SAMUEL JOHNSON commented that Dr. Richard Mead "lived more in the broad sun-shine of life than almost any man", a fine tribute to a man who distinguished himself not only as a physician and scientist but also as a collector, connoisseur, and patron of the arts. Early in his career, in 1702, Dr. Mead published a pioneering work on the operation of poisons; and in 1703 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. Later he tended Queen Anne shortly before her death, ministered to the ever-ailing Pope, and during the reign of George II joined John Pringle, James Lind and others in furthering the cause of public health. Commenting about art collectors during the reign of George II, Osbert Sitwell and Margaret Barton write in their chapter on "Taste" in A. S. Turberville's *Johnson's England*, "The most exceptional and individual, and yet in some ways the most typical, was Dr. Mead (1673-1754). Not only was his collection unrivalled both in its dimensions and quality, but, in this most rare, he was a generous patron of the living as well as of the dead. His house was the first to be thrown open to students of art, and a number of scholars and artists were kept continually in his employ."

Dr. Mead died on 16 February 1754 having left a record of achievement both as scientist and humanist, and it is no surprise to find his life and accomplishments commemorated in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for November 1754 in an essay entitled, "Some Account of the Life and Writings of the late Dr Richard Mead", on pages 510-515, an account, according to a note, "indebted to the learned Dr Mattley, author of the Journal"

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2 In the *First Epistle of the First Book of Horace* (lines 51-52) Pope writes, "I'll do what Mead and Cheselden advise,/To keep these limbs, and to preserve these eyes ."

Britannique from whose French it is translated."¹ In the following pages I hope to show through a discussion of Samuel Johnson's interest in the lives of scientists and physicians, his work as a translator of French sources, and his connections with the Gentleman's Magazine that he may have been the translator of the "Life of Dr. Richard Mead".

Although Dr. Johnson's fascination with science, men of science, and physicians is known, many might be interested to learn that he wrote eighteen biographies of scientists and physicians. These include lives of Boerhaave, Sydenham, Sir Thomas Browne and Lewis Morin; in the Lives of the English Poets biographies of Drs. Cowley, Garth, Blackmore and Akenside; and for volume one of Dr. Robert James's Medicinal Dictionary lives of Actuarius, Aegineta, Aesculapius, Aetius, Aretaeus, Archagathus, Asclepiades, Alexander, Tournefort, and Ruysch.² It is important to note, I think, that seven of the eighteen biographies are translated from French sources. Johnson also wrote the "Dedication" to Dr. James's

¹ Matthew Maty (1718-76), not "Mattley", according to the D.N.B. account, was a physician, writer, and principal librarian of the British Museum who "commenced in 1750 the publication of the bi-monthly 'Journal Britannique', which was printed at the Hague, and gave an account in French of the chief productions of the English press." The Mead life in the Gentleman's Magazine is taken from the "Eloge du Docteur RICHARD MEAD", Journal Britannique, xiv (Juillet & Août, 1754), 215-48.

Johnson's relations with Maty were far from cordial, chiefly because of his attacks on the Dictionary. When Dr. Adams suggested to Johnson that Maty would make a good assistant on Johnson's proposed Bibliothèque (a publication similar to Maty's Journal), Johnson responded that he would throw the little black dog into the Thames (Life, i. 284). Details about the Johnson-Maty feud are found in A. De Morgan's "Dr. Johnson and Dr. Maty", Notes and Queries, iv (October, 1857), 341. It is clear that Johnson was familiar with Maty and his Journal, and it is important to observe that the Mead life in the Gentleman's Magazine was completed well before the Johnson-Maty break took place since it might seem unlikely that Johnson would use a source written by a man he detested.

I wish here to thank Johnsonians Arthur Sherbo and Donald Greene for alerting me to the Mead life and Johnson's possible connection with it.

Medicinal Dictionary, which was addressed to the illustrious Dr. Richard Mead, and in speaking for Dr. James he undoubtedly spoke for himself in his words of praise for the celebrated physician:

SIR,

That the Medicinal Dictionary is dedicated to You, is to be imputed only to Your Reputation for superior skill in those Sciences which I have endeavoured to explain and facilitate: And You are, therefore, to consider this Address, if it be agreeable to You, as one of the Rewards of Merit; and if otherwise, as one of the Inconveniences of Eminence.

