

S. 13. 2. – THE HISTORY OF MEDICAL OF THE SEA AND PORT
Chair: Fabiano Bracht
(FLUP-CITCEM)

Oceans, Ships, and Maritime Environments in Eighteenth-Century Medical History

ELINA MAANIITTY (University of Helsinki)

Abstract

In this paper, I will examine the role oceans, ships, and maritime environments had in medical science in the eighteenth century.

In the age of sail, maritime voyages could last months or even years, requiring careful planning of the crew's nutrition and other health-related needs. Furthermore, a sailor's profession was a risky one, and diseases and accidents were often the crew's companions on the high seas. The paradox of isolation and mobility made ships unusual environments for diseases, as the crew was both residing in a small area with only a very limited amount of human contact and being constantly exposed to varying weather conditions, pathogens and other factors that affected its health. Thus ships were also peculiar working milieus for physicians and barber-surgeons, who were in charge of the crew's wellbeing.

The work of ship doctors and surgeons can be seen as a central predecessor of modern occupational medicine. These medical professionals had to be able to perform operations, treat both wounds and misplaced joints, prepare medicines and maintain collections of pharmaceutical supplies in conditions that were far from ideal or stable. Simultaneously, the ship environment made it possible for physicians to make careful, long-term observations of individual sailors, which in turn enabled them to monitor the progress of certain diseases, the effects of medicines and treatments, and the role of nutrition in overall health. This led to significant advances in the field of medical science, one of the most famous being the treatment of scurvy with citric juices. Ships and seafaring also had an important role in the development of epidemic prevention measures, such as quarantines. Furthermore, ship doctors often worked as botanists and natural scientists during long journeys and expeditions, striving not only to scientifically describe new species but also to find plants and other natural substances that could be used for medicinal purposes.

Keywords

maritime medicine, healthcare at sea, epidemic diseases, eighteenth century

Biography

Eliina Maaniitty is a doctoral student in the University of Helsinki. She is writing her doctoral thesis on medical knowledge and the prevention of epidemic diseases in Sweden and Finland during the long eighteenth century. She is particularly interested in themes such as demogra-

phy, mortality, maritime history and historical epidemiology, and has published several articles on these topics. She has also written about the history of prostitution.

British ship surgeons, transoceanic mobility, and the emergence of tropical hygiene in the early nineteenth century

MANIKARNIKA DUTTA (University of Oxford)

Abstract

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, naval surgeons played an important role in expanding the knowledge of tropical diseases and hygiene. The tropics were widely considered detrimental to the health of Europeans. The image of the Orient as a dangerous and deadly place generated a number of presuppositions that informed much of the early writings on tropical diseases in Europe. This partisan line of thought slowly changed over the nineteenth century as physicians and surgeons from European countries travelled to their tropical colonies and through their study of diseases at the location of prevalence challenged and revised existing ideas. Surgeons working on ships that connected empires with their colonies were in the best position to produce knowledge about tropical diseases. Transoceanic voyages offered them the perfect platform for observing the impact of various geographies and climates upon the health of people of various races and ethnicities. A study of the use of ships as a mobile laboratory and doctors' chamber enables us to recenter the history of tropical hygiene from being a discipline developed in specific sites of imperialism (e.g. London, Calcutta) to an epistemology rooted in systematic observations carried out in a territorially fluid setting (e.g. any route between England and India). Thus, in its examination of the work of naval surgeons in the first half of the nineteenth century from a global history perspective, this presentation traces the importance of systems of transit in the emergence, circulation and validation of the knowledge of tropical hygiene and medicine. To do so, it will study treatises written by British naval surgeons and physicians, articles in medical journals, and reports of medical assemblies and conferences.

Keywords

Tropics, naval surgeon, disease, hygiene, colonies

Biography

Manikarnika Dutta completed her MSc in the History of Science, Technology and Medicine on a Wellcome Trust Master's Studentship at the University of Oxford. She has recently defended her DPhil thesis "Health and Welfare of European Seamen: Sanitary Regulation in Colonial Indian Port Cities(1800-1900)", that was a part for a Wellcome Trust-funded project at the same institution. Her research examined the health and sanitary regulation of European seamen in colonial Indian port cities, integrating the history of health, imperial governance,

maritime exchange and public policy in the British Empire. She has won the 2018 Taniguchi Medal from the Asian Society for the History of Medicine for her essay. Currently, she is pursuing research at the Rockefeller Archives, New York where she has been awarded a research stipend to work on the history of the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health Calcutta, an international crossover study.