

BOOK REVIEW

A Time for All Things: The Life of Michael E. DeBakey *by Craig A. Miller*

Hardback, 616 pages
Oxford University Press
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Michael DeBakey stands out as one of the most recognisable characters from 20th century surgery. His 99-year life was a whirlwind of awesome innovation, firsts, and dealings with dignitaries. Leading the way for major vascular operations to become routine and successful, we are still getting our heads round some of his most ambitious projects such as the total artificial heart.

Craig Miller, who divides his career between vascular surgery and medical history, is well placed to write about DeBakey's life and work. The result is a very comprehensive biography, full of technical details, but grippingly readable at the same time. Meticulously referenced and with frequent footnotes, including explanation of some terminology for non-medical readers, it is amply illustrated with black and white photographs.

Opening with probably the most famous episode of DeBakey's later life, when he was called to supervise the care of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, what follows is a detailed chronological account of DeBakey's childhood, training, career, and personal life. Whilst enjoyably readable cover-to-cover, clear section headings and a useful index mean the book can be used as a reference work with ease.

Coming through strongly is DeBakey's hard-working nature, his technical brilliance and self-confidence. Miller is clearly in awe and this could have too easily become a hagiography, but instead is balanced by a more rounded perspective of the DeBakey family's pain at his long hours and his reputation as a hard taskmaster. Moreover, the book is far from dry and there are plenty of lighter anecdotes amongst the tales of death and gory glory.

As well as DeBakey, the reader is introduced to many other important characters with whom he interacted. We meet other notable surgeons such as DeBakey's pupil turned rival Denton Cooley, eminent patrons such as Princess Lilian of Belgium and famous patients such as the Duke of Windsor. Moreover, the book provides a good overview of 20th century surgery in general.

A 600-page book on a single clinician may seem over-indulgent but comes across in this case as completely justified. It is hard to believe a more comprehensive biography will be written about this most colourful of careers, and I would recommend *A Time for All Things* to anyone with even a vague interest in the history of surgery.

Will Parker
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