

Abstracts

Rodolfo Taiani

Population, illness and medicine. A contribution towards the history of health in the region of Trentino

The author proposes a synthesis of trends within the historiographical debate on the history of medicine and health as they have developed in Italy since the 1970s, as well as of the favourable reception these have received within Trentino. Here, during the same period, studies on the history of medicine and health began to multiply in line with the new avenues of research opened up at the national level, as local scholars willingly took up the invitation to contribute to the history of the subject, particularly with regard to the period from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Among the various aspects covered by this research are: the prevalent illnesses and their relationship with the natural and social environment; demography; the healing arts and professions; the relationship between health and the organisation of society; sanitary organisation, and health legislation. Finally, historians have analysed popular health knowledge, empirical medicine, the theoretical implications of official medical culture, and the reorganisation of the infrastructures enabling recuperation.

Alois Unterkircher

“Tyroleans! Let your children be vaccinated” – the pox as an example of mortality conditions and early vaccination efforts in nineteenth-century Tyrol

Edward Jenner’s vaccination against cow-pox, which had been made public in 1796, was applied on a large-scale by doctors in Tyrol from 1801 onwards. The implementation of a vaccination policy for all classes of the population constituted an enormous administrative challenge for provincial health officials. Owing to the regulations and compulsory measures involved, the vaccination campaign redefined the relationship between medicine and society against a background of a growing process of medicalisation. At the same time, however, it also represented a scientific problem for the medicine of the day. The article describes the different phases in the expansion of vaccination in the first years of its arrival in Tyrol and provides an historical epidemiology of cow-pox in this region. The process of vaccination visibly emerges as an important factor within a broad catalogue of policy measures by health officials, which helped reduce mortality rates in the nineteenth century.

Michael Pammer

Diphtheria in imperial Austria (Cisleithania), 1880–1912

In the course of the nineteenth century, diphtheria became the most dangerous disease affecting children and was responsible for about one tenth of child deaths. The situation changed after 1894 when Emil Behring invented the process of passive immunization, which reduced mortality to about one sixth of its former rate. This article examines the key factors that determined mortality from diphtheria in the western part of Austria-Hungary between 1880 and 1912. The author examines, by political district, annual data on diphtheria, infant mortality, urbanization, and population density. These data are then analyzed using multivariate models. The results suggest that Behring's discovery lowered death rates from diphtheria, but was not the only relevant factor. In rural areas, higher population density led to higher diphtheria mortality, whereas diphtheria mortality was lower in urban areas than the countryside. Diphtheria mortality is shown to have no systematic connection with general infant mortality. In addition, certain Austrian crownlands, such as Galicia, had a markedly higher preponderance of diphtheria cases than others.

Emanuela Renzetti

'With one's feet on the ground': the alpine environment and popular healing between practical knowledge and medical science

Starting from the observation that the only characteristics common to the different cultures inhabiting the alpine region are all based on the specific features of the mountain environment, the author sets out to demonstrate that this very specificity also has strong implications in the sphere of popular medicine. Using a combination of oral and written records, it is possible to trace the outlines of a popular science deriving from everyday practice and concrete experience. By means of perception, intuition and observation, popular healers selected and classified the products of the soil, using them for therapies passed down by tradition and also handing them on to medical science. In the case of Trentino, the scarce presence of magical elements within this body of empirical knowledge only confirms the natural environment's notable capacity to reveal its richness and variety. This has then allowed a number of popular practices to be accepted as pharmaceutically effective.

Casimira Grandi

The lunatic asylum of a border region: historical notes on the psychiatric hospital in Pergine Valsugana

The former psychiatric hospital in Pergine Valsugana came under the responsibility of the current region of Trentino-Alto Adige / Südtirol and its precursors for almost exactly a century (1882–1981). The author demonstrates how, in an area marked historically by endemic pauperism, this institution functioned above all as an undifferentiated repository for all those physical and social pathologies that a well organized society did not accept. It was, therefore, a place of marginalisation, characterized by a culpable absence of intervention from the central state, even if the hospital did provide the only means of obtaining food and lodging for a multitude of derelict individuals. In today's Italy, the lunatic asylum forms part of the past, and its closure has shifted the provision of psychiatric care onto communal authorities. At the same time, the memory of the asylum remains part of the local culture, while its history has moved into the archives.

Vito Carrara

Ancient church regulations in the diocese of Trento at the start of the twentieth century. The cathedral chapter, deacon Inama and bishop Endrici (1904–1913)

Using unpublished sources, the article examines certain aspects of the relationship between the cathedral chapter at Trento and Bishop Celestino Endrici in the period from 1904 to 1913. Endrici, who was a product of the school of social doctrine propagated by Pope Leo XIII, tried to reform his diocese according to more modern ecclesiological arrangements and pastoral thought. In doing so, he was opposed by the head of the cathedral chapter, deacon Inama, an old priest from the town's clerical elite. The resultant conflict clearly demonstrated the persistence of regulations, institutions and privileges that derived from very ancient traditions.