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History of Anaesthesia VII: Proceedings of the 7th International Symposium on the History of Anaesthesia. H. Askitopoulou, K. E. McGoldrick, R. N. Westhorpe and D. J. Wilkinson (editors). Published by the University of Crete Press, Heraklion, Greece. Pp. 585. Price £ 60.00. ISBN 978-960-524-370-8.

There have been international symposia on the history of anaesthesia every 4 or 5 yr since 1982. The 7th symposium was held at Heraklion, Crete, Greece, in 2009. This well-produced book publishes the 47 presentations. The essays are by individuals about individual topics and are linked only by their historical theme. The essays are in English, but this is not the first language of many authors and there are a number of misprints, although they do not detract from the value of the book. It is divided into four historical sections with a final section about anaesthetic pioneers. It has an extensive index. There is a good summary of the symposium in the first chapter by the senior editor, Helen Askitopoulou, titled 'From Greek Antiquity to the Twentieth Century'.

Greek philosophy and medicine: The Hippocratic school freed medicine from a theocratic dogma (it is in the hands of the Gods) and made it into a science. Diagnosis was to be made on the basis of history, examination, and investigations. The concept of anaesthesia was defined. However, until William Morton made his successful public demonstration of ether anaesthesia in 1846, surgery would always be extraordinarily painful.

Herbal medicine: There are two interesting chapters on the historical use of medicinal herbs, one from Greece, where opium was used to alleviate pain, and one from Peru, where the sedative *Datura stramonium* was given before the ritual of execution of young warriors. The graphic illustrations (pages 117–18) from Mochica pottery suggest that it was not a good sedative.

General anaesthesia is dangerous: The discovery of successful general anaesthesia in 1846 spread throughout the world rapidly. However, it was soon recognized that general anaesthesia was dangerous, with deaths reported from England, America, and Australia. An interesting chapter describes how Henrietta Heathorn, in Tasmania, having nearly perished under a chloroform anaesthetic in 1847, later always opted for dental extractions without anaesthesia (p. 134).

Necessity is the mother of invention: The chapter on the influence of World War I on the development of anaesthesia shows how many technical advances were made during this period, including high-pressure gas cylinders, pressure reducing valves, anaesthetic machines, and also trained anaesthetic personnel to use them. It had become clear that some deaths were attributable to inexperienced individuals

administering anaesthesia to wounded soldiers. In Czechoslovakia, after World War II, the government encouraged manufacture of all medical equipment at one centre, Chirana Stara Tura. Importation of equipment was discouraged and the equipment centre developed in isolation. Some of the anaesthetic machines look rather like East Radcliffe ventilators (p. 384).

Jealousy: This was an occasional but recurrent theme among pioneers. The chapter on the discovery of oxygen shows that it was the brilliant Lavoisier who worked out the chemistry of oxygen in 1784, but he and his wife conspired to conceal the considerable help he received from Joseph Priestley and Carl Scheele. With local anaesthesia, Carl Koller first demonstrated the effects of cocaine in 1884, but he suffered unpleasant intellectual attacks of three rivals about his discovery. He emerged in a good light and he was modest about his great discovery.

Should you buy this book? You would need to like history and the quirks and foibles of humans. The book is an eclectic mixture, with many more good parts than not so good. It made me laugh (Camille Redard's use of a blue light to hypnotize his lady patients before he extracted their teeth!), smile (Thomas Huxley falling in love with Henrietta Heathorn), and wince (the Hippocratic technique to reduce a dislocated hip). This must have been an enjoyable meeting held in the cradle of Mediterranean civilization.

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