

Lea Haller Cortison. Geschichte eines Hormons, 1900-1955. Zürich: Chronos; 2012, 273 p. ISBN 978-3-0340-1115-0. € 31.

This book tells the story of the development of one of the most influential drugs after 1945, namely Cortison. This is the synthetic product of a substance, originally produced in the adrenal gland. It was/is effective in combating quite different maladies as e.g. allergies, rheumatic arthritis, chronic inflammation of the bowel and others. Haller's approach is to tell the story of Cortison as a story of knowledge. The reason is that the construction of the substance since the turn of the century was based on work of specialists in different scientific fields, bound together only by working on the adrenal gland and developing no school of knowledge. Haller is creating her description as a history of ideas and research programmes, which were synchronized only by chance. So the story of Cortison is not the history of a systematically planned invention but the story of different interests bound together often by chance and not as an organized process.

Haller's book has four parts. The first chapter deals with hormone therapy around 1900 and in last consequence describes the shift of scientific medicine from the anatomical to the physiological age. The second chapter is devoted to further research on the adrenal gland and to the development of the first synthetic drug based on these research strands (approx. 1928 to 1938). The third chapter describes the discussions about the substance and new approaches of application, namely efficiency medicine («Leistungsmedizin») which was a fashionable movement in the interwar period and had a take up around the 1920s. This meant to be a rise of the impact of the substance. The fourth chapter is devoted to the postwar period and to the development of the finally successful product Cortison, which participated at the golden age of medicine after 1945, when major improvements changed diagnostics and treatment rapidly. The final conclusion summarizes the chapters and explains the development of Cortison as an independent and not consistently planned cooperation of technical-pharmaceutical research, biological knowledge of the body and therapeutic visions and problems. Again Haller insists on her approach of history of knowledge as a fruitful and innovative research method in the history of science and medicine. The final pages of the book cover a list of archival / unprinted sources as well as a bibliography of secondary literature and printed sources.

The book is a consistent description of a pharmaceutical innovation. A lot of different research strands and their proponents is presented and carefully worked out. Since Haller gives at least some impressions about contemporary

notions of the development of scientific medicine, the reader also gets information about the history of medicine between 1900 and 1950. In this sense the book is a good addition to the publications already produced about innovations especially after World War Two, explaining the new age of medicine after the World Wars.

Problematic is Haller's approach. Her introduction is not very persuasive since it gives the impression of a desperate attempt to create a sort of original methodology—which finally fails. It is no new idea that scientific innovations have no scientific masterplan and that there is a lot of contingency, luck and unexpected synchronization of events and developments. Moreover strange are the efforts of the author to distance her own approach from cultural history and micro studies of history of science. Most astonishing is the remark, micro studies would prevent knowledge acquisition on transfer processes of knowledge and interdisciplinary research. There are meanwhile enough studies showing the opposite. In fact, Haller's study is methodologically nothing else than a classic history of innovation under consideration of contemporary network theories. Another problem are the meager footnotes. Especially in chapter one, Haller has neglected a lot of literature on 19th century medicine and especially on Rudolf Virchow. The whole discussion on static versus functional medicine, which is tackled in this chapter, has been already mentioned and analyzed in several recent publications and it would have been sound to quote these sources. Last, but not least, a good and usable register would have been a good add on. Especially in works on innovations, giving a lot of names and places, a register is a good help to tease out single information needed on researchers and research strands.

In spite of the shortcomings, Haller's book is welcomed since there is still not much literature on the Post WWII-period and it is in last consequence a sound description of the major events, leading to the construction of Cortison. Every library with units on the history of science and or medicine should have it. ■

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