

Book Reviews

ARTHUR E. IMHOF (editor), *Mensch und Gesundheit in der Geschichte* (Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften, no. 39), Husum, Matthiesen Verlag, 1980, 8vo. pp. vii, 415, DM. 69.00 (paperback).

This volume is the outcome of an international colloquium held in Berlin on 20–23 September 1978. A research project on the topic of ‘Men and Health in History’ by a group of social historians at the Friedrich-Meinecke Institute of the Free University of Berlin provided the impetus for the meeting. The colloquium was interdisciplinary, with speakers from various academic backgrounds, and it also broke national barriers by having participants from a variety of European countries, England, and Canada.

The broad theme of the conference gave those contributing considerable scope in their papers, but an examination of the volume shows that they were largely focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that a demographic approach to historical questions predominated. This, perhaps, reflects the special interests of Arthur E. Imhof, the organizer. Topics that receive such an approach include, amongst others, infant mortality in a French provincial town; mortality in the southern Swedish population; mortality from smallpox, measles, and whooping cough in Finland; and over two centuries of experience with smallpox in Geneva. While none of these analyses reaches startling conclusions, most are the result of careful research and provide useful material for the development of our understanding of historical mortality trends.

Several papers have themes relating to childbirth and infant care; Jacques Gélis, Marie-France Morel, and Françoise Loux elaborate on topics that they have illuminated before. Two papers by Inger Wikstrom-Haugen and Toby Gelfand provide insights into patient complaints at hospitals at Göteborg and Paris at the end of the eighteenth century. Jean-Pierre Goubert takes a suggestive look at the significance of water in hygienic concerns from 1830 to 1840, and the volume is rounded out by studies of pastoral medicine, the history of classification of causes of death and disease, and the importance of contemporary medico-biological knowledge in understanding the disease environment of the past. A useful bibliography and an index complete the book. As is to be expected in such volumes, all contributions are not even in quality, but it was clearly a stimulating conference for the participants and overall papers are worth having in this more permanent form.

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NICHOLAAS A. RUPKE, *The great chain of history. William Buckland and the English school of geology (1814–1849)*, Oxford University Press, 1983, 8vo, pp. xii, 322, illus., £22.50.

A broad survey of early nineteenth-century English geology in its cultural context would be welcome at any time, while a careful study of Oxford’s first reader in geology – the colourful cleric William Buckland – has long been a desideratum. Nicholaas Rupke’s readable and beautifully produced new book aims simultaneously to fill both these gaps in the history of science, with all the advantages and disadvantages that such a strategy implies.

Buckland was a fascinating, earthy, eccentric, and important figure, the kind of man never fully at ease with an audience until he had made them laugh. Known for his brilliant geological analogies between present and past, he would go to any lengths to illustrate a point: who else would pursue pioneering studies of the habits of ancient life forms by keeping a domestic menagerie of their nearest modern equivalents? For all the significance of Buckland, however, readers of *The great chain of history* may find that the focus on him produces a less balanced picture of English geology as a whole than might be wished. Many leading metropolitan men of science – Charles Lyell, John MacCulloch, George Greenough, Richard Owen, Henry De La Beche – receive insufficient attention in their own right. Geology after Buckland’s “Oxford school” ceases to occupy centre stage is misleadingly pictured in decline, and his scientific opponents are sometimes treated unsympathetically. Lyell’s non-progressionist version of uniformitarianism, for example, is condemned outright as being of “low intellectual calibre”. Without denying the idiosyncrasies of the author of the *Principles of geology*, a more fruitful