

Obituary

OBITUARY

CHARLES DONALD O'MALLEY

1 April 1907– 7 April 1970

It is with great regret that we report the sudden death from coronary heart disease on 7 April 1970 of Professor Charles Donald O'Malley, M.A., Ph.D., the distinguished medical historian of the University of California at Los Angeles, the leading authority on Renaissance anatomy and especially on the life and work of Andreas Vesalius.

Charles Donald O'Malley was born at Alameda, California on 1 April 1907, the son of James and Isabel (née Ten Eyck), and was educated at Stanford University, where he joined the teaching staff as a historian in 1946. He had already published his first book in 1942 on Jacopo Aconcio (1492–1565) and his abiding interest in Vesalius had produced his first paper, 'Vesalius as a clinician', published in the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* in 1944. This was the first fruit of a long collaboration with J. B. de C. M. Saunders, Professor of Anatomy at Berkeley, from which sprang the two well-known volumes on *The Illustrations from the Works of Andreas Vesalius* (1950) and *Leonardo da Vinci on the Human Body* (1952). Before embarking on these works, O'Malley spent a considerable period on anatomical studies in the dissecting room, an experience which enabled him to appreciate more intimately the problems which had beset the anatomists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. At Stanford he had the advantage of researching in the contemporary texts contained in the Lane Medical Library, of which he was for a time Director, and which had been enriched by the acquisition of the late Karl Sudhoff's Library.

When he accepted the invitation of Professor Magoun in 1958 to go to his department of anatomy in the University of California at Los Angeles as Visiting Professor in the History of Medicine, O'Malley had already published more than twenty papers directly or indirectly related to the life and work of Vesalius and was becoming widely known as the leading authority on his subject. In the following year he was given a permanent appointment at Los Angeles as Professor of Medical History, at first in the important and rapidly expanding department of anatomy and then a few years later as head of an independent Department of Medical History located in ample accommodation in the new Medical Center. Despite the heavy demands on his time made by the task of developing a new department, giving and organizing courses of lectures for medical students, initiating and supervising the work of graduate students, and rapidly building up a fine collection of early medical texts, O'Malley continued his own researches steadfastly. In 1959 there was published in London the splendid facsimile edition of the Thomas Geminus version (1553) of the *Fabrica* with a substantial introduction embodying a great deal of original research. In 1961 appeared two more volumes, one being a facsimile of the first English book on anatomy by David Edwardes (1532), with a long introduction written jointly with Professor K. F. Russell, and the other an annotated English translation of William Harvey's manuscript *Lectures on the Whole of Anatomy*, edited in collaboration with F. N. L. Poynter and K. F. Russell.



Professor C. D. O'Malley (1907–1970)

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Through all these years the detailed research for his *magnum opus* on Vesalius was patiently pursued and in 1964 his definitive work *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels 1514–1564* was published by the University of California Press and was an immediate success. On his last visit to Europe, in the autumn of 1969, after attending the Seventh British Congress on the History of Medicine at Cambridge, he travelled to Brussels as the guest of the Belgian government to receive one of the most important Belgian literary prizes—the Eugène Baie Prize—for his work. Much of the intervening period had been spent in producing (in collaboration with Dr. Edwin Clarke, of University College, London) a massive contribution to the history of neuroanatomy, published in 1968 as *The Human Brain and Spinal Cord, a Historical Study illustrated by Writings from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century*, a volume of nearly 1,000 pages which has been the subject of many appreciative reviews.

Always in great demand as a lecturer, O'Malley was to have opened a symposium in Melbourne in May of this year and later in the same month to give a lecture at the formal opening of the new Fishbein Center of Medical History in the University of Chicago. He had already planned and started a comprehensive history of anatomy and he was looking forward to spending the next university session as Clark Professor in the famous Clark Library, where he was to hold an international symposium on Medicine in seventeenth-century England, following the pattern of his earlier symposia on Leonardo da Vinci and the History of Medical Education. The volume of the proceedings of the former was published last year and has been acclaimed as one of the most important contributions to Vincian studies to appear for many years. The proceedings of the symposium on medical education has been edited and seen through the press by O'Malley and is shortly to be published.

He made annual visits to Europe in the course of his researches and wherever he went he won lifelong friends by the warmth of his personality and his quiet devotion to scholarship. He was almost as much at home in London as in his native California and he was one of the small and exclusive group of medical historians who have been made honorary fellows of the Faculty of the History of Medicine of the Society of Apothecaries. An honorary member of many European societies, he was at the time of his death President of the International Academy of the History of Medicine and Immediate Past President of the History of Science Society in the United States.

In his private life, O'Malley found relaxation in literature, music, and the arts. He was an accomplished pianist and the grand piano in his gracious home in Bel Air was rarely closed for long, while his fine personal library testifies to the wide range of his interests. He married in 1939 Dr. Frances Keddie, a consultant in dermatology who has been working on full-time research in the university at Los Angeles. She was the devoted companion of all his travels abroad and shared in all his interests.

The loss to the department in Los Angeles is incalculable, for men of his experience and abilities are few. Many younger workers in his field of study will recall with gratitude the generosity with which he sustained and forwarded their interests with his expert help and advice. His colleagues in many countries have learned with deep emotion of the sudden passing of a man they had been privileged to count as a friend. Their sympathy goes out to his wife in her sad loss.

F. N. L. POYNTER