

## Book review

## Biographies of healers

**Dictionary of Medical Biography**

Vols 1–5

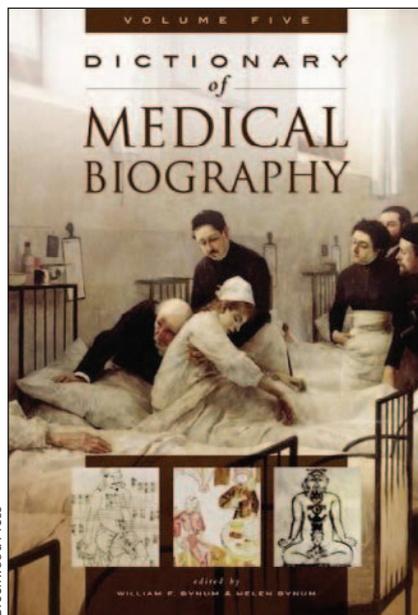
William F. Bynum and Helen Bynum, eds.

Greenwood Press; 2007

1616 pp US\$749.95 (set)

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This offering of 5 volumes is more in the tradition of an academic encyclopedia than a dictionary. With 1140 subjects covered by 384 contributors under the editorial supervision of 22 “area editors,” it is indeed an academic contribution. The co-editors note that the study of medicine’s past has changed: “The older Great Doctors approach has been replaced by a much broader vision of health, disease, and healers.” Here we find diverse areas of study such as alternative healers, the interaction between Western medicine and indigenous medical systems, women in medicine and nursing. So the reader is not startled to find a passage on Hildegard of Bingen, a medieval nun who wrote 12th century works on practical causes and cures of human ailments, or on Shujue (under Yun,



first entry in the entire opus is about one of our own: Dr. Maude Abbott — who was initially refused entry to McGill Medical School in 1890, because she was a woman.

Each biographical entry, of about a column each, features the name of the subject, dates of birth and death (when known), place of birth and the notable field of activity. The text tends to feature

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Tieqiao) who struggled against the “scientization” of traditional Chinese medicine, trying instead to integrate its metaphysical approach with Western principles. Canadian readers will, perhaps, be amused to find that the

the whole life of the person rather than simply the salient medical achievement. Each entry ends with a brief bibliography separated into primary — the subject’s own writings — and secondary sources. The managing co-editors had

the flexibility of mind to allow longer passages for outstanding persons, for example, there are 4 pages for Hippocrates and 3 and a half for Freud

At the beginning of each volume is an alphabetical list of all the contributors and all the subjects covered in the entire set. Under the name of each contributor, in italics, are the names of the subjects (varying from 1 to 15) described. At the beginning of volume 1 is a series of 6 short essays about different medical traditions around the world. At the end of the last volume are 3 helpful appendices: lists of subjects covered by country, by field of activity and by date of birth.

Casual readers of the history of medicine will find their thirst for medical biographies well satisfied by browsing through this series. Researchers will also find this a useful starting place, partly because of the scholarship exercised on the entries in general, but also because of the extra emphasis on the personal life of each subject. The co-editors do generously acknowledge in their “Editorial Notes” that there are 2 other recognized scholarly works that are organized in a similar fashion (with their subjects listed alphabetically).

The quality of the research and writing is generally good, though some entries do give the impression of having been given to the contributor more on the basis of location than expertise. The \$750 price tag seems steep, but it comes out to \$0.66 an entry. Any reference library with a history of medicine section will need this collection; teachers and scholars in the field will want ready access to it.

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