However You shall receive it, my Design cannot be disappointed; because this public Appeal to Your Judgment will shew, that I do not found my Hopes of Approbation upon the Ignorance of my Readers; and that I fear His Censure least, whose Knowledge is most extensive.

During the course of his career Dr. Johnson turned a number of times to French texts, and a knowledge of the way he translated from the French may shed some light on whether he was the author of the "Life of Mead" in the Gentleman's Magazine. Johnson's first extant work in prose, Father Lobo's Voyage to Abyssinia (1735), was translated from Joachim Le Grand's Voyage historique d'Abissinie (1728). In November, 1738, his "Life of Father Paul Sarpi, Author of the History of the Council of Trent", appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine on pages 581-3, a sketch based on Pierre-François Le Courayer's "Vie Abrégée de Fra-Paolo" in his French edition of Sarpi's work entitled Histoire de Concile de Trente (1736). A third work Johnson translated from the French and one of the earliest sources of his critical views was A Commentary on Mr. Pope's Principles of Morality, or Essay on Man By Monsieur Crousaz (1739) from Jean Pierre de Crousaz's Commentaire sur la Traduction en Vers de M. l'Abbé Du Resnel, de l'Essai de M. Pope sur l'Homme (1738), a work involved in the furore Pope's Essay on Man caused, especially in France.

Two more items translated from the French by Johnson appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine in 1741: the first, in April, on pages 202-8, is entitled, "A Dissertation on the Amazons. From the History of the Amazons, written in French

1 From Allen Hazen, Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications (New Haven, 1937), p. 73.
by the Abbe de Guyon” from Guyon’s *Histoire des Amazones anciennes et modernes* (1740); the second, in July, on pages 375-7, is “A Panegyric on Dr Morin, by Mr Fontenelle” from his *Eloges des Académiciens de l’Académie Royale des Sciences* (1731).

As mentioned above, Johnson made substantial contributions to Dr. James’s *Medicinal Dictionary* (1743-5), the ponderous eighteenth-century medical encyclopedia which Mark Twain satirized in his essay entitled “A Majestic Literary Fossil”. Six of the lives Johnson wrote for James’s tome are based on French sources: two, those of Tournefort and Ruysch, are taken from Fontenelle “Eloges” in his *Histoire de l’Académie Royale des Sciences* (1708 and 1731 for Tournefort and Ruysch respectively); and four, those of Aesculapius, Archagathus, Aretaeus, and Asclepiades, are translated from Daniel Le Clerc’s *Histoire de la Médecine* (1723). Besides these French translations, Johnson contributed “A Dissertation upon the Greek Comedy” and the “General Conclusion” to Charlotte Lennox’s *The Greek Theatre of Father Brumoy* (1759) from Pierre Brumoy’s *Le Théâtre des Grecs* (1730); and he translated poems from the French, “Translations of Verses from a French Pantomime”, “Translation of Lines by Benserade”, and “Translation of French Verses on Skating”. ¹

Almost without exception Johnson’s French translations are more recreations than literal renditions of his French sources, and through a variety of devices such as paraphrase, condensation, and abridgement Johnson presents a new version of the French. Sometimes through subtle rephrasing he manages to impose his views and biases on his French texts. His ant clericalism, for instance, is detectable in collating his “Life of

Father Paul Sarpi and his Father Lobo’s *Voyage to Abyssinia* with the French originals and his anti-Spanish bias is noticeable in his “Life of Ruysch” in James’s *Medicinal Dictionary*. Something more than hack work, really, Johnson's translations from the French are often sufficiently original works to deserve membership in the canon, and a close analysis of them reveals insights about his mind that one would not expect to find in the somewhat restrictive medium of translation.

It would be difficult to define a Johnsonian style of translating from the French, though one does become aware of his effort to give his English version a smoothness, a rhythm and a balance that a literal rendition would lack. Frequently he accomplishes this by doubling or tripling modifiers, nouns, and phrases. The following passage from Johnson’s translation of Crousaz’s *Commentaire* (see above) illustrates this tendency. The italics are mine.

