

B O O K R E V I E W S

Storia della Sanità in Capitanata dalle origini ai giorni nostri. Presentazione di Gianni Iacovelli, Andrea Pacilli Editore (Collana di Ricerca Storica), Manfredonia 2017, pp. 344 (Euro 18,00)

Ripe in experience, and after publishing several articles and volumes on hospital institutions in his region and on lots of physicians, Lorenzo Pellegrino provides medical historians with a valuable tool to better understand what happened in Capitanata's medicine. He starts from a look at poorhouses and xenodochia of the early modern age and then he takes a deep glance at the transformations in the medical profession and health institutions about the last decades. This is not a simple collection of the author's previous production. This is a new and articulated reflection on historiography due to his long experience through these paths. Pellegrino is a physician and cares about our traditional studies dealing with the distant events recalling nineteenth-century chapters and also with the stormy years during World War I. He writes about the history of the last fifty years and the total transformation in healthcare organization and clinical practice. It is important to remember that nowadays these ones are based on the inalienable rules of biomedicine. Pellegrino has collected a lot of useful documents in order to explain the continuous process of interaction between society and medicine. He recalls the initiatives led by central or local governments in support of institutions dealing with hospitality or care, and many physicians as well as other figures of the healing art working in the various centers of the province of Foggia. The originality of the research is due to the use of unpublished archival materials and attention to special chapters, in local studies so far ignored, dedicated to surveys on obstetric and nursing care, on pharmacies or on the role of ecclesiastical institutions.

Lorenzo Pellegrino

Johannes Schmidl Oltre la disabilità, con testi di Agnese Tedaldi e Carlo Pagani, Milano 2015, s.i.p.; ID., Benedetto Schiassi La lungimiranza del pensiero medico, Edizioni Aspasia, Bologna 2016, un pieghevole di 6 facciate; ID., Antonio D'Ormea La volontà di indagare la mente, Edizioni Aspasia 2016, pp. 142 (Euro 10,00); ID., Dino Spisni La cura come ragione di vita, con testi di Claudio Sighieri e Roberto Spisni, Edizioni Aspasia 2017, pp. 15 (Euro 10,00)

Publishing these volumes between 2015 and 2017, Leonardo Arrighi, who is recently involved in medical history studies, gives an important contribution to medical biographies. The research is due to the initiative of the Municipality of Budrio that gave the young expert the task of recalling these figures related to the history of the territory, organizing exhibitions and editing the catalogs. Arrighi honoured his commitment by working with admirable accuracy offering us extensive volumes, rich of interesting photographic documentation. Today, therefore, we can count on new tools fit to bring us closer to the best acquaintance of people who appear important in medicine but, up to then, differently considered in our historiography. The work of Antonio D'Ormea (1873-1952) had been repeatedly studied in the history of psychiatry, but the catalog of the exhibition, opened in 2016 in the Sala Rossa of Palazzo Medosi Fracassati of Budrio, greatly enriches the information, also enlarged to the aspects of family life. Arrighi recalls Sebastiano D'Ormea (the psychiatrist's father) who had long been chief in the Ospedale Civile of Budrio. The surgeon Benedetto Schiassi (1869-1954), who had also been chief in the hospital of Budrio, was remembered in the local history and in the exhibition organized in the Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio of Bologna. Close to his merits for innovative surgical techniques he also had been recalled for the deep look at humanities and the open mindedness towards psychosomatics. Completely original is the research on Dino Spisni (1913-2003)

who was a pupil of Benedetto Schiassi, and graduated in Veterinary in 1936 before reaching the one in Medicine and Surgery in 1939. Appreciated during his doctoral work in didactics at the university, and in physiology and biochemistry studies, he had devoted part of his life to music, in particular to the ocarina. With the exhibition dedicated to Johannes Schmidl (1932-1996) Arrighi offers us a volume that covers a lack of our historiography. There was indeed no monograph on this Austrian “magician of the prostheses”, who was the director for more than thirty years of the Officina Ortopedica INAIL di Vigorso of Budrio, set up at the beginning of the Sixties. Considered as the father of the myoelectrical prosthesis, Schmidl had quickly brought the Emilian structure to world-wide stand out.

