

Preface and Acknowledgements

Medical geography originated during the first half of the nineteenth century, at the crossroads of reformist medical science with the new physical geography. Its early practitioners were concerned with the global distribution of human diseases as a function of large-scale, environmental conditions. In Germany, France and Britain, large bodies of literature on medical geography were produced. The new subject significantly overlapped with epidemiology, medical topography, medical statistics, hygiene and especially also with colonial and tropical medicine.

In recent years, medical geography has experienced a resurgence of popularity, as have in general our concerns with the relationship of health with the environment. In the wake of this resurgence, historians have begun looking at medical geography in historical perspective, examining its practices and theories, its national traditions and the socio-economic conditions of its nineteenth-century popularity. These historiographical studies have received further stimulation from the growing interest in environmental history, and in the history of colonial and tropical medicine, as well as of nineteenth-century Humboldtian science.

By the mid-1990s, the time appeared ripe for a spring harvest of the results of these studies, and a symposium was held on 'Medical Geography in Historical Perspective' at the Institut für Geschichte der Medizin (now Institut für Ethik und Geschichte der Medizin) of the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (13–15 June 1996). Most of the chapters in this volume are based on papers presented at this symposium. Conevery Bolton Valenčius kindly offered a second contribution, on the historiography of medical geography, which proved a fitting introduction to the volume. Also the chapters by Michael Osborne and Frank Barrett, who could not be present, were added at a later stage. The chapter on 'Humboldtian Representations' is based on the symposium exhibition, 'Early Maps of Medical Geography', organized by Karen Wonders. The lively and substantive participation in the symposium by William F Bynum, Meike Cordes, Richard Grove, Gerry Kearns, Melinda Meade and Ulrich Tröhler is gratefully acknowledged. The editor wishes to thank David Livingstone for constructive comments on early drafts of the chapters, Wolfgang Böker and Caroline Tonson-Rye for editorial hard work and Gregor Schuchardt for preparing the index.