Crousaz: *Commentaire*¹

Il est triste de voir l’espérance la plus respectable, & pour laquelle nous devons à Dieu des actions de graces infinies, marcher à la suite d’une liste de chimères, effets de notre orgueil, & de la légéreté de notre attention.

Johnson: *A Commentary*²

I cannot, without Melancholy and Pity, see that Hope, which is so firmly grounded, so strongly supported, and so highly valued; that Hope for which we owe such ardent and frequent Acknowledgments to the Goodness of our Creator, rank’d among airy Visions, and wild Chimeras, which are indebted for their Influence and Existence to nothing but our Pride and our Inattention.

A longer passage from Johnson’s “Life of Frederic Ruysch” in James’s *Medicinal Dictionary* from the French of Fontenelle reveals Johnson’s characteristic method of translation from the French:

Fontenelle: *Histoire*³

M. Ruysch se destina à la Medecine, & il commença par s’appliquer à la matière Medicinale, aux Plantes, aux

Johnson: “Life of Ruysch”⁴

This Gentleman, from his Infancy, devoted himself to Physic, and began his first Researches with the Materia

⁴ (London, 1743), i. 522r. Hereafter cited as James.
Animaux ou parties d'Animaux, aux Mineraux qui y appartiennent, aux operations de Chimie, aux dissections Anatomiques, & de tout cela il se fit de bonne heure un Cabinet deja digne des regards & de l'attention des Connoisseurs. Il etoit tout entier a ce qu'il avoit entrepris; peu de sommeil avec beaucoup de sante, point de ces asmusements inutiles, qui passent pour des delassements necessaires, nul autre plaisir que son travail, & quand il se maria en 1661, ce fut en grande partie pour etre entierelement soulage des soins domestiques, ce qui lui reussit assies aisement dans le Pays o"il il vivoit.

In comparing the two passages it is clear that Johnson paraphrases throughout and adds to and omits from the French. In his version there is no mention of Ruysch's famous "Cabinet", which, according to Fontenelle, was worthy "des regards & de l'attention des Connoisseurs". But of greater interest are Johnson's additions, especially his statement, "He was none of those superficial Inquirers, who either thro' Prejudice, or Indolence, rest satisfied on this Side of Truth; for he had stripp'd his Mind of all those unreasonable Attachments, which are inconsistent with the Temper of a Philosopher; and acquir'd such an indefatigable Turn, that his hardest Labours in Pursuit of Truth became his highest Pleasures, and his only recreations. And even when he married in 1661 it was in a great measure with a View to render his Circumstances easy, that he might pursue Truth to the greater Advantage.

Although he translated frequently, especially from the French, Johnson seemed to fear translation as a possible corrupter of the English tongue and in his "Preface" to the English Dictionary he writes,

The great pest of speech is frequency of translation. No book was ever turned from one language into another, without imparting something of its native idiom.

1 Boswell, for instance, writes of Johnson (Life, i. 355), "He would have been under no temptation to deviate in any degree from truth, which he held very sacred" and "No man was more incredulous as to particular facts, which were at all extraordinary; and therefore no man was more scrupulously inquisitive, in order to discover the truth" (Life, ii. 247).
... If an academy should be established for the cultivation of our style; which I, who can never wish to see dependence multiplied, hope the spirit of English liberty will hinder or destroy, let them, instead of compiling grammars and dictionaries, endeavour, with all their influence, to stop the licence of translators, whose idleness and ignorance, if it be suffered to proceed, will reduce us to babble a dialect of France.  

Perhaps it was his fear of corruption through translation that prompted Johnson to avoid a literal rendition of his French sources; and coupled with our knowledge of the force of his personality that would resist the strictures imposed by translation, it helps explain why Johnson's French translations are not mere duplicates of their sources. One can conclude, then, from a study of Johnson's translations from the French that he consistently worked flexibly with his French texts; and when one comes upon a translation such as the "Life of Dr. Richard Mead", which is translated in much the same manner Johnson translated French works, it deserves a close scrutiny.

