

of town physician appeared in the middle ages but, by the early modern period, it had disappeared from the major urban centres, superseded by the development of hospitals and confraternities (which often employed doctors “for the poor”), and, more generally, by the expansion of the medical profession. In contrast, the post became increasingly common in small and medium sized localities and, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, most communities in the area under consideration boasted one or more *condotte*.

The book highlights the power of initiative of local governments, which sent councillors to recruit physicians and surgeons in Venice and Padua, levied taxes to provide the community with essential services (the schoolteacher, the lawyer, the organist, as well as the *condotto*) and paid grants to the local young people wishing to undertake medical studies. Thus the common assumption that small, mountainous communities lagged far behind urban centres in their provision of medical services appears misconceived. Far from being isolated and economically marginal, these highlands were part of the trade routes between Venice and the empire; moreover they were socially stratified and actively engaged in timber and woollen-cloth production. Not only were these small communities willing to pay their doctors stipends equivalent to those offered by provincial towns, they also often chose the more expensive “foreign” candidate over a local man in order to boost the honour of the commune. Far from being simply determined by financial considerations, the selection of candidates was influenced by political motivations and by reasons of civic pride. Payment of the *medico condotto* was not standard but negotiated on an individual basis, and the fame of the candidate was often capable of securing him a good income. Indeed, another unexpected finding of this study is the appeal that the position of *condotto* exercised upon distinguished practitioners—court physicians for example, or those with prestigious jobs in the Venetian colonies. The possibility of having a private practice in parallel with public duties was another attraction of the post: nothing

prevented the community doctor from treating private patients for part of the day and in nearby villages. Hence the professional activities of *condotti* covered a rather wide geographical area. This shows that it can be misleading to take the number of resident practitioners as evidence of the availability of medical services in a given locality. Even the smallest communities appear much better equipped with licensed and learned practitioners than is often assumed. A community doctor, therefore, was not just employed to guarantee the stable presence of a practitioner in remote, unattractive locations. A *condotto* was above all a sort of sanitary official, who was expected to act informally as local Protophysician, checking the ingredients used by pharmacists and the quality of spring waters, authorizing other practitioners to practise locally, and performing autopsies if a death was suspicious. He acted as a legal expert in court and could proclaim the state of contagion.

At times the book is loosely structured and encumbered with excessive detail. A conclusive section, bringing together the various strands of the argument, would have been welcome. These are minor blemishes, however, in a study that provides a mine of material and new perspectives to advance our understanding of the complex figure of the town physician.

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Martin Stuber, Stefan Hächler and Luc Lienhard (eds), *Hallers Netz. Ein europäischer Gelehrtenbriefwechsel zur Zeit der Aufklärung*, Studia Halleriana, vol. 9, Basel, Schwabe 2005, pp. x, 592, illus., SFr 98.00, €68.50 (hardback 3-7965-1327-1).

Almost 400 illustrations make this 600-page study look like a catalogue. However, the pictures provide additional material, some as illustrations, depicting

people with whom Swiss super-scholar Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777) exchanged letters, some charting the network Haller was putting in place first in Göttingen and later in Switzerland. More than thirty schematic maps merit special attention, even if they all show Europe in an identical frame. Dots in different shapes and shades tell us about the quantity and the quality of the correspondence, not only of Haller, but also of contemporary scientists, in order to enable comparison.

Haller was, by any standard, a very prolific writer, not only of letters. He published 24 books in 50 volumes, many of which he reworked for second editions; he wrote 450 essays, 9000 book reviews, and edited another 52 volumes. Of his letters exchanged with 1139 male and 50 female correspondents, close to 17,000 have survived. He was a professor of anatomy, botany and surgery at Göttingen University from 1736 to 1753, and later had different political functions in his native town of Bern where he returned in 1753. His work includes studies in natural philosophy, physiology, medicine, botany, and also poetry—all of which are discussed in his correspondence. The fact that, today, we know so much about Haller is due to the work of Swiss researchers who, with the present book, are completing their ninth volume of the series ‘*Studia Halleriana*’.

The previously published volumes of this series were devoted to individual correspondences (vols. 1, 3–5), Haller’s Paris diary (vol. 2), and one of his books (vol. 6). Other volumes give a complete bibliography of Haller’s works (vol. 8) and a repertory of his correspondence between 1724 and 1777 (vol. 7). Volume 9 is a study of several aspects of this correspondence including a bird’s eye view of it all. This “general analysis” of Haller’s correspondence fills the first 200 pages (chapters 1 to 10, written by the three editors). The second part (chapters 11 to 19) provides 300 pages of case studies with a wide variety of topics, for example, the definition of illness, the use of different languages, problems of economy, cataloguing Swiss flora, tele-diagnostics. In this second part, every chapter has its own author including, in addition to the editors,

Urs Boschung, Barbara Braun-Bucher, David Krebs, Claudia Profus, and Hubert Steinke. The extensive bibliography and the annotated index of names make this book very useful indeed.

