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Stanis Perez, Ed., *Journal de santé de Louis XIV. Écrit par Vallot, Daquin et Fagon*. Grenoble, France: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2004. 445 pp. € 27.00 (pb). ISBN: 2-84137-159-X.

Review by Colin Jones, University of Warwick.

In 1862, J.A. Leroi published the whole of the text of a remarkable manuscript located in the national library, in which three successive *Premiers Médecins du Roi* kept a chronicle of the health and the medical treatment of Louis XIV between 1647 and 1711. Well-known if only fitfully utilised by subsequent historians, Leroi's text has, of course, long been out of print and is relatively inaccessible. Stanis Perez has had the excellent idea of providing a new edition of this text, which will be read, if not with unalloyed pleasure (the text leads us mercilessly from stool to stool, purge to purge, cure to cure), then at least with considerable profit. Perez has gone back to the original text to correct some errors in the Leroi edition, and he also reproduces Leroi's *pièces justificatives*, provides a helpful lexicon of medical vocabulary, and supplies an excellent introduction, 'La lancette et le sceptre', which highlights the source's value. He compares the text to the physician Jean Hérouard's famous chronicle of the health of the young Louis XIII, which Philippe Ariès utilised in writing *Centuries of Childhood*, and which was given its first scholarly edition in 1989 by Madeleine Foisil.[1]

The emergence of the history of the body as a sub-discipline of cultural as well as medical history will be particularly well served by this new edition. The text is so detailed and extensive that we get to know more about Louis XIV's body than that of just about any other historical figure (with the possible exception, thanks to Hérouard, of his father). It is a wonderful source for the kind of patient-centred history of medicine preached by the late Roy Porter and others. It was indeed used this way in the sprightly bio-medical biography by Michelle Caroly, which Perez oddly contrives not to cite.[2]

The full original text has lacunae. The three royal physicians--Antoine Vallot (1652-70), Antoine Daquin (1670-1692), and Guy-Crescent Fagon (1693-1711) were writing for posterity (and possibly for various members of the royal family as well), and larded their accounts with royal panegyrics and with consistent self-promotion aimed at highlighting their own sterling interventions. Thus there is no account of the king's famous 1686 anal fistula, seemingly because this would redound to the credit of Daquin's rival, the surgeon Félix. The king's active sex-life is missing too; it was probably too delicate a subject to be recorded by a physician's quill.

Perez's introduction offers some useful ways into the text which will allow scholars to rethink the significance of this important source for the cultural, medical, and political history of the reign of Louis XIV. In the past, historians have been prone to use sources such as this to highlight the formidable good health of Louis XIV in surviving all that the doctors could throw at him. This comprehensive new edition provides a useful and rather pathetic corrective on this point. We observe the ailing body of the king, and the varied and ingenious efforts of his medical ministers to keep him capable of enjoying life--and ruling. Perez suggests that they consciously wrote as a counterblast to the Latinate buffoons of Molière's medical plays, and certainly there is more close, neo-Hippocratic observationism than dogmatic attachment to the verities of the Ancients: neither Galen nor Hippocrates is cited in the text in fact, and there is no Latin either, bar a few pharmaceutical formulae. This welcome new edition of a rich and colourful text thus offers much food for reflection.

NOTES

[1] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Knopf, 1962); Madeleine Foisil, ed., *Journal de Jean Hérouard* (Paris: Fayard, 1989).

[2] Michelle Caroly, *Le corps du Roi-Soleil: grandeur et misères de sa majesté Louis XIV* (Paris: Imago, 1990).

Colin Jones
University of Warwick
c.d.h.jones@warwick.ac.uk

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