In citing representative passages showing Johnson's translation of French sources for purposes of comparison with the "Life of Mead" in the Gentleman's Magazine, I am aware of the frailty of this evidence since one must ask whether Johnson's method of translation differed significantly from other translators of the French during the period. A convenient way of comparing Johnson's practice with other translators is found in Charlotte Lennox's The Greek Theatre of Father Brumoy, referred to above, which involved seven translators, including Mrs. Lennox and Johnson himself. Though Johnson translates his French text more faithfully here than elsewhere, differences can be seen in comparing his work with that of the other translators. Only Mrs. Lennox, it seems, takes the liberties Johnson does with the French and her version contains some doublets. Her rendition, however, is marred by infelicities in translation that Johnson usually avoided.

I have also compared Johnson's method of translating French with that of another possible candidate for the authorship of the "Life of Mead"—Dr. John Hawkesworth whose biography I am writing. A friend and leading imitator of Johnson, Hawkes-

\(^1\) Johnson's Works, ed, F. P. Walesby (Oxford, 1825), v. 48-49.
worth was an important force in the Gentleman’s Magazine when the Mead biography appeared. In 1768 he published the Adventures of Telemachus from the French of Fénelon. Hawkesworth takes few liberties with his French source as Johnson often did while his English version contains rhetorical flourishes which Johnson generally avoided. Also, few doublets appear in Hawkesworth’s translation.

If Johnson differs from the translating practices of his time, then, it would seem to be in his tendency to work creatively with his French texts—to such a degree, in fact, that it would appear to be excessive even for an age when translators placed little emphasis on fidelity to the original. At the very least a knowledge of Johnson’s technique of translating French provides a kind of negative evidence: if the “Life of Mead” were translated literally, contained few or no doublets, and showed no evidence of the translator imposing his prejudices on the text, it could hardly be Johnson’s. Such information, when combined with a number of other possible Johnsonian connections with the biography, has its uses. Before examining the “Life of Mead”, however, it is important to discuss Johnson’s connection with the Gentleman’s Magazine during the time the Mead life appeared.

Dr. Johnson’s writing for the Gentleman’s Magazine has yet to be fully discovered, though scholars have shed light upon his numerous contributions which range from his poem to Cave, Ad Urbanum, in the March 1738 issue to the December 1784 issue when John Nichols printed a Johnson letter concerning the authorship of the parts of the several volumes of the Ancient Universal History. Professor Arthur Sherbo in his article, “Samuel Johnson in The Gentleman’s Magazine, 1750-1755”, comments on Johnson’s contributions to the periodical during the period the Mead life appeared and states that the year 1754, the year the biography was published, “is exceeding rich in

1 An excellent introduction to theories of translation in the period is John W. Draper’s “The Theory of Translation in the Eighteenth Century” Neophilologus, vi (1921), 241-54. In discussing the translation of classical poetry Draper also reveals the general attitudes toward translation which may have been shared by translators from the French. Johnson’s comments on translation are found in his “Life of Dryden” and in Idlers 68 and 69 (see below).
possible Johnsonian pieces.".1 Confirming previous attributions such as Johnson’s "Life of Edmund Cave" and the "Preface" to the 1754 volume, Professor Sherbo finds evidence of Johnson’s writing in all but three months of the year—July, October, and November, the last month being the one when the Mead account appeared.

One approaches the "Life of Dr. Richard Mead" in the November 1754 Gentleman's Magazine, then, knowing that Johnson wrote eighteen biographies of physicians and men of science during his career, a number of them based on French sources; and it is clear he was active in the periodical when the "Life of Mead" appeared. Also, one knows that Johnson consistently eschewed literal translation of his French sources and worked freely with the French texts he translated.

A collation of the "Life of Dr. Richard Mead" in the Gentleman's Magazine with its French source in the Journal Britannique reveals a method of translation similar to Johnson's in his translations from the French. The Mead biography is not a literal rendition of the French account by Maty; and the translator through paraphrase, addition, omission, and abridgement works the French into an English life which while based on the French is no slavish imitation of it. Of considerable interest is the appearance of some nine doublets and three triplets in the ten-column life, a number consistent with Johnson's fondness for this stylistic device found throughout his French translations. Important, too, is the intrusion of an apparent bias on the translator's part concerning Charles II and the dissenters. This is seen in the following passage which also illustrates the author's method of turning his French source into an English version which approximates, though it scarcely mirrors, the original. The passage involves the Mead family's difficulty as dissenters during the reign of Charles II.

