



Correcting the myths

Dental Practice in Europe at the End of the 18th Century. Christine Hillam (Ed). (Editions Rodopi, Amsterdam/New York. Clio Medica/The Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine 72.) Paper £40./US \$62 ISBN: 90-420-1258-7

Christine Hillam had noted in her preface to this posthumously published work that it was the first international study of developing dental practice in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century and was based on primary sources such as newspaper advertisements and directories. It owes its existence to the work of an international group who met in Berlin in 1992, Liverpool in 1993 and Paris in 1994. There were many problems in obtaining unanimity in the approach to this study and it is due to the organising efforts of Christine Hillam that the contributions share a common overall pattern. France was in revolutionary turmoil, Holland was a republic, Hungary was re-organising following the expulsion of the Turkish Ottoman Empire and Germany, as the end of the Holy Roman Empire approached, was a collection of self-governing states and imperial towns. With such varied backgrounds it is surprising that common features emerge in the accounts of the development of the dental profession. Resident dental surgeons were established in the largest centres of population, itinerant dentists were still active in rural communities and the problems of dental education and the official recognition of qualifications were being addressed.

This study attempts to correct myths and generalisations by examining primary sources with a critical eye. The individuals named in directories and who speak for themselves in the newspaper advertisements and petitions which they composed afford genuine quantitative data and qualitative information about the dental treatment on offer at that period. A more accurate picture can now be obtained of the roots of the dental profession in Europe.

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