

Skin Disease and the History of Dermatology: Order out of Chaos **by Scott M Jackson**

Hardback and ebook, 398 pages
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Jackson covers the history of skin disease classification and treatment and its relationship to the growth of dermatology as a science and medical specialty. He builds this on the lives of key practitioners and authors, balanced with paragraphs on many specific skin diseases. The text follows changes in the understanding of skin disease with the growth of Western civilisation, from the Middle East and Egypt to Europe and to the United States.

There is little about the important concepts of skin disease in ancient China and India, probably related to the two-way flow of ideas, facilitated by early traders and travellers. Some readers may perceive this book to have a somewhat Western bias.

The text is balanced and very well referenced, and the author's dermatological expertise and analytical approach allows new insights into leprosy, syphilis and the Black Death in three 'interlude' chapters.

The American voice resonates when considering the social aspects of skin disease and treatment: the huge problems that skin disease has caused, and continues to cause in developing countries gets limited coverage.

The book, however, is a good read for dermatology historians, containing many original and intriguing hypotheses and arguments. More creative use of figures and time-lines would have made some large blocks of text more digestible. The history of dermatology and skin disease is a very visual subject, so the lack of any figures and illustrations makes this text unusual. Despite this, the erudite approach keeps the reader engaged.

Nick Levell
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