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**Review of : J. Andrew Mendelsohn, Annemarie Kinzelbach, Ruth Schilling (Hg.),
Civic Medicine. Physician, Polity, and Pen in Early Modern Europe, 2020**

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J. Andrew Mendelsohn, Annemarie Kinzelbach, and Ruth Schilling, eds. *Civic Medicine: Physician, Polity, and Pen in Early Modern Europe*. The History of Medicine in Context. London: Routledge, 2020. xvi + 316 pp. \$160.00 (978-1-472-45358-7).

It is rare for an edited volume to change the reader's perspective on a whole field of studies. *Civic Medicine*, however, has the potential to do just that. It presents early modern European medicine as deeply entangled in the public life of civic communities. Building on a justified critique of the economically inspired concept of the "medical marketplace," J. Andrew Mendelsohn, Annemarie Kinzelbach, and Ruth Schilling propose a concept of early modern medicine that understands medical practices primarily as "civic activities" aiming at the "common good" much more than at "goods exchange" (pp. 8–9). Medicine and the early modern physician are shown as profoundly involved in polity, responsibilities, and local context.

The empiric evidence is overwhelming: Physicians in early modern cities took on civic tasks en masse. They organized public health, epidemic management, and poor relief. They inspected bodies regarding illnesses such as leprosy, acted as experts in criminal cases, approved drugs, taught, and oversaw other health care providers. In addition, they functioned as local historians, catalogued the natural environments of the community, took on diplomatic functions, or acted as mayors. Civic authorities were particularly interested in their academic skills, which is why practices of writing figure prominently in the volume.

Civic Medicine changes our perspective on several master narratives like professionalization or social disciplining and shows that understanding early modern medicine and its practices requires a focus on communal ties rather than concepts of state-building or economic development. The volume, therefore, is also a plea for local histories of medicine instead of national ones. Its essays focus on specific settings, mainly cities in Central Europe and Italy, where the office of "city physician" was particularly widespread and stable over several centuries.

Civic Medicine succeeds in bringing together areas of research that have traditionally been disconnected, like the history of public health, charity, diplomacy, knowledge, scholarship, and publishing. It focuses on physicians as "major figures of intersection" (p. 8). Instead of a history of "control" from above—or a history of "choice" from below—it offers a history "from between" (p. 1), taking the physicians' practices of communication in their written and oral forms as its starting point.

The book begins with a concise introduction by the editors followed by a longer essay by J. Andrew Mendelsohn in which the concept of "civic medicine" is explained in depth. Then follow the eleven chapters of the book, arranged in five parts. The first three contributions by Michael Stolberg, Sabine Schlegelmilch, and Fritz Dross explore the ways in which physicians entered community life using

their writing expertise, sending letters of applications to the authorities, swearing oaths, and signing contracts as city physicians. While oaths and contracts show that some elements of the office were fixed and stable, there was also room for negotiation by the physicians as well as the authorities.

Part II focuses on evaluating and reporting. Laura Di Giammatteo, J. Andrew Mendelsohn, and Annemarie Kinzelbach analyze various forms of writing and communication by physicians within and around urban government. We learn about the complex interaction between medicine and polity in early modern Milan and the breadth of physicians' administrative tasks. Writing in the early modern Milanese *Tribunale di Sanità* was "not just a means of government. It was government" (p. 146). In the German city of Nördlingen, too, physicians, like other actors of the urban administration, acted not only "on paper" but "by paper" (p. 162).

The third part of the volume comprises three very rich articles that all share a profound interest in the locale. Valentina Pugliano introduces the reader to the Venetian physician Cornelio Bianchi, who treated patients in Damascus and acted as "diplomatic physician." Bianchi's exceptional notebook shows him in interaction with the local population, using writing models from merchant handbooks to travelogues, pondering on his own state of health in the unfamiliar surroundings, and obtaining information for the Venetian authorities. This story, maybe the most surprising in the volume, provides a very telling example of how medical diary writing could be a powerful "performance of citizenship" between spaces (p. 202). In turn, Gianna Pomata diligently explores the importance of location for early modern medicine. With physicians bound by their oaths to a largely sedentary lifestyle, many developed strong ties to the places and communities in which they worked and lived. Locality was very important in regimens of health, case collections, and for public health. Moreover, the focus on space also enables an understanding of disease as an early modern cultural phenomenon, like in the condition of "tarantism" in the Apulian city of Taranto. Early modern physicians, therefore, were also ethnographers of their communities, providing localized healing rites. Ruth Schilling complements the articles in this inspiring section with an account on the royal physician Christian Heinrich Erndtel and his description of Warsaw, which combines natural and civic history by blurring the boundaries between city and territory, politics and medicine, and court and urban community.

The last two contributions move from specific places to processes of translation. Elaine Leong traces the eventful journey of Lazare Rivière's *The Practice of Physick* "from university settings into early modern homes" (p. 258) by focusing on the publishing efforts of Cole and Culpeper in seventeenth-century London and their political aim to provide access to knowledge. Annemarie Kinzelbach and Marion Maria Ruisinger recount the story of the medical journal *Commercium litterarium* and show how its editors built on the commercial infrastructures of the early modern hub of Nuremberg.

While certainly not all articles fit equally well in the volume, put together they provide us with a fascinating kaleidoscope of what "civic medicine" in early modern Europe meant and how important it was. The volume opens up myriad

possibilities for further research on physicians and urban as well as courtly communities, writing techniques, space, translation, knowledge, and communication. *Civic Medicine* should be not just on the reading lists of historians of medicine, but anyone interested in how day-to-day life in early modern Europe was organized.

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