

## פרקים בהתפתחות הפסיכיאטריה Chapters in the History of Psychiatry

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The authors, Prof. Eliezer Witztum and Dr. Jacob Margolin, are well known and well respected psychiatrists in Israel with decades of experience treating patients with mental disorders. Professor Witztum, Professor of Psychiatry at Ben-Gurion University, Beersheva Mental Health Center, and Ezrat Nashim Mental Health Center in Jerusalem, authored and co-authored scientific papers, books and textbooks on various subjects in the field of psychiatry. Dr. Margolin headed the Jerusalem Center for Mental Health, the Jaffa Community Mental Health Center, and was District Psychiatrist for the Tel Aviv region and co-authored books in Forensic Psychiatry and Figures in the History of Psychiatry.

In the preface, the authors note, that as a medical discipline psychiatry belongs to the natural sciences, but is the medical profession closest to the social sciences and humanities. In order to provide proper treatment for the patient, who suffers from emotional distress, it is essential to understand his social and cultural background in depth, while relating to the spirit of the time and time (Zeitgeist). Indeed, unlike standard psychiatry textbooks *Chapters in the History of Psychiatry* provides an overview of selected psychiatric disorders and treatments in historical, social and cultural contexts.

The book is organized in three sections. In the first section various models, such as the supernatural, magnetism, phrenology and the model of degeneration, are presented to describe stages in the development of attempts to conceptualize mental disorders. The book also features significant figures related to the different models such as Franz Mesmer (mesmerism), Cesare Ezechia Marco Lombroso and Max Nordau, with their life stories and scientific experiments illustrating the appropriate sections. The Jewish/Israeli connection is also noted when relevant. The theories as reflected in the contemporary literature of the times (e.g., Mark Twain, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens) gives the reader a broader picture of the perception of the various mental disorders in society throughout the ages. It should be noted that sometimes the theories that were refuted in the historical perspective, might have contained a nucleus of new theories that developed in future generations.

The second section focuses on some of the “darker psychiatric treatments” such as lobotomy and insulin coma therapy. The authors question how a “treatment” with no scientific basis such as lobotomy could have occurred in the twentieth century and incurred brain injury in people suffering from mental disorders. Witztum and Margolin emphasize that the treatments were performed in the United States, in the mainstream of medicine, and conclude that to a large extent, this is a warning that should serve as a lesson for all physicians.

In the third section, the authors describe various cultural phenomena, some of which have a long history, such as the dance craze – tarantism and their relationships to mass hysteria. Some of the described phenomena such as Dybbuk, Zaar and Voodoo death are related to the mental mechanism of dissociation. The scientific, literary, folkloristic and psychiatric aspects of the occurrences of werewolves, vampirism and moon disease are also presented.

The combination of the three sections of the book comprise fascinating variety and a wealth of extraordinary detailed information that represent many components of psychiatry that are off the beaten path.

The book is definitely a “good read,” often riveting and hard to put down. The technical presentation, the clarity of the typeset, the unique illustrations throughout the book, and precise documentation, references and indices contribute to the comprehensive and enjoyable thorough reading experience.

The book is not a standard medical textbook, rather it provides historical, social and cultural issues related to psychiatry, some of which are not generally emphasized in traditional psychiatry texts, and thus extend the study of the history of psychiatry for those who are interested in the broader picture. As the medical profession closest to the social sciences and humanities, the authors succeeded in presenting the history of selected unique chapters of psychiatry within the social and cultural context.

When finishing the book the reader is left with the question – what will be written a few decades from now about contemporary psychiatric therapies?

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