Journal Britannique : 216 : 15-29; Johnson : GM : 510 cl. 2, F-G
217 : 1-2

Les Malheurs des tems dissipèrent dispersed by the troubles which en 1683 cette Académie domestique. happened in 1683, and Mr Mead Charles ou plutôt celui qui gouvernoit having been accused of concerting

1 In Johnsonian Studies, ed. Magdi Wahdi Wahba (Cairo, 1962), p. 147.
en son nom se vengeoit de ceux qu'il n'avoyt pu gagner. Le zèle de la haute Eglise en fournissoit les moyens. Le Ministre de Stepney fut accusé d'avoir trempé dans quelques projets contre la Cour. Il étoit Presbyterien ; il n'osa compter sur son innocence, & ne vit de salut que dans la fuite. Il alla chercher en Hollande un repos qu'il ne trouvoit plus dans sa Patrie. Avant que de s'exiler, il mit son fils Richard dans une une Ecole régie par un maitre habile & attaché à la même cause.

The English version is more a rewriting than a translation of the French, and the translator takes considerable liberties with his source, even modifying the tone and substance of the Journal account. Mead's father in the French is persecuted by Church and State and, realizing the futility of protesting his innocence, flees the fatherland for the safety of Holland. While there is no obvious bias in the French version, it does present Presbyterian Mead in a lonely struggle against the power of Church and State.

The abridged and more expository English account omits all references to Charles II, thereby modulating his dealings with Mead as well as the zeal of the Church in persecuting the minister who "n'osa compter sur son innocence". It might be argued that the translator toned down his French text to avoid placing both monarch and clergy in a bad light. If Johnson translated the Mead biography, one might contend that he abridged his French source, as he often did, simply to eliminate extraneous material; yet perhaps a better reason exists. Johnson's references to Presbyterians in the Life of Johnson and the English Dictionary are quite negative while his remarks about Charles II in the Life are often laudatory. Thus it appears that Johnson

1 The citations Johnson gives in the Dictionary (1818 edition) concerning Presbyterians are scarcely flattering: "One of the more rigid presbyterians" (Swift); "Flea-bitten synod, an assembly brew'd/of clerks and elders ana, like the rude/Chaos of presby'try, where laymen guide/with the tame woolpack clergy by their side" (Cleaveland on the Presbytery); "Could a feeble presbytery, though perchance swelling enough, correct a wealthy, a potent offender?" (Holiday on the Presbytery).

In one exchange with Boswell (Life, ii. 103) Johnson states that he is no more an enemy to the Roman Catholic religion than to the Presbyterian. "BOSWELL.
and the translator of the account of Mead's life share similar prejudices, and if Johnson did translate the "Life of Mead" it would not be the only time he imposed one of his biases upon the supposedly objective medium of translation.

In his "Life of Father Paul Sarpi" Johnson subtly intrudes upon the text his own anti-clerical prejudices and makes Sarpi more of a rebel against church authority than he is in Le Courayer's French version. A certain Colissoni, for instance, attempted to ruin Sarpi by publishing a letter Sarpi wrote to him in which he had stated concerning church politics in Rome, "qu'on ne s'avançoit aux Dignités de cette Cour que par de mauvais moyens". A bad enough comment in itself, Johnson intensifies it by translating, "he detested the Court of Rome",¹ a phrase which more closely duplicates his feelings than Sarpi's.

Another example of a Johnsonian bias imposing itself in a translation appears in his "Life of Frederic Ruysch" in Dr. James's Medicinal Dictionary. Johnson translates Fontenelle's comment concerning a Spanish doctor, "Ce Docteur traitoit avec très-peu de considération ceux qui avoient jusque-là le plus brillé dans cette Science & préféroit de beaucoup, & hautement ses découvertes aux leurs" by "This Physician bore it with a high Hand; undervalued those who were justly esteemed the Ornaments of their Profession, and with all the haughty and supercilious Airs of a Spaniard, extoll'd his own Discoveries above theirs"². In his rendition Johnson gives vent to an anti-Spanish bias which also appears in his London and his "Life of Blake". The appearance of a possible prejudice in the Mead life does not, of course, establish Johnson's authorship of the piece, though it seems consistent with his practice in his other translations in imposing at times his views on French sources.

