

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Visualizing Disease: The Art and History of Pathological Illustrations** *by Domenico Bertoloni Meli*

Hardback, 288 pages  
University of Chicago Press  
January 2018

This is a scholarly, extensively documented story of the illustration of morbid anatomy over the 300 years from the time of Vesalius in the 16th century to the mid-19th century and the arrival of photography and modern microscopy.

An outstanding feature of the book is the comprehensive account of the medical men, the artists, and their collaboration. Sometimes, the same person fulfilled both roles. The biographical information, a remarkable achievement of academic research, would by itself make the book a unique reference resource. But it is far more, reflecting as it does the changes in concepts of disease, technical advances in preservation of organs and creation of images for publication, and the ambitions and careers of individual doctors and artists.

The first chapter, dealing with the early modern period, presents a selection of publications with illustrations of diseased states, mainly rarities. The output of Amsterdam physician and anatomist Frederik Ruysch heralded a tension between artistic pretensions and pedagogy. The second and third chapters deal with works on preserved specimens with bone pathology playing a prominent role. Matthew Baillie, the physician nephew of William and John Hunter, used his own and his uncles' collections for high quality illustrations of both common and rare structural lesions.

The fourth chapter considers three authors: René Laennec on auscultation, Everard Home's work on diseases of the prostate, and James Wardrop and his "*Fungus haematodes*". The bland use of such obsolete names of disease perhaps betrays the author's background as a non-medically trained historian of science. The index has ten references for *Fungus haematodes*, a term used by 19<sup>th</sup> century authors to describe assorted luxuriant vascular "soft" tumours. Wardrop's publications are now credited as an excellent early description of retinoblastoma.

The succeeding chapters bring us to the use of colour, essential for images of disease in live patients with Robert Willan and others classifying skin disease. British authors including Richard Bright were prominent in producing expensive treatises from the 1820s, but the French have the last word in the final chapter with Jean Cruveilhier's huge work using mainly hand-coloured lithographs.

The reproductions are of a high quality and this remarkable, innovative book will appeal to readers interested in the history of pathological anatomy and its visual representation.

**Barry Hoffbrand**  
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