

Book Reviews

MIRKO D. GRMEK, *Les maladies à l'aube de la civilisation occidentale*, Paris, Payot, 1983, 8vo, pp.527, Fr.160.00 (paperback).

This a large and ambitious work which draws together and attempts to balance a range of information pertinent to an understanding of patterns of disease in early mediterranean societies. Grmek calls on relevant comment from Aristotle and arthritis to Hippocrates and hyperostosis. While the Greek world holds his interest in particular, he makes use of material and literary evidence well beyond this narrow classical domain. Sigerist and others have, of course, attempted this kind of treatment before, but it seems to me that Grmek's survey is especially successful, and he has been wise enough to restrict himself, when possible, to the Greek world. His emphasis has also been on disease, not medical history as a whole.

Of the thirteen chapters, about half thus have a considerable palaeopathological and palaeodemographic content. Tuberculosis, leprosy, and treponemal disease are discussed in special chapters, and Grmek rightly gives much consideration to the problem of possible inherited anaemias, associated skeletal changes and malaria (a subject well debated since the early writings of 'Malaria Jones' and the more recent skeletal work of Larry Angel).

It was interesting to see Grmek's evolutionary scheme for the mycobacteria, and the modest amount of time (well under 25,000 years) he allows for the differentiation of tuberculosis varieties in larger mammals and also for the separation of murine and human leprosy. Are these in fact more likely to be linked to very different human cultural development and rodent infestation? This question of the micro-evolution of parasites is without doubt one of the most interesting, yet neglected, aspects of medical history. It could in fact have been developed further when considering the evolution of the treponematoses, a recent study in the *International Journal of Systematic Bacteriology* (1981) showing that alternative hypotheses are possible.

As it stands, the book is a synthesis of a wealth of variable information, and it is understandable enough that his bibliography is representative but not exhaustive. Nevertheless, the bibliography is extensive, and my one grumble is that for those of us who will want to refer to it on various occasions, we have the job of plodding through it as footnotes, instead of as a properly assembled reference list at the back. Why on earth do publishers still do this? Perhaps for cost reasons, there are no illustrations, but the book would have benefited from a good selection of them.

Possibly the main contribution of this work is to emphasize that a balanced evaluation of ancient disease must be far more than simply finding neat equivalents in ancient and modern literature. The situation is far more complex and problematical than that. For instance, ancient symptoms can be tied up with the wrong diseases and disease names, and a condition might have been far more devastating in the past. So the evaluation and interpretation of ancient diseases needs really to be ecologically based, calling on environmental, social, and micro-evolutionary factors, with due attention to the limitations of early descriptions and possible changes in the modern situation.

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WILLIS J. ELWOOD AND A. FÉLICITÉ TUXFORD (editors), *Some Manchester doctors. A biographical collection to mark the 150th anniversary of the Manchester Medical Society 1834—1984*, Manchester University Press, 1984, 8vo, pp. xiv, 228, illus., £17.50.

The Manchester Medical Society's foundation in 1834 was part of a broader, national movement towards more structured professional organizations among rank-and-file doctors. Two years previously, Charles Hastings, a Worcester practitioner, had launched the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association, which for twenty-five years campaigned for legislative