence” (p. 457). Bacon felt that Severinus had wasted his clear intellect on Paracelsianism. But when in the *Idea medicinae* Severinus advised his readers to sell their possessions and to investigate and learn from nature and the laboratory, Bacon approved. As he wrote, when Paracelsus and Severinus “lift up their voices and summon men to gather together in honour of Experience, then they are the right criers for me” (p. 264).

Having explored at length the contemporary influence of the *Idea medicinae*, Shackelford uses the final part of his book to investigate in depth two of its most important early readers and interpreters. These were the Latin defence of the *Idea medicinae* by Ambrosius Rhodius, published in Copenhagen in 1643, and the commentaries (1660 and 1663) written by the first professor of chemistry at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, the Scotsman, William Davidson (c.1593–1669). Davidson is of particular interest to historians of English medicine and chemistry, as it was he who had taken Thomas Hobbes, and possibly William Petty, through “a course of chymistrie” in Paris (p. 232). Sir Isaac Newton also owned a copy of Davidson’s earlier chemistry text, the *Philosophia pyrotechnica* (Paris, 1633–35)—though it does not appear in the list of books he annotated. Shackelford’s examination of Davidson’s application and development of Severinus’s *semina* theory of disease, and its application to the cure of fevers through chemical medicines, is in itself an important and illuminating piece of work.

All told, this is an excellent piece of scholarship that brings to life the work and influence of a leading theorist in early modern medicine. Shackelford sheds clear light on how the Galenic tradition of medical practice was gradually overthrown in this period, and how

chemistry emerged—albeit slowly—as the foundation of a new medical tradition.

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Gianna Pomata and Nancy G Siraisi (eds), *Historia: empiricism and erudition in early modern Europe*, Cambridge, MA, and London, MIT Press, 2005, pp. viii, 490, £32.95, \$50.00 (hardback 0-262-16229-6).

This is an excellent collection of essays focused upon the relation between the textual and linguistic expertise of humanist scholars in the early modern period and the development of empirical proficiency in natural history and medicine. The missing link between the two is a genre of works related to both human and natural subjects collectively called *historia*. Focusing upon various forms of *historia* the collection forcefully makes the case that the observation and description of nature in the early modern era was interwoven with practices relevant also to displays of humanist erudition. In the Renaissance, the study of nature is, as the editors claim, inseparable from the study of culture. The fact that antiquarian studies, philological learning, as well as civic and religious histories should have something in common with observationally based natural philosophy and medicine may seem baffling. Yet, it is just such a relationship that each essay in this collection skilfully helps to bring to light.

The primary fault of many edited volumes is usually a lack of a clearly defined problem that holds focus throughout. This is manifestly *not* the case in this collection. Much of the reason why has to do with its origin—a workshop sponsored by the Max Planck Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte that kept a specific question consistently in view. Was there a link between the practices of early modern physicians and naturalists in their use of *historia* and the earlier Renaissance discussion of *historia* as antiquarian knowledge? This volume clearly demonstrates that such a connection existed in a rich variety of forms.

In their essays, Anthony Grafton first illustrates that some traditions of the Renaissance *artes historicae* emphasized empirical knowledge, while Brian Ogilvie highlights the shared moral and didactic purposes that existed between the portrayal of human deeds and the honest description of natural particulars. Both Ian Maclean and Gianna Pomata address the Aristotelian context in which *historia* gained new meanings. Maclean traces a revised empiricist outlook among humanists to a rethinking of the value of descriptive knowledge in Aristotle's zoological works. Pomata, on the other hand, looks carefully at the uses of *historia* among anatomists and physicians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These were Aristotelian trained writers who, she argues, looked at *historia* as descriptions of individual parts of the body and who gave such descriptions a preliminary role in the pursuit of traditional questions about function and final cause. Antiquarianism is more centrally the focus of Martin Mulsow's essay, which describes the humanist creation of a new *historia* of religion that combined traditional interest in texts with attention to the description of material artefacts and the customs of peoples. In his contribution, Donald Kelley connects shifts in the meaning of human history to the re-evaluation of *historia*, with the result that history itself emerged as a more methodical and system based subject.

The second part of the collection focuses upon "the working practices of learned empiricism" and gives us specific examples of how some early modern writers joined erudition and empiricism in works related to natural philosophy and medicine. Laurent Pinon discusses the meaning of *historia* in Conrad Gesner's important *Historia animalium*, noting Gesner's emphasis upon practical utility (as opposed to explanation or classification) in an account of animals based both upon contemporary observation and historical reports. Ann Blair uses a study of Theodor Zwinger's inventory of types of human actions, his *Theatrum humanae vitae*, to illustrate the value of the *ars excerpenti*, a tradition of excerpting individual sections from various texts in order to recontextualize them for new purposes. In the writings of the humanist

physician Michele Savonarola, Chiara Crisciani focuses upon how the role of a court physician who was both healer and counsellor helped to connect the writing of civil history with writing *historia medica*. In both cases *historia* meant *casus* (case study) and the description of particulars (*exempla*).

The same emphasis upon *casus* underscores Nancy Siraisi's examination of several Roman medical authors from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. For these doctors case histories blended with natural history and antiquarian knowledge as different aspects of the practice of *historia*, each requiring attention to material evidence in the discussion of texts, ancient or modern. Finally, Peter Miller offers a compelling study of the day-to-day practices of Nicolas de Peiresc, who in many ways represents the full development of the learned empiricist, effortlessly moving between the description of nature and the study of ancient customs and artefacts, and bringing together the skills of both language and observation as a combined approach to knowledge.

These are first-rate essays, interesting and instructive in their own right and expertly combined by the editors into a collection that makes the whole greater than the sum of parts. The subject of early modern empiricism once again enters the spotlight with this volume and what one sees as a result is the emergence of a scientific sensibility that, rather than being set off from intellectual tradition, results from a synthesis of disciplines.

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Bettina Wahrig and Werner Sohn (eds),
*Zwischen Aufklärung, Policy und Verwaltung,
zur Genese des Medizinwesens (1750–1850),*
Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, Band 102,
Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003, pp. 212,
€59.00 (hardback 3-447-04822-0).

Medical practice in the latter half of the eighteenth century was faced with several extraneous phenomena: the development of medical administrative regimes covering entire