

Preface

This volume – a collaborative effort of established scholars in French history and the history of medicine – brings together the dominant themes of French medical culture in all its disparate strands viewed from several perspectives: inside the medical community itself; within the broader context of French society and culture; and the outsider's view. While a couple of recent collections have addressed particular aspects of French medical culture, such as the relationship of the professions – including medicine – to the French state and the Pasteurian revolution, no volume has attempted a multifaceted coverage.¹ Useful collections have also been published for sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century medicine, but none of them has a French focus.² So far no collection has restricted itself to French medicine, addressing the principal themes of the French medical experience.

This collection serves an important professional role by defining a developing sub-specialty at the intersection of French cultural and intellectual history, the history of medicine and science, and the social history of medicine. Although it is becoming increasingly popular – and often most appropriate – to bridge national boundaries and look at topics like medicine from an international and comparative perspective, it is clear that there was something distinctive about the nineteenth-century French medical experience which influenced and reflected sociopolitical developments within French society. Not only was France the birthplace of modern scientific medicine, but France was different from other European countries demographically, politically, and socioeconomically. Indigenous problems and practices such as depopulation and wet nursing – just to cite two well-known examples – were sociomedical and required medical expertise for their investigation and solution. For these reasons the present volume, by exploring the singularity of the French model, will also serve as the basis for a future integrative and comparative approach.

The eleven essays in this volume illustrate the richness, complexity, and diversity of French medical culture in the nineteenth

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century, a period that witnessed the ‘medicalization’ of French society. Medical themes permeated contemporary culture and politics, and medical discourse infused many levels of French society from the bastions of science – the medical faculties and research institutions – to novels, the theatre, and the daily lives of citizens as patients.

We have not tried to impose uniformity of spelling and punctuation. Consequently, the reader will find British spelling and punctuation styles in some articles, American in others. We assume a cosmopolitan readership and trust that our readers will be familiar with both and not be troubled by these minor differences.

Notes

1. Gerald L. Geison, (ed.), *Professions and the French State, 1700–1900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984). This volume includes articles on French medicine by Toby Gelfand, Jan Goldstein, and Matthew Ramsey. On the Pasteurian revolution, see Claire Salomon-Bayet, (ed.), *Pasteur et la révolution pastoriennne* (Paris: Payot, 1986).
2. For example, see Andrew Wear, R. K. French, and I. M. Lonie, (eds), *The Medical Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Roger French and Andrew Wear, (eds), *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Andrew Cunningham and Roger French, (eds), *The Medical Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).