

Book Reviews

power over nature, can work with natural means to effect cures. There is much that is theologically remarkable and psychologically astute, such as the description of the soul's desire for, and integral connection to, the body (chapter 4) or the account, which mingles physiological predisposition and psychological dynamic, of how anger rises from black bile (chapters 3.8 and 6.1). As Berger recognizes by her decision to retain the Latin terms *flegmata* and *livores*, Hildegard devises an original classification of the humours into dominant and subordinate that adds dynamism to the account of disease.

Both because the accompanying material is inadequate and because the editor has not made sufficiently clear how much she has omitted in translation, this volume will not be of use to scholars, who will in any case want to wait for the new edition to appear in the series *Corpus christianorum: continuatio mediaevalis*. Those who wish to use this text in courses on medieval women or medieval medicine would do well to assign along with it Florence Eliza Glaze's splendid essay on Hildegard as medical writer in *Voice of the living light: Hildegard of Bingen and her world*, edited by Barbara Newman (Berkeley, 1998).

Caroline Walker Bynum,
Columbia University

Doreen Evenden, *The midwives of seventeenth-century London*, Cambridge History of Medicine series, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. xvii, 260, £40.00, \$64.95 (hardback 0-521-66107-2).

The art of midwifery, one of the most prominent female occupations in the early modern period, has attracted a good deal of attention from historians over the last couple of years. Fascinating material has been discovered, illuminating the lives, the work and the socio-economic standing of

this group of working women. Several studies have challenged long-held beliefs such as, for example, that midwives were all poor, incompetent and ignorant crones. To prove these old and stale prejudices wrong and "redress the injustices created by many centuries of neglect and misunderstanding" (p. 23) is also the principle aim of Doreen Evenden's detailed, archival-based study of seventeenth-century London midwifery.

She shows that, until the 1720s, the time when male-midwives increasingly began to squeeze women out of practice, the ritual of childbirth was the most prominent part of a collective culture of early modern women, and the midwife was one of its central figures. Evenden was able to trace more than 1200 official, Church licensed midwives in the different parishes of the fast growing English capital. By discussing midwives' training in great detail, she proves that this group of working women was far better trained than often assumed, thanks to an "unofficial" system of apprenticeship served under the supervision of a senior midwife. She also investigated midwives' clients, a world which was hardly known. In addition, her archival records reveal that midwives generally originated from the respectable and economically better off part of London's early modern society.

The amount and variety of archival material the author worked through is undoubtedly impressive. And it is precisely her use of archival data as opposed to contemporary accounts and printed sources that makes Evenden's work so original. However, her explicit decision to base her arguments almost exclusively on archive evidence is also problematic. As the material is almost never analysed within the wider context of early modern medical world and female culture, her reconstruction of the lives and practices of London's midwives hardly ever reaches beyond statistical profiles and the enumeration of details. Other sources such as, for example, seventeenth-century obstetric literature that could have "fleshed out" her archival

Book Reviews

findings, Evenden dismisses almost completely. These texts, predominantly written by male medical practitioners, are, in her view, of little use to illuminate the world of female birth practice. She argues that male practitioners had hardly any obstetrical practice, and, with regard to the theoretical basis, their treatises present only an untidy mixture of useless Galenic or humoral theory, marred by superstition.

Evenden's unwillingness to admit the limitations of her material enables her, however, to reconstruct a conflict-free female world revolving around the birth event. According to her, seventeenth-century London midwives were united in a "proud sisterhood", fully aware of their responsibilities and commitments to their sister midwives as well as their clients. In this happy world, men are "aliens", and male medical practitioners are constructed as incompetent and totally unskilled aggressors threatening not only the lives of helpless, pregnant women but also the livelihood of competent midwives.

I am sceptical about the existence of such a "golden age of midwifery". Some recent studies have, for example, pointed out that the daily experience of midwifery was to a large degree shaped by tension, friction, and conflict occurring in the midwives' associations with other official and non-official midwives, with their apprentices and, ultimately with their patients. The work of midwifery differed widely in early modern Europe. Evenden's book has convinced me that concerning their training and economic status, the officially licensed seventeenth-century London midwives were much better off than many of their colleagues on the continent. But how these women conceived their art and interpreted their role as women workers, as wives or widows, or active members of their community, remains somehow sketchy and superficial. This story still needs to be written.

Claudia Stein,
University of Warwick

Renate Wilson, *Pious traders in medicine: a German pharmaceutical network in eighteenth-century North America*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, pp. xiv, 258, illus., \$37.50 (hardback 0-271-02052-0).

Not many books try to bring together the history of religious movements and the description of (in today's view) "secular practices" like pharmaceutical trade. The title of Renate Wilson's study *Pious traders in medicine* shows the author's conviction that eighteenth-century medical practice was fundamentally influenced by its religious context. The book aims at reconstructing the Pietist medical and pharmaceutical network, which—according to Wilson—originated in the Francke Foundations at Halle (Germany) and which was established in the American colonies during the eighteenth-century. Wilson wants to show how German "Pietist medicine" interacted with the American environment and to what extent European traditions of voluntarism and philanthropy were integrated into the social policies of the emerging American republic. The study is based on records mainly from the archive of the Francke Foundations at Halle as well as on secondary literature on Halle Pietism and on eighteenth-century medicine and pharmaceuticals.

The first part of the book deals with the German and European scene of the story. Wilson describes the institutional centre of Halle Pietism, the orphanage and the schools founded by the theologian August Hermann Francke, who had been driven from Leipzig and Erfurt and had found refuge in Brandenburg-Prussia. Mainly borrowing from older studies by Werner Piechocki and Wolfram Kaiser, Wilson describes the "medical institutions" of the Francke Foundations, the infirmary and the dispensary, where in mid-century (according to the medical director Johann Juncker) 12,000 poor outpatients were treated every year. These charitable institutions were financed