

ISSN: 1139-0107

ISSN-E: 2254-6367

MEMORIA Y CIVILIZACIÓN

ANUARIO DE HISTORIA

21/2018

REVISTA DEL DEPARTAMENTO DE HISTORIA,
HISTORIA DEL ARTE Y GEOGRAFÍA
FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS
UNIVERSIDAD DE NAVARRA

RECENSIONES

Jiménez Sureda, Montserrat, *Les dones i les professions sanitàries al llarg de la història*, Bellaterra, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2017
(Ailen Abdala Vadillo)
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Jiménez Sureda, Montserrat, *Les dones i les professions sanitàries al llarg de la història*, Bellaterra, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2017, 132p. ISBN: 978-84-490-7244-4. 12€

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The fight for gender equality has struggled its way through modern history. From the suffragettes demanding the right to vote to present day protests, still fighting harassment, underpayment or objectification, women have been standing up to discrimination and working for an equal world. Some might—and do—state there is no such thing as gender bias these days, and even if it is true that western society has come a long way since the times of witch hunting, there are still many issues still to be worked out, improved and removed from our social education.

Within this social subject, *Les dones i les professions sanitàries al llarg de la història* is an attempt to shed some light on a field that is often forgotten in western academic historiography-medicine. A mistake, she states, as «even in times of peace a doctor can have in his hands more lives than a ruler». Through 41 short chapters, Jiménez describes the different ways women have been involved in medical care, how they led this field before modern medicine —both in the public and private sphere— and how they had to fight their way back into practice once it became regulated and declared unsuitable for them by governments and schools. Furthermore, she analyses the situation women have found themselves in as patients under the care of male doctors.

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Let's not forget that medicine was the conceptual creator of the division between the biological sexes. It also was what defined the masculine as strong and the feminine as weak. Jiménez describes how medical language, methodology and scientific aura legitimated the discourses that attempted to prove this division as biologically determined, inalterable and inherited. This fact, the author states, has been the guideline followed when establishing the social functions and responsibilities to both genders. In medicine, this not only excluded women completely from becoming doctors but also influenced the way their body was treated and studied. And this isn't the first and only time medicine has had this sort of influence upon society; homosexuality when believed a disease and the way it was treated is a just one great example of the many terrible mistakes that shall always keep us attentive to not treat science as unquestionable truth.

Magic was very much related to medicine in early civilisations, and subsequently stayed linked to Catholic religion during the Ancient Regime. Monarchs were believed to cure miraculously and praised for it. When it came to low-class, female practitioners, though, the reactions changed depending on the results: most of witchcraft accusations were directed to healers or midwives that had failed during her work. People continued to reach out to them, anyways, as they did when modern medicine developed. Even nowadays some still do. That can only be explained by the fact that for a long time before science existed, their empirical knowledge allowed them to heal. And as limited as their medical abilities were, there was nothing else.

With the development of science during the Enlightenment, medicine became regulated and these practitioners became publicly discredited. Medicine would be from then on taught academically. Women weren't allowed to attend, and would only be trained as midwives or nurses to work under the surveillance of male doctors. The fight to access scientific professions, then, had to come after the fight to access scientific studies. Both are described by the author by telling the stories of women precursors from all around the world who refused to be excluded by every means, including transvestism: Grace Mildmay, Florence Nightingale and Sophia Jex-Blake are just some of their names. And it wasn't until women became part of this field that many natural events of feminine biology like menstruation or menopause stopped being treated as pathologies. The book concludes with a critical look of the nowadays situation: even though women have certainly introduced themselves into science, they are still underpaid, and still get less important positions —just like what happens in almost every professional field. There is much still to be worked out.

Montserrat Jiménez Sureda es profesora de Historia en la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Ha publicado libros como *L'Església catalana sota monarquia dels Borbons. La catedral de Girona en el segle XVIII* (1999); *La memòria de pedra. Les*



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làpides sepulcrals del pla de la catedral de Girona (2005) (con Javier Antón); *Girona, 1793-1795. Guerra Gran i organització política a la monarquia dels Borbons* (2006) o *Crist i la història. Els inicis de la historiografia eclesiàstica catalana en el seu context europeu* (2014).

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