

## Trachoma through the ages

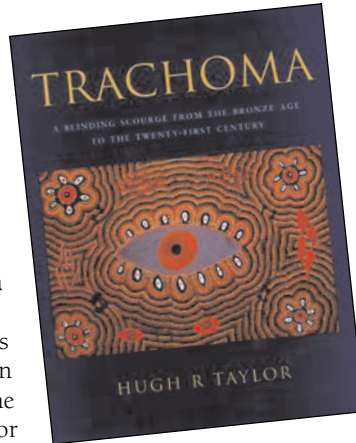
**Trachoma: a blinding scourge from the bronze age to the twenty-first century.** Hugh R Taylor. Melbourne: Haddington Press, 2008 (282 pp, \$132.00). ISBN 978 09757695 9 1.

**WHY WOULD A SUBSTANTIAL** scholarly work devoted solely to trachoma be published in Australia? For two good reasons: firstly, trachoma, a disease of poverty and poor countries, is still found in Australia. Secondly, it is written by a world renowned trachoma expert, the University of Melbourne's Professor Hugh Taylor.

Taylor's passion is evident in this comprehensive review of trachoma from antiquity to the present, a scientific work of great detail and scope.

Copies and extracts of documents, photographs and images, both from the author's own collection and from sometimes obscure sources, support the text. Many of the photos were taken by Professor Taylor during his extensive field studies in Africa, Mexico and Australia, as well as in his laboratory studies. To this extent, the book provides a record of Taylor's many years in the field and in the laboratory, his work ranging from vaccine development to simple, practical but effective means of eliminating trachoma in children at risk.

Taylor draws our attention to the fact that the establishment in the 19th century of many now-famous ophthalmic hospitals was



due to the trachoma epidemic in Europe, and even in Australia. He describes how improved living conditions in Europe and much of Australia at the beginning of the 20th century led to the almost total disappearance of trachoma.

There is a clear exposition of why trachoma still exists in some remote areas of Australia, offering evidence of control measures and, importantly, evidence for advocacy to policymakers so that they may make evidence-based decisions on the subject.

This book is an invaluable reference work for medical researchers, providing an in-depth knowledge of the subject. For public health planners, sections on the prevalence and natural history of the disease, with proven interventions detailed, will be invaluable. Students will find that this work covers much of what they need to know about a disease all but eliminated, yet which still persists in pockets of disadvantaged areas around the world.

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