

## Book Reviews

large and aims to show that the concept of toxicity in ancient China was not only medical, but also cultural. This theme is not gone into deeply enough, as can be seen in the comparison between China and ancient Greece, which is far too generic to be significant, and leads to a generalization perhaps more apparent than real.

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**Thomas M Daniel**, *Captain of death: the story of tuberculosis*, University of Rochester Press, 1997, pp. viii, 296, illus., £37.50, \$49.95 (1-187882-2969).

Yet another book for the general reader on the history of tuberculosis, by a retired professor of medicine. Admittedly, most of the others are elderly, but one even has almost exactly the same title—J Arthur Myers' *Captain of all these men of death* (1977). The prospect is enough to make the professional historian of medicine sigh, and the opening chapters of this book, which recount evidence for the presence of tuberculosis in ancient societies, from Egypt and South America to Greece and Rome, and on into the Middle Ages, will not cause any recantation. The determined reader will discover, however, that the book is not without merit; indeed, with suitable health warnings, it might prove useful in certain types of teaching. Thomas Daniel has that rarest of gifts, the ability to explain scientific concepts clearly and comprehensively, and even the most unregenerate arts student could hardly fail to understand, for example, the workings of the immune system under his guidance. He also makes intelligent use of familiar material: another account of the illnesses of John Keats and Robert Louis Stevenson may make the heart sink, but Daniel's specific use of these case histories to illustrate "opposite poles on the sphere of resistance to tuberculosis" is admirable.

The clarity and intelligence with which Daniel deploys his scientific knowledge to make the science of tuberculosis accessible to the general

reader make this book both enjoyable and instructive. It is all the more depressing, therefore, that his literary style is old-fashioned enough to trouble most people with any historical training—and that surely must encompass a good share of the potential readership of this book. He employs the imagery of warfare unremittingly and intensively throughout the book: adversaries, enemies, struggles, battles, conquests, defeats and victories rampage unchecked across these pages in a most anachronistic fashion, somewhat at odds with the author's rather tacit recognition of cycles of tuberculosis virulence, and the failure of most primary infections to develop into actual disease. Daniel is a great hero-worshipper, too. Robert Koch is "one of history's most brilliant and most rigorous medical scientists"; Edward Livingston Trudeau, "a man destined to have an effect on medical practice in the treatment of tuberculosis unparalleled even by Koch". Worrying is the table on page 40 which depicts, on no statistical and very little other evidence, five epidemic waves of tuberculosis since 2000 BC. English readers will be irritated by Daniel's inability to spell English names correctly: Lady Mary Wortly [*sic*] Montagu and Joseph Priestly [*sic*] deserve better than that.

Pretty mixed blessings, then, for this volume. Blame, perhaps, lies with Rochester's editors, not just for the copy-editing, which is shoddy, but for being historically naive enough to let Daniel get away with a circa 1950 historical prose style which went out of fashion in the 1960s.

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**Phyllis Hembry**, *British spas from 1815 to the present: a social history*, edited and completed by Leonard W Cowie and Evelyn E Cowie, London, Athlone Press, 1997, pp. x, 292, illus., £50.00 (0-485-11502-6).

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Leicestershire town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch underwent a transformation from a