

# **Researcher Workshop with Honorary Professor Vivian Nutton**

Organised by the Centre for the History of Medicine,  
Department of Classics and Ancient History, and the Department  
of History

University of Warwick

29 January 2013

Convenors

Aileen Das (Classics and Ancient History), Collin Lieberg (History) and Dr Roberta Bivins (CHM)

**Kindly supported by the Warwick Centre for the History of Medicine's Strategic Award,  
the Department of Classics and Ancient History, and the Department of History**

## Researcher Workshop with Honorary Professor Vivian Nutton

### Workshop Information

This workshop will examine the relationship between different 'histories' of medicine, including both ancient and modern accounts. In particular, it will reflect on the historiography of 'medical history', considering how ancient and pre-modern medicine fits into a field that is increasingly being defined as 'social history'. The papers will also explore the intersections of medical history with different fields of study, such as philosophy, religious history, philology, and film. Moreover, these papers will ask how cultural and linguistic contexts should inform our understanding of the medical texts of the ancient and (pre)modern periods.

### Venue

**Seminar Room, Institute of Advanced Studies, Millburn House, University of Warwick**

Millburn House is located two buildings along from University House in the University of Warwick Science Park – it is marked as **building 42** on the main campus map (the building is in the top right hand corner of the map). This can be downloaded at: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/campusmap/> Please note that the building numbers on printed versions of the map may be different. Once you arrive at Millburn, use the front entrance shown on the photo and take the staircase opposite you as you enter. IAS is on the left at the top of the stairs. If coming by road, a map can be downloaded from: [http://www.warwicksciencepark.co.uk/img/uwsp\\_mapweb.pdf](http://www.warwicksciencepark.co.uk/img/uwsp_mapweb.pdf).

Should you have any dietary or access requirements please contact the Centre for the History of Medicine Administrator (Tracy Horton) via email: [T.Horton@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:T.Horton@warwick.ac.uk) or tel: 024 765 72601.

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IAS, Millburn House

**Provisional Programme**

Tuesday 29 January 2013

9.30	Registration and Refreshments (IAS Reception)
9.45	<b>Honorary Professor Vivian Nutton:</b> History, Medicine and the Historiography of Medicine
10.45	<b>Rebecca Taylor (<i>Classics</i>):</b> Myth, Medicine, and the Rise of Rational Thought
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11.15	Refreshments (IAS Reception)
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11.30	<b>Josh Moulding (<i>History of Medicine</i>):</b> 'Dining with Disney': Film, Nutrition Education and Selfhood in 1960s Guatemala
12.00	<b>Aileen Das (<i>Classics</i>):</b> Galen's 'Medical Timaeus' in al-Bīrūnī's 'A Verification on What is Said on India' ( <i>Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind min Maqālatin</i> )
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12.30	Lunch (Millburn House Foyer)
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1.30	<b>Paula McBride (<i>History</i>):</b> Magic and Healing in Early Modern England
2.00	<b>Greg Wells (<i>History of Medicine/ Renaissance</i>):</b> The Nature of Medical Casebooks in the Early Seventeenth Century in General, and of John Hall's in Particular
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2.30	Refreshments (IAS Reception)
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2.45	<b>Madelaine Burrows (<i>Classics</i>):</b> Mystical and Medical Ideas about Blood in 1–2nd-century AD Rome
3.15	<b>Round Table Discussion</b>
4.00	<b>Closing Remarks</b>
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## Abstracts

**Rebecca Taylor**

***Myth, Medicine, and the Rise of Rational Thought***

The move from irrational to rational thought is a concept that has presented a problem to modern scholarship. The shift in thought from myth to science was once thought to be a clear-cut phenomenon, but studies in the nature of μῦθος and λόγος as two approaches to thought have revealed that there are significant overlaps between the two.

This paper will first strive to show how the rise of philosophy and so called “rational” ideas stemmed from mythology and the stories of creation apparent at the time of Thales, whom Aristotle hails as the “founder” of natural philosophy. Not only is the content of some early creation myths such as and Babylonian *Enuma Elish* and Hesiod’s *Theogony*, very similar to the theories put forward by early philosophers, but there is significant overlap between the systems of μῦθος and λόγος at this time. The idea that prose and poetry represented λόγος and μῦθος respectively, will serve to demonstrate how the two approaches to thought were seen to be entirely separate from each other and the overlaps between them will then be explored. In this first section too, the nature of the divine in “irrational” thought will be considered as well as the part played by the divine in “rational” thought in the early stages of philosophy.

Secondly, the creation and the nature of man in Greek myth will be explored with reference to passages in Hesiod and Homer. These mythological ideas regarding how man was created will be compared to early Presocratic and Hippocratic notions about how humans are composed of different natural elements or humours associated with such elements.

This paper will then focus on the nature of disease in myth observing how diseases were considered to be beings roaming the world or a form of divine vengeance. The fact that some diseases in myth were not considered to be divine in any way, will also be explored in relation to the rise of rational thought. Also, the idea that a disease or malady could have a natural cause but was ultimately sent by a god for a wrong will be investigated.

Finally, medicine in myth and religion will be explored. The fact that medicine was recognised as a skill that could be learned by man is apparent in myth as well as rational thought. The choice between praying to a divine power or going to a skilled physician seems to have existed in the tales told by Homer and Sophocles. Thus, the concept of recognising whether an affliction was divine or not and then acting accordingly, is important in this study of how medicine was employed in myth. The role of religious practice in the Hippocratic texts, particularly in *On the Sacred Disease*, will then be considered. Moreover, the powers manifest in drugs in both mythology and medicine will be investigated and finally, the distinct overlap between religion and “rational” medicine in the cult of Asclepius will be explored.