¹ You are joking.' JOHNSON. 'No, Sir, I really think so. Nay, Sir, of the two I prefer the Popish.' BOSWELL. 'How so, Sir?' JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, the Presbyterians have no church, no apostolical ordination.' Johnson refused to attend Presbyterian services in Scotland saying he did not wish to "give a sanction, by my presence, to a Presbyterian assembly" (Life, v. 121). Among other favourable references to Charles II in the Life, Boswell comments on Johnson's "extraordinary partiality" for that Prince (Life, ii. 341).

² Fontenelle, pp. 100-101; James, i. 5Z².
The "Life of Mead" in the *Gentleman's Magazine* follows with some exactness the *Journal* account of Dr. Mead's education at Utrecht and Leyden and his travels to Italy. Dr. Mead's *Mechanical Account of Poisons* (1702), a work which brought him fame and recognition, is mentioned in the English version, but the long *Journal* commentary discussing it is omitted. Instead, the reader is referred to volume fifteen of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1745) to a long review of a subsequent edition of this work on pages 255-60, which begins with the comment, "If the ingenious and judicious author of this treatise had been conceal'd, I should have introduced these pages with an encomium, which is now entirely unnecessary, for the name of Dr Mead is a stronger recommendation than any I could frame, tho' I had spared no pains to do justice to the merit of this work." Two years earlier, in 1743, Johnson published the dedication of Dr. James's *Medicinal Dictionary*, a felicitous tribute to the great physician whose words match in sentiment those expressed in the review above. One might conclude, then, that Johnson had a hand in all three pieces relating to Mead—not only the *Medicinal Dictionary* dedication which has already been attributed to him, but the 1754 "Life of Mead" in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, as well as the 1745 review of Mead's study of poisons.

One consistent feature of Johnson's French translations is his unwillingness to be restricted by the conciseness of the French he translates. While Johnson often omits material, abridges and condenses his French sources, he frequently expands the French into a fuller English version. This tendency is evident in the Mead biography in a passage concerned with Mead's pioneering work on the operation of poisons.

*Journal Britannique*: 221: 3-8
Tel est le progrès de la science; elle découvre à chaque pas un nouvel horizon plus vaste & moins distinct. On commence par croire tout facile à expliquer; on finit par sentir qu'à la rigueur rien ne l'est.

*Johnson*: GM: 511 cl. 1, E-F
And indeed all who mount the acclivity of science discover, at every step, a new horizon, which in proportion as it is more extensive, is less distinct. When they begin to ascend, they believe they shall see every thing; but when they gain the summit, they know that nothing is to be distinguished, but the mere external surface of many objects, of which even the outline is
Sometimes imperfect, where the shade of one often obscures another; where clouds hover over the nearest, and the most remote are lost in unmeasurable distance.

Some forty words in the *Journal* account have been more than doubled in the English version; and while the idea of the French has been retained, it has been worked into a virtually new statement which compared to the spare French is balanced, amplified, and generalized. This method of translation parallels closely Johnson’s practice in his translations from the French and, one might add, the English passage has a Johnsonian ring, from the phrase “all who mount the acclivity of science” to the elaborately and skilfully balanced final sentence.

Another longer excerpt illustrates well the means by which the Mead life is rendered into English. One comparing these passages with other extracts from Johnson’s French translations cited in this essay and those referred to in the notes will, perhaps, detect a similar method of translation, particularly Johnson’s tendency to work with considerable freedom with his French sources and his use of the French more as a guide for the preparation of a fairly original English version rather than as a text to be translated literally. I italicize four doublets which appear in the English, a stylistic mannerism present throughout Johnson’s translations from the French and an important reason why one might see his hand at work in the “Life of Mead”.