Haller was very keen on establishing contacts through the exchange of letters, especially in his capacity as a medical doctor. When he was only twenty-one, he wrote a note saying that new inventions and publications depended upon extensive correspondence among experts, and he added that it was also most interesting to see the personality and talent of the writers revealed in letters (p. 49). Within Haller’s net there were 286 medical doctors of whom over 4000 letters from 200 different places have survived. We learn from the book (pp. 127ff.) that this correspondence was not entirely professional, but touched many themes, such as when Antoine de Haen from Vienna discussed an imminent penury with Haller. Some fellow doctors needed letters of introduction, others sought advice for their patients (who also sometimes wrote directly to Haller). Most doctors who stuck to medical topics lived in Switzerland; contacts farther away often had less thematic restrictions.

An essay by Stefan Hächler in the second part investigates the practice of “tele-medicine” in the eighteenth century. If, for instance, the treatment of an eye-illness took a long time (doctors waiting for one eye to heal before the other underwent surgery), this time was filled with consultations by letter. When in 1761 in Paris a new method of cataract surgery was practised, Haller participated directly via letters exchanged before and immediately after the operation with a doctor he had suggested in the first place. In this, as in other cases, surgeons and doctors quite often included a detailed account of an illness when writing to Haller, asking for a consultation.

What Hächler adds to those observations is somewhat typical of this volume as a whole: he completes the analysis of the content of the letters with a statistical survey, enriching his essay by diagrams answering the following questions: how many first consultations did Haller give, and how many on average? What

profession did those have who asked for his medical opinion? What country did they come from? The database established for the Swiss project (which is also online: <http://www.haller.unibe.ch>, but in German only) has been prepared for this kind of search. Even if, in the case of the medical correspondents, the sample comprises only 152 letters (70 of which were from doctors or university professors of medicine; 75 of which came from outside Switzerland, etc.), the insight provided by quantitative evaluation is telling. It helps one understand the eighteenth-century culture of producing and exchanging information via letters, which is often overlooked because its traces are hidden away in archives. With the steady progress of the Swiss researchers, at least Haller's net can no longer be overlooked.

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Philip M Soergel (ed.), *Sexuality and culture in medieval and renaissance Europe. Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3rd series, vol. II, New York, AMS Press, 2005, pp xv, 287, \$89.50 (hardback: ISSN 0081-8244, ISBN 0-404-64552-6).

In this thoughtfully edited volume, Philip Soergel brings together an international group of nine scholars, all historians of pre-modern society and culture. Their essays range from micro-studies of rural and urban women to broad statements about the nature and transmission of the Hippocratic corpus. All provide a fresh perspective on an often misunderstood topic: the history of human sexuality. Here, the topic is taken seriously and addressed with confidence and skill.

Sexuality and culture opens with an engaging survey of medieval women's medicine. Monica Green reviews and discusses recent scholarship on technologies of the body, sexual difference, and the history of childbirth. There are also references to edited texts and on-line databases, the latter allowing for what Green aptly calls the

democratization of knowledge. Her concern to elucidate theories of human sexuality is shared by Helen King in an essay that explains how ancient Greek texts re-entered the medical mainstream in the sixteenth century. This Hippocratic revival enhanced the perception that the female body required discrete and distinctive therapies. No longer was it commonplace to infer that women, with genitalia supposedly shrunk inward, were hardly different from men. The scientific thinking of the sixteenth century was more expansive and measured than this.

Of course, people in earlier centuries were no less interested in acquiring knowledge and testing traditional norms. This is evident in three essays on the medieval world. In the first, 'A medieval territory for touch', Fernando Salmón reviews Latin commentaries on the five senses. He argues that touch represented a complex of sensations, surrounding the body like a net, and gradually becoming the locus of self and experience. What ultimately mattered were not simply the sexual overtones associated with touch, but the role it had in forming personal identity. Medieval constructions of personality reflected an interest in natural philosophy and admittedly had a part in Latin physiognomy. This was the art of discerning character and sexual nature by studying genitalia. Rather than dismiss physiognomy as little better than pseudo-science, Joseph Ziegler uses the scholastic commentaries it generated to document alternative ways of perceiving the body. More detailed as to practice is Carol Lansing's essay reconstructing a civic inquiry into female sodomy in 1295. Her story of Guercia of Bologna is so artfully told that it deepens our understanding of an aspect of sexuality seldom glimpsed in medieval texts.

Equally informative are four essays that address the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Using Christian tradition as her starting point, Merry Weisner-Hanks places Martin Luther centre stage, deftly highlighting his ideas about the male libido and how they figured in Reformation theology and social thought. Joel Harrington discusses German society as well. Exploring the plight of an unwed mother