

Book Reviews

interesting book, a valuable contribution to the author's field of study, and a useful work of reference. It should interest many in addition to those for whom the author wrote.

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LLOYD G. STEVENSON (editor), *A celebration of medical history*, Baltimore, Md., and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, 8vo, pp. vi, 228, illus., £12.75.

The fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Institute and Library for the History of Medicine at the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, was appropriately marked by festivities, academic as well as gastronomic. Distinguished scholars were invited from Europe and the USA to lecture, and their offerings, together with the formal comments on them by Hopkins alumni, form the basis of this elegant and enjoyable volume. The range is wide, from the historiography of diseases and medical metaphors, to sixteenth-century England, Glisson and Wepfer, pre-revolutionary France, and nineteenth-century Italy. There is much here to admire, and indeed to stimulate thought. Friends of the Institute will be especially glad to have the varied assessments of the value and importance of its Library, not just in the context of other American medical schools and libraries, but internationally as one of the joint creators of the indispensable MEDLARS. The wittiest revelation of all is reserved until last: the birth of the Institute owed far more to W. H. Welch than he ever knew or suspected.

Medical History salutes the Institute on its golden jubilee, and expresses the confident hope that it will continue to meet and surpass the expectations of its founding fathers as a model worthy of worldwide emulation.

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SRBOLJUB ZIVANOVIC, *Ancient diseases. The elements of palaeopathology*, trans. by Lovett F. Edwards, London, Methuen, 1982, 8vo, pp. xxii, 285, illus., £17.50.

In recent years there has been a welcome and increasing interest by the medical world in palaeopathology – that is, the study of ancient disease. In this country the most readily available sources of data for palaeopathological study are the large number of skeletons from archaeological excavations. Most of the examination and assessment of skeletal material is carried out by archaeologists and anthropologists with no medical background. The publication of this book is therefore welcome, especially as its stated aim is to be a comprehensive text in palaeopathology from the medical standpoint for archaeologists and anthropologists. This is an aspect that should be encouraged, as far too many reports of disease in skeletal material have in the past been based on inaccurate diagnosis – probably due to lack of a medical background and confusion of terminology. Sadly then, although this book, as well as considering material and methods, covers a wide range of abnormalities and disease, it does not fulfil its promise.

There are not enough illustrations and some of those which are present do not show what they set out to. A striking example is Plate 13 – a full-page picture of a lady with apparent changes in the teeth characteristic of hyperfluorosis. The teeth are hardly visible, however. It is also disappointing to find Dr Zivanovic stating that a “Disease which is very common and quite easily diagnosed in Palaeopathological material is Rheumatoid Arthritis”. Most workers find that there are very few examples of this disease in skeletal material, possibly this is due to the difficulty of diagnosis or the poor archaeological recovery of diagnostically essential parts such as the small bones of hands and feet. Perhaps rheumatoid arthritis was commoner in Eastern Europe, from which many of the palaeopathological examples are drawn, but no details are given.

This book will provide an interesting background read in this fascinating subject but will not be so useful as a diagnostic aid.

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Many authors resent critical analysis of this sort as an attitude but not real evaluation. The other approach tends to pursue another extreme: a formal registration of the data of the text. It divests a work of art of its magic and poetry by a pragmatic and statistical treatment that dissects the text and explains but little. The process of encoding will only make any sense if besides the encoder who sends the information it includes the recipient or the addressee who in this case is the reader. In contrast to the writer who is always concrete the reader who is addressed is in fact an abstract notion, he is any of the thousands of people who may read this book. This abstract reader may not be prepared or willing to decode the message or even take it. The reasons are numerous and various. Who wrote the first American slave autobiography after obtaining his freedom? e. Olaudah Equiano Olaudah Equiano was born in what is now Nigeria before being captured and sold as a slave in America. b. Religious This passage comes from Chapter 9 of William Bradford's History of the Plymouth Plantation. He uses Old Testament imagery to describe the flight of the Puritans to escape the religious oppression they suffered in England. In addition, the passage is from the poem The Bells. c. railroads The author Walt Whitman refers to the important role played by the railroad lines made of iron that helped to develop and tie together the Midwestern states.