*Journal Britannique*: 237: 8-29; 238: 1-6

*Sans le Docteur Mead il y a lieu de craindre, que l’invention de Mr. Sutton pour tirer par le moyen du feu hor des vaisseaux & des autres lieux renfermés cet air corrompu, qui cause les plus fâcheuses maladies, aurait eu le sort de bien d’autres découvertes, que l’ignorance, la jalousie, & souvent l’intérêt particulier étouffent. Heureusement notre Savant, qui d’un coup d’œil avait senti tous les avantages de cette méthode, & qui la regardoit comme la découverte la plus salutaire faite en...*  

*Johnson*: *GM*: 513 cl. 2, D-G; 514 cl. 1, A-B

There is great reason to fear, that without the assistance of Dr Mead, the invention of the late Mr Sutton to evacuate ships and other close places, of the corrupted air which so often causes *diseases* and *death*, would have shared the fate of many others useful discoveries which ignorance, jealously, or private interest has *discouraged* and *depressed*. Sutton’s method of ventilation was by fire, and Mead soon perceived that it was incontestibly the best; but to persuade mankind to accept of
Physique depuis un siècle, joignoit la patience à la fermeté. Il engagea les Seigneurs de l'Amirauté à faire faire l'épreuve de la nouvelle machine, il y assista non seulement avec eux mais avec divers autres Savans qu'il avait intéressés à la même cause, il presenta à la Société Royale un Mémoire de sa façon qui constatoit l'efficace & la simplicité de cette invention, & il ne cessa insister, que lorsqu'au bout de dix ans il eut obtenu l'ordre favorable, que de passions humaines avoient jusqu'alors arrêté.

A close comparison of the above passages reveals a number of differences between the French and the English versions. The translator expands the French somewhat and makes structural changes—note that Sutton's method of ventilation by fire is mentioned well along in the English compared to the French. While omitting portions of the French which must have seemed extraneous to him such as Dr. Mead's estimate of Sutton's process as "la découverte la plus salutaire faite en Physique depuis un siècle", he adds a comment which could be Johnsonian that "to persuade mankind to accept of any benefit which is offer'd them by labour or ingenuity" was a difficult task even for one so influential as Dr. Mead. These changes, besides the four doublets which appear in the English, are consistent with the method of translation Johnson used in his translations from the French and suggest the possibility that he wrote the Mead life in the Gentleman's Magazine.

Samuel Johnson not only translated a number of works from various languages but he thought as well about the theory of translation. In Idler 69 for Saturday, 11 August 1759 he writes, "There is undoubtedly a mean to be observed. Dryden saw
very early that closeness best preserved an author's sense, and that freedom best exhibited his spirit; he therefore will deserve the highest praise who can give a representation at once faithful and pleasing, who can convey the same thoughts with the same graces, and who when he translates changes nothing but the language.” In my last citation of passages from the French and English versions of the “Life of Mead” it would appear as if the translator were attempting to fulfil this Johnsonian ideal.

Journal Britannique 245: 1-22: Johnson: GM 514 cl. 2 H; 515 cl. 1, A

He kept every day a public table for men of learning and ingenuity, at which he presided himself, and addressed the naturalist, the mathematician, the antiquarian, the painter, and the classic, each in his own language, displaying the merit of their discoveries, or their compositions, and inspiring reciprocal emulation and esteem.

The English rendition above is hardly a translation in the strict sense of the word and the author uses his French source, as Johnson often did, as a model to be imitated rather than a text to be literally construed. One might indeed praise it, though, for at the same time it is faithful to the sense of the French it is also pleasing as a carefully effected and fluid English sentence.

There is, then, considerable evidence for Dr. Johnson’s authorship of the “Life of Dr. Richard Mead”. The subject

matter of the biography accords well with Johnson's interest in the lives of scientists and physicians, and it would be no surprise to see his use of a French text for his Gentleman's Magazine essay since he turned a number of times to French sources during his career. It is clear that Johnson thought highly of Dr. Mead and his accomplishments, was familiar with Maty and his Journal Britannique, and was working for the Gentleman's Magazine when the Mead life appeared. Furthermore, a collation of the French and English versions of Mead's biography reveals a method of translation similar to the one Johnson used in his various translations from the French. Impressive though this evidence is, however, it is at best circumstantial, and one would hope for additional facts which would shore up what must remain a tentative attribution. If Dr. Johnson did write the "Life of Dr. Richard Mead", it would be a credit to him; for while the life is based on a French source, it is more than a mere translation and would make a useful addition to the canon.