

Book Reviews

Juan Bautista Bru de Ramón, *El atlas zoológico, el megaterio y las técnicas de pesca valencianas 1742–1799*, ed. José M López Piñero, Colección Científicos Valencianos, Ayuntamiento de Valencia, 1996, pp. 348, illus., no price given (84–88639–86–4)

Juan Bautista Bru de Ramón (1742–1799), Valencian anatomical painter and dissector at the Real Gabinete de Historia Natural of Madrid, should have legitimately occupied a place in the history of the natural sciences at least for having drawn, described and assembled for the first time the skeleton of a fossil mammal, a megatherium, in 1789. Despite the praise of Georges Cuvier, who referred very positively to the Spaniard's work, the figure and importance of Bru de Ramón as both a zoological illustrator and a popularizer of anatomical knowledge have remained practically unrecognized in contemporary Spanish and international historiography. Professor López Piñero, who has been working on different aspects of Bru's production for more than a decade, here provides the first account of the life of this unjustly ignored man and an outline of his work. The book, an anthology of three sets of Bru's artistic works, begins with a detailed one-hundred page introduction, in which López Piñero combines Bru's biographical details with the academic and social conditions of an eighteenth-century anatomical painter and taxidermist. Centred on the Real Gabinete of Madrid, the work of Bru reflects the personal anxieties and technical difficulties that an illustrator of natural history had to encounter at the end of the eighteenth century.

The first of Bru's works contained in this volume, the *Colección de láminas que representan los animales y monstros del Real Gabinete de Historia Natural de Madrid*, published initially between 1784 and 1786, includes 71 illuminated engravings of dissected specimens and a brief description of each of them. As in many other similar collections published during the Enlightenment—beginning with Claude Perrault's *Histoire naturelle des animaux*—Bru's *Atlas zoológico*

was also intended to inform the public of things “as they are seen in this Real Gabinete” (p. 117). The absence of references from classical or medieval sources, avoiding the accumulation of unfounded curiosities and the dissemination of unreliable beliefs, turns the *Atlas* into “the first title of zoological popularization with a modern scope published in Spain” (p. 31). Following this is a selection of Bru's prints for the unpublished ichthyological treatise of Antonio Sáñez Reguart, ‘Colección de producciones de los mares de España’ (1783–96), and for the *Diccionario histórico de las artes de la pesca nacional* (1791–95), “the most important work of its kind published in the century” (p. 83). Finally the volume also contains the complete set of plates and the anatomical description of the megatherium produced by Bru and published by José Garriga in 1796. Like the previous sections, this one is also introduced by a precise historical account in which López Piñero explains not only the circumstances of its production and publication, but also the academic discontinuities that led to its being overlooked. Accompanied by a bibliographical appendix and profusely documented, this edition of Bru's works should interest anyone dealing specifically with the history of palaeontology and appeal to those concerned with the history of zoological and scientific illustration.

Javier Moscoso, Harvard University

Piero Camporesi, *The land of hunger*, trans. Tania Croft-Murray with the assistance of Claire Foley, Oxford, Polity Press, 1996, pp. 223, £39.50, \$49.95 (0–7456–0888–4).

Time may prove Piero Camporesi, Professor of Italian Literature in the University of Bologna, a prose-poet as well as social anthropologist of *food*: these designations are more likely than “empirical” or “cultural historian”. Not that the functions are exclusive, but Camporesi relies intensely on the power of narrative and embroidered description over

Book Reviews

argument and conclusion to frame his fundamentally nostalgic tone: a world lost to all but those who care to reify it.

Unlike the scientist, the prose-poet carries the reader into his orbit of realism and nostalgia by creating a narrative world in which language, especially a limpid prose style, lies at the forefront of his imagination. The subject here—the primacy of food in the early modern world—cannot usurp style's prominent place. Camporesi has been writing a book a year for over a decade, all now translated into English by the Polity Press in England and dealing with quasi-medical topics, if medicine is construed in the post-modern habit as broadly implicating the body: the body in its sacred and profane states, cold and sick, fed and hungry, robust and emaciated (the *corpo secco* of the artists), gyrating and levitating, dreaming and hallucinating, beatified and apostatized, rotting and fermenting, palpitating before God and bleeding on the cross. These subjects remain his themes.

Within these bodily transformations Camporesi's preoccupation remains primarily with food: bread, sugar, drink, meat, fish, soups; the basic perishables sustaining the lives of his pre-Bakhtinian sinners and saints and the protean fluids to which these foodstuffs are symbolically related: blood, water, urine; the detrius of other substances and their erotic and excremental connotations. These foods and fluids obviously had religious connotations in Christian countries. And to the degree that Camporesi connects food substances to symbolic actions and historical events he remains a modern Christian prose-poet (as well as social anthropologist of food) dealing with the most essential ingredients in the Catholic mixture that renders things Italian into forms they have come to represent in the post-Renaissance imagination.

His new book, a study of hunger and plenty in the pre-1700 Mediterranean world, builds on *The anatomy of the senses* and includes topics he has so wistfully described before: feast and famine within the sciences of the belly, the myth of plenty leading to the banquets in Cockaigne,

the haves and have-nots. He demonstrates what bread meant in that blemished world where poverty was the norm, not the deviation, and the degree to which malingerers connived for it. The difference in this book is that he also documents the plenitude.

This feast may appear less than medico-historical but it is an illusion. Poverty and wealth, haves and have-nots, always alter food stuffs: collecting as well as imbibing them. Every medical historian knows that as countries grew richer their diseases proliferated, as the poor were increasingly deprived of the meagre soil that at least kept them simple and healthy. Medical historians of the early modern period will therefore find this approach to hunger illuminating for its medical applications. The conjunction of food and health remains among the most puzzling of conjunctions, and the least explored. Myths of plenty and their opposites have not been viewed in relation to illness in any scholarly treatment, though the pathology of food is primal in the human imagination. Nothing has ever been able to dislodge it, not even the ethic that I am healthy, provided I eat. What is the history of the idea that life is a meal, and when did the pathology of food become preeminent? Recent studies of patients demonstrate their almost automatic confluences of food and sickness: doctor, I don't know what I ate last night that has brought me here . . . The *secular* history of the idea remains unexplored and is one in which medicine must be implicated.

G S Rousseau, Aberdeen

Thomas Bartholin, *On diseases in the Bible: a medical miscellany, 1672*, trans. James Willis, eds Johan Schioldann-Nielsen and Kurt Sorensen, *Acta Historica Scientiarum Naturalium et Medicinalium*, vol. 41, Copenhagen, The Danish National Library of Science and Medicine, 1994, pp. 147, DKK 200.00 (87-16-15099-6). Distributed by Munksgaard, 35 Nørre Søgade, DK-1016 Copenhagen K, Denmark (Fax: +45 3312 9387).