

Ancient medicine

Start date Friday 16 July 2021 **End date** Sunday 18 July 2021

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge
CB23 8AQ

Tutor Piers Bursill-Hall **Course code** 2021NRX091

Director of ISP and LL Sarah Ormrod

**For further information on this
course, please contact** Sarah Ormrod
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To book See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk/residential-weekend-courses

Tutor biography

Piers Bursill-Hall was educated in France, America, Canada, and England and has spent most of his academic life in the Department of Pure Mathematics at Cambridge. He has taught undergraduate courses in history of mathematics and most aspects of history of science at Cambridge and in various universities in Europe, North America, South Asia and South Korea. In Cambridge his lectures are known for their humour, irreverence, and challenging, serious scholarship. He believes that lectures should be lectures, and does not use PowerPoint. His research and teaching has concentrated on history of Ancient sciences, Renaissance mathematics and mathematical arts, and Enlightenment mathematical sciences, the history of medicine, and more recently on early Islamic mathematics and science.

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 – 22:00 **Pre-Classical concepts: Egyptian and Babylonian medical texts**

22:00 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 – 10:30 **Pre-Hippocratic medicine; early rationalist natural philosophy; the Hippocratic corpus**

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 **Aristotle's revolution**

13:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 Free

16:00 Tea

16:30 – 18:00 **Alexandrine physiology**

18:00 – 18:30 Free

18:30 Dinner

20:00 – 21:30 **Galen and Roman medicine**

21:30 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 – 10:30 **Christians, God's will, and the doctors**

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 **Hospitals (or not?)**

12:45 Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

The course aims to give an historiographically modern survey of the development of ancient medicine, and in particular ancient Greek rationalist medicine, along with its eventual, troubled relationship with early Christianity. It will not be a technical survey of a modern view of ancient diseases and medical practice, but rather will try to put the craft and the science of medical thinking and medical practices into their intellectual and social context.

Content:

In the Western tradition medicine has been – and remains – one of the most complex of sciences: no other science combines a core of technical (scientific) knowledge and doctrines, public commercial practice, a constant struggle against (or negotiation with) ‘alternative’, opposing, or parallel doctrines and practices, and – to complicate matters further – the constant presence of government (and/or religious) authority and legal meddling or influences. Think about it: physicists don’t often get taken to court for their physics, after all. Mathematicians don’t have clinics where they talk to the public (and just as well). Medicine is like this today, and so it has been for the last two and a half thousand years, at least. The relationship between these aspects – scientific theory, the market place, and issues of legitimisation and regulation – makes the history of medicine as a science and as a social practice indissoluble, and makes its history one of the most complex and dramatic parts of the history of science.

The theme of these lectures will be to examine the changing pressures that explain the nature of ancient medicine, how practitioners in each generation have legitimised their practices, and to understand how very unlike modern medicine it was, for all that it was clearly and genuinely medicine. The comparison with the modern is just misleading.

The very notions of *illness* or *disease*, *cure*, or *wellness*, are a changing combination of social factors and theoretical notions, just as are doctor–patient relations (and what each expects of the other). The ideas of what a doctor was supposed to ‘do’ with sickness have changed over the millennia: some past practices seem very far from what we would today expect of a doctor, and some treatments seem very far from what we would expect a doctor to do today to ‘cure’ our ailments. The lecturer gets squeamish, however, so the gorier bits of the history will not get detailed discussion. Sadly, there will be no class demonstrations of ancient medicine, such as surgery without anaesthetic or antiseptics.

After a look at some very early medical practices, we shall look at the ‘birth’ of what has been called scientific medicine in ancient Greece, and how these ideas developed alongside ‘non-rational’ traditions ... and how those non-rational traditions, along with political and theological pressures shaped ‘rational’ medicine. We will see how the professional practice of doctors and caring institutions changed in response to the changing world of Roman society and the intervention of Christian ideas.

The course is not a technical history of medicine, and no technical background will be presumed. A good sense of humour is essential.

Presentation of the course:

The course will consist of lectures; the lecturer does not use PowerPoint, and there are few historically valid illustrations of ancient medicine (all those pictures of Hippocrates of Cos are entirely made up; we have no contemporary depictions of him). There will be ample time for questions and discussion both in the lectures and outside of lecture hours; the great advantage of Madingley Hall courses is the possibility of discussions outside of lecture times.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. appreciate a modern historical perspective on the story of ancient medicine.
2. have a deeper grasp of the development of the ideas of ancient medicine
3. begin to understand the complexity of the social and intellectual matrix in which ancient scientific ideas developed.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk *

There are surveys of the history of medicine that have a reasonable section on early ancient (Egyptian and Mesopotamian) medicine, and ancient Greek medicine; if you are interested these will provide background for the lectures, but they are not *necessary* for the course:

Conrad, Lawrence I, *et al. The Western Medical Tradition 800 BC to AD 1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1995). The best and most up-to-date survey of the history of early medicine; if you are considering purchasing a book, this is the best.

Duffin, Jacalyn. *History of Medicine* (Macmillan, 2000). Seems a competent and standard history; there are cheap second-hand copies on Amazon.

Ackerknecht, E H. *A Short History of Medicine* (John Hopkins University Press, 1982 revised edition (and various reprints)). A standard and rather old-fashioned narrative history; not the best but the chapters on ancient medicine will do for an introduction to the course.

Porter, Roy. *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (Fontana Press, 1999). An excellent survey, sometimes controversial and sketchy in some areas of earlier medicine, but always interesting and lively. There seem to be all sorts of variants of this book, so don't worry if the title or edition is different.

Porter, Roy. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). This is a very provocative view of medicine, and not as detailed as some of the above; paperback but still expensive; if you can get a second-hand copy, it is worth having.

In addition, there are a couple of chapters in these two paperbacks that are still about the best short introductions to ancient medical figures:

Lloyd, G E R. *Early Greek Science: Thales to Aristotle* (W W Norton, 1974 and all sorts of reprints). Chapters on Hippocrates and Aristotle are good introductions.

Lloyd, G E R. *Greek Science after Aristotle*. (W W Norton, 1975 and all sorts of reprints). Chapter on Galen is a good introduction.

Here are some scholarly monographs on ancient medicine that will be a good resource for you if you want to read further in this area; some are absurdly expensive, and some are even affordable!

Geller, M.J.: *Ancient Babylonian Medicine: Theory and Practice* (Wiley / Blackwell, 2015) Specialised, scholarly, affordable.

Lane Fox, Robin: *The Invention of Medicine: from Homer to Hippocrates* (Allen Lane, 2020) Very high level scholarship, consistently first rate.

Nunn, J.F.: *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* (Oklahoma U Press 2002) Scholarly and affordable, fairly detailed.

Nutton, Vivian: *Ancient Medicine* (Routledge, 2nd ed 2012) Consistently excellent, and affordable

Nutton, Vivian: *Galen: a Thinking Doctor in Imperial Rome* (Routledge 2020). Excellent, scholarly, and sound ... and almost affordable

Zuccconi, L.M.: *Ancient Medicine: from Mesopotamia to Rome* (Eerdmans, 2019) This looks solid, scholarly ... and expensive.

Additional information

Venue

Details of how to find Madingley Hall can be found on our website:
<http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/who-we-are/how-to-find-the-institute>

Refreshments

Tea and coffee, lunch and dinner will be provided as outlined in the timetable. If you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies and have not already advised us, please inform us on intenq@ice.cam.ac.uk.

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 19 May 2021