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different symposiums. The overall theme could be described as “for and against Paracelsus”. Gundolf Keil is violently against Paracelsus whom he accuses of being misshapen, unoriginal, a bad physician and a bad surgeon. He is also against Karl Sudhoff for being too enthusiastic about his subject. Other contributions deal with Paracelsus’s life, including his inglorious departure from Basel which now ironically is celebrating the 500th anniversary of his birth. An indirect influence of Ficino and Neoplatonism on Paracelsus is defended by some and attacked by others. Benzenhöfer analyses a trilogy by Guido Kolbenheyer which makes Paracelsus into a truly German hero. But Benzenhöfer is mistaken when he describes the National Socialist Kolbenheyer, who was born in Budapest and lived in Tübingen and Munich, as a Sudeten German. Vivian Nutton and Bernhard Dietrich Haage deal with the problem of how far Paracelsus was an innovator of medicine comparable to Luther in religion. Hartmut Rudolph deals with the theology of Paracelsus, specially with regard to his accepting the possibility of free will about which he changed his mind during his lifetime. Wolf-Dieter Müller-Jahncke shows the special way Paracelsus uses the idea of the parallelism of macrocosm and microcosm. Volker Zimmermann reports on Paracelsus in literature, and two contributions deal with his medical ethics. The discussions are more arresting than helpful, but footnotes, including those of Gundolf Keil on medieval medicine and surgery in such works as Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* stimulate one to further reading, and cover most of the Paracelsus scholarship of the 1990s.

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Sieglinde Lieberknecht, *Die Canones des Pseudo-Mesue: Eine mittelalterliche Purgantien-Lehre*, Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Pharmazie, Band 71, Stuttgart, Wissenschaftliche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1995, pp. x, 278, DM 48.00 (3–8047–1382–3).

According to Galenic humoral doctrine, the balance of four body fluids, called humours—blood, bile, black bile and phlegm—is responsible for good health whereas excess of a particular humour, or corrupt humours, leads to disease. Corrupt humours which cannot be improved or an excess of a humour have to be eliminated from the body. Therefore purging, like bloodletting, was an important method of treatment in the tradition of Galen.

Die Canones des Pseudo-Mesue deals with a very influential medieval Latin text about purgatives, published under the name of Johannes Mesue of Damascus. While she could not trace the author of this work, Sieglinde Lieberknecht comes to the conclusion that the main writer may have been an Arabic author, probably not Mesue himself (Yuhanna ibn Masawaih, AD 777–859(?)). The text found its final form between AD 1260 and 1290, when a Latin-speaking scholar had it translated from Arabic. Then he extended and supplemented the translation, arranging the contents according to the *Canon* of Avicenna (Ibn Sina, AD 980–1037). Possibly even some of the text under examination was written in Latin with the help of Arabic sources.

The *Canones* themselves consist of two parts. The first part, *Canones universales* or *De consolatione medicinarum*, translated into German by Sieglinde Lieberknecht, deals with the rules of treatment in general. The second part, *De simplicibus*, is about the properties of various drugs.

In order to make comprehension of this very specialized text easier, Lieberknecht starts with a short description of the authors mentioned or quoted, shows parallels to the *Canon* of Avicenna and presents her research on the authorship of the *Canones*. Then she proceeds to the fundamental theoretical concepts of this work, theories about natural philosophy, physiology, pathology and pharmacology, especially the effects of cathartics. Two alphabetical lists of the drugs which are mentioned in the translated text show the difficulties in identifying Arabic drug names; species and even genus sometimes remain uncertain.

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For the main part of her work, the translation of the Latin text into German, Lieberknecht has used the Valgrisius edition (Venice 1561) which incorporates a commentary of Mondinus (1275–1326) and an interpretation of Sylvius (Jacques Dubois, 1478–1555). In cases of uncertainty she compares this edition with the Venice and Padua (?) incunabula of 1471, a selection of eleven manuscripts and commentaries. The appendix gives the Latin text, which makes a comparison of her translation possible.

The text itself consists of four main sections. The first one stresses the importance of the rules of treatment and shows the criteria for judging whether a drug is suitable for use. Touch, smell and taste are of particular importance in order to determine the characteristics of a drug, but colour, age, durability and location of a herb give additional information. Certain drugs specifically act on different humours and on different organs.

In the second section instructions are given on how to improve drugs that are too weak or too strong, avoid harmful side effects and direct the drugs to the organ intended. This is done by adding certain substances to the drug itself. The second strategy is to change some of the characteristics of the drug by skilled preparation, especially cooking, washing, soaking or grinding.

The third section describes the circumstances under which cathartics can harm the body, and gives recommendations for treatment. The first condition is when a purgative only stirs up a humour but does not eliminate it from the body, the second is when other humours than intended are purged or painful purgation, and the third is excessive purgation. The fourth section deals with the treatment of harmful conditions after purgation, such as fever, headache, vertigo, loss of eyesight, loss of stomach function, thirst, hiccups, stomach pain, bowel lesions, loss of blood, necessity of defecation, weakness and convulsions. The large number of manuscripts, above all in Latin, but also in Italian and Hebrew, and the early (and expensive)

printings show the importance of the *Canones* down to the seventeenth century. According to various comments of doctors and apothecaries, the *Canones* were very useful for them.

The need for further investigation is evident throughout the book, not only on the authorship of the *Canones*. A comparison with the Arabic sources, if available, would show the ways in which the transition of medical knowledge from Arabic to the Latin-speaking world, with all its translations, interpretations and commentaries, changed the understanding of the subjects concerned. The Latin text exemplifies the observation that, if detached from the Arabic sources, only a partial comprehension of the Arabic original can be provided. It is the merit of Sieglinde Lieberknecht that the *Canones* are now accessible in a modern language as a stimulus to further research.

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John F Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian medicine*, London, British Museum Press, 1996, pp. 240, illus., £25.00 (0-7141-0981-9).

Anyone who sets out to write a synthesis of Egyptian medicine, from its pre-dynastic origins to its continuation in Greece, Rome, and Byzantium, faces many difficulties, both of material