

BOOK REVIEW

Pharmacopoeias, Drug Regulation, and Empires. Making Medicines Official in Britain's Imperial World *by Stuart Anderson*

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Behind its beautifully designed cover, Stuart Anderson's latest book is a stimulating read. In many respects (apart from its publisher) it feels like a sister publication to his 2021 *Pharmacy and Professionalization in the British Empire, 1780-1970*. In this book, Anderson takes the term "pharmacopoeia" and examines it from all angles, specifically within an imperial, and mainly nineteenth-century, context.

Although his primary emphasis is the British empire, the narrative is extremely wide-ranging. The first five contextual chapters are unsurprisingly reliant on secondary sources, so operate primarily as usefully comprehensive literature reviews. Considering different disciplinary approaches to the term (chapter 1), the interrelationship between pharmacopoeias and drug regulation (chapter 2), and providing case studies of varied European empires (chapter 3) the first part of the book offers an impressive synthesis of a significant range of publications. I found this a helpful way to get a grip on the subject, but the potted histories in chapter 3 in particular, with its examination of the interplay between metropole and colonies via pharmacopoeias as potential agents of control and/or independence, are rather dizzying as the reader is led rapidly through time and space.

Exploration of the establishment of the original three separate pharmacopoeias for England, Scotland, and Wales narrows the focus in chapter four. I particularly enjoyed the section on the relationship between the pharmacopoeias' contents and Patrick Wallis's work on drug imports. In chapter five, the focus is widened again to survey the usage of the pharmacopoeias in the British empire. There is an understandable emphasis on India in this and subsequent chapters, with a thread throughout of the interaction between local sources, supplies and knowledge – and therefore related power - and those emanating from Britain.

Anderson's voice is most strongly heard from chapter six onwards when his original research, rooted in the contemporary 19th century sources, comes to the fore. Chapter six is effectively a case study of the production of the *British Pharmacopoeia* (first published in 1864) and the related publication of the *Pharmacopoeia of India* (originally published in 1868). The account delves into the role of pharmacists versus doctors, including those knowledgeable about Indian practice, power play between Britain and India and an interesting review of the development of the content of the British Pharmacopoeia linked to its editorial processes. Chapter seven develops the narrative further with the history of the production of the 1898 *British Pharmacopoeia* and the 1900 *Indian and Colonial Addendum*. The reception of both volumes forms the focus of chapter eight, including the subsequent publication of the first *British Pharmaceutical Codex: an imperial dispensatory* in 1907 as a more comprehensive resource for the whole British empire. The impact of the First World War and

its aftermath, and the continuing jockeying for position of doctors and pharmacists as the lead authority for subsequent pharmacopoeias continues as a significant theme.

Continuing the chronology, chapter nine presents the circumstances and results of the Committee of Inquiry into the *British Pharmacopoeia* in the 1920s. With consultation across the whole British Empire, the opportunity to obtain views in British colonies and dominions, and then set them against the experience of other European imperial nations makes for interesting reading.

The final chapter looks at decolonization, and the fate of the *British Pharmacopoeia* as the British Empire unravelled after the Second World War. The account is closely linked to other key factors: the growth in emphasis on chemical and biological drugs at the expense of botanical medicines; the growth in patent medicines; the rise of European co-operation. The last *British Pharmacopoeia* was published in 1968; the first *European Pharmacopoeia* was published in 1964.

Anderson saves his most significant analysis for his conclusion, with the presentation of his main themes as four perspectives: cross-disciplinary; cross-imperial power; cross-colonial; and temporal. In a similar vein to his 2021 publication, he makes it very clear that his ambition is to spur on other historians, within and beyond pharmacy history, to explore new research avenues, to think more clearly about their own approaches, and to consider interdisciplinary work. In this respect, the book offers numerous opportunities to examine a whole host of different potential projects or to engage in further reading into particular areas. There are 66 pages of endnotes to aid the reader, although interestingly no bibliography to act as a more straightforward reading list.

With such a broad approach, the book would be of interest to pharmacy and medical historians, but also to those working in the widest fields of medicinal history at imperial, global and national levels, and from a range of disciplines. Its rallying cry to “problematize” the term “pharmacopoeia” should inspire readers to re-consider their own perspectives.

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