**Josh Moulding**

***'Dining with Disney': Film, Nutrition Education and Selfhood in 1960s Guatemala***

The Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP) is one of nine PAHO (Pan American Health Organization) biomedical research centres currently active across Latin America and the Caribbean. During the 1960s, INCAP advocated the incorporation of nutrition education into the curricula of elementary schools across Guatemala, as a means of combating pervasive chronic malnutrition. The institute published model teaching units which instructed teachers to warn their pupils of the unhealthy, and thus irrational, nature of indigenous corn-based diets. Each unit presented membership of various communities as being dependent upon the individual's rational rejection of such diets and their subscription to consumption habits deemed 'modern'.

INCAP regularly promoted the use of animated films within such teaching units, so as to ensure that pupils engaged with its gospel of modern rationality. This paper will uncover why the institute invested in Walt Disney's *Planning for Good Eating* as a pedagogical device to transpose ideals of modern selfhood onto Guatemalan bodies. My analysis will then explore the ways in which the film rendered the acquisition of a 'modern self' dependent upon corporeal metamorphosis and conformity to prescribed gender roles. The paper will conclude by questioning whether INCAP's efforts to reform Guatemalan dietary practices were, in fact, undermined by the inclusion of *Planning for Good Eating* in school curricula, as the film's model of modern selfhood often diverged from that presented in the institute's own educational publications.

**Aileen Das**

***Galen's 'Medical Timaeus' in al-Bīrūnī's 'A Verification on What is Said on India ' (Taḥqīq mā li-l-Hind min Maqālatin)***

The influence of Plato's *Timaeus* on Galen's thought is well known. The dialogue's discussions of the tripartite division of the soul and the basic structure of the human body provides the basis in part for Galen's development of his own psychology and physiology in works such as *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* and *On the Usefulness of the Parts*. His most sustained engagement with the *Timaeus* can be found in two texts that are not fully extant: his fragmentary commentary *On the Medical Aspects of Plato's Timaeus* and a synopsis of the dialogue that only survives in the form of an Arabic translation. Translated into Arabic by Ḥunayn ibn 'Ishāq (d. c. 873 or 877) and his son 'Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn, Galen's commentary on the *Timaeus* is quoted by medical, scientific, and philosophical writers working in both the Jewish and Arabic traditions. This paper will draw attention to the use of this commentary in 'Abū 'l-Rayḥān Muḥammad b. 'Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī's (973–c. 1050) *A Verification on What is Said on India (Taḥqīq mā li-l-Hind min Maqālatin)*, a voluminous work describing the customs, languages, and sciences of the Indian subcontinent. I shall argue that the citations of the *Timaeus* commentary in the *India* reveal that Galen's original text was adapted by Ḥunayn and his workshop to reflect the religious concerns of Muslim readers. This paper aims to emphasize the need for a contextual approach to the translation of Greek medical sources, which takes into consideration the adaption of material for specific readers (or audiences).

**Paula McBride**

***Magic and Healing in Early Modern England***

Magic began in a world very different from the world we know today. Survival then was dependant on the understanding of natural forces, where boundaries were less clear than they are now, blurred between the natural and the supernatural, between everyday life and the unexplained miracle, between those living in this world and those of the 'invisible world'. The threat of the invisible, of the unknown, lead to popular beliefs full of demons, witches and spirits. The need to protect oneself from potential harm provoked a search for assistance from whoever was deemed able to provide solace and remedy. Magic was knowledge, a secret knowledge that most people did not have, and so the healers with their knowledge of natural magic, word rituals and communion with supernatural powers, were magical and mysterious to the seeker. This held true whether a magical incantation or a humble prayer was used.

With little medical knowledge, the average early modern individual was constantly at the mercy of disease and high mortality rates prevalent during this period. From the curing of illnesses to diagnosis of demonic possession through witchcraft, local healers were consulted, be they cunning folk, Catholic priests, Protestant clergymen, or others thought to possess the ability and knowledge in detecting such matters. And so, alongside the more orthodox use of religious prayer and divine intervention, magical and astrological healers were consulted for cures.

This paper will draw on my current research of magic and healing during the Early Modern period, from the rites of the Catholic priesthood and the magical charms and chants of cunning-folk and the witch, through to the sixteenth-century Reformation that transformed the relationships between magic, religion, and healing.

**Greg Wells**

***The Nature of Medical Casebooks in the Early Seventeenth Century in General, and of John Hall's in Particular***

Casebooks ('books containing an account of medical or legal cases') are a staple source for information on medical practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England. Yet the word itself is an anacronism, the first use recorded in the OED being in the eighteenth century.

I shall explore the nature of documents described as casebooks, and question whether the group is homogeneous enough to be regarded as a single entity. It includes both records made at the time of a consultation, and also summaries which may have been produced many years later. It also excludes some documents such as medical accounts, which seem to fit the definition.

I conclude that as long as the use made of them is illustrative, the variation is probably not a problem, but it should be taken into account if one is making comparisons between different practitioners and the way they practised.

Finally I turn to John Hall's casebook and consider what evidence there is for his intentions in writing it: did he intend to publish it, or was it a vade-mecum serving his own practical needs?

**Madelaine Burrows**

***Mystical and Medical Ideas about Blood in 1–2nd-century AD Rome***

Blood, being an undeniable requisite for life, has fascinated cultures throughout history, being viewed variously as a vessel for the spirit, a prime influence on the body's health, and even as a potent ingredient in medicine. Herein, I shall discuss the ideas surrounding blood during the 1st and 2nd centuries, with a focus on its uses in medicine, and how these practices endured for centuries thereafter, despite considerable moral debate, and the disdain of many early physicians.