Leonardo Arrighi

Piergiorgio Strata, *Dormire, forse sognare, Carocci, Roma 2017, pp. 206 (euro 15,00)*

What mysterious mechanisms lie in brain circuitry during sleep?

To this and many other questions, *Dormire, forse sognare. Sonno e sogno nelle neuroscienze*, the last book of the neuroscientist, *emeritus* Professor Piergiorgio Strata, aims to find more than an answer. Its title, evocatively, refers to those famous verses of the *Hamlet*, where “sleeping” is declined with “dying”, and then with “dreaming”, but in a context of fear and revenge. On the contrary, the background on which Strata relies is far more complex. Firstly, the book is preceded by an interesting historical preface of two specialists, Chiara Cirelli and Giulio Tononi, who tied their life-long research to the study of sleep and its pathologies. Strata starts from the neurophysiological theory on the alternation between REM and non-REM sleep in the framework of the pioneering research of Giuseppe Moruzzi and Horace W. Magoun on the ascending reticular activating system. Then, he goes to examine the behavior of the thalamocortical complex during sleep and wakefulness, and in particular the role of the thalamus, which serves as true “gatekeeper” for sensory information to the cerebral cortex.

After going through the activity of various molecules, neurotransmitters and neuromodulators promoting sleep (*in primis* adenosine), Strata passes to highlight the significance of sleep in terms of survival, and especially for the maintenance of physical and mental health.

In recent decades the neuroscientists stress the role of the “cost containment” on the part of the brain (a notoriously wasteful organ), and Strata does not hide that “a possible solution of the REM sleep might be to accentuate energy saving” (p. 57). To this end he puts his views in the wider context of both evolutionism and the most recent theories of the mammalian and invertebrates brain. These aspects of his book satisfy those students who already have some knowledge of the brain and its physiology, and seek further insights.

Nevertheless, even the common reader can find important points of interest. There are pages devoted to sleep change in the ageing, case studies of sleep deprivation, chapters about the restorative sleep, its disorders and remedies, pharmacological and non-pharmacological. A central place is the discussion of the *glymphatic* system: in this regard, it is worth watching a video, reported by Strata, which tells us the meaning of the “waste removal” that, during sleep, contributes to sweeping away the amyloid proteins, the presence of which is a factor matching insomnia to Alzheimer’s disease.

Among history, poetry, art and science, the theme of the dream is no less attractive. Strata does not hide his reservations against Freud’s theory of the unconscious applied to the dream. Even in this respect the approach is strictly neuroscientific and it refers, on one hand, to the theory of consciousness, in particular of the “global neuronal workspace”, according to Stanislas Dehaene, whose Strata is a fervent admirer; from the another side, to the state of the *default mode network* formulated by Marcus Raichle, a theory who is becoming more and more important in the studies of the brain resting state. Significant are the electrical and magnetic transcranial stimulation techniques, which show that the dream is correlated with intrinsic functional connectivity, but in a “deformed” state both for the altered frequency of neuronal discharge and for the abnormal release of neurotransmitters and neuromodulators (p. 166).

Finally, the dream has been, and will always be, an exciting object of interest in the figurative arts both as expression of unconscious activity and “masking” of our most occult desires. From antiquity (more precisely, from the first graffiti, which witnessed a link between sexual activity and dream) to the early twentieth century, the dream inspired artists of the most diverse addresses. The suggestive and exotic cover of

the book, from a famous painting of the post-impressionist “naive” painter Henri Rousseau, gives us confirmation. A useful, not trivial, glossary completes this volume, which leaves us with many answers, but also with some worrisome questions.

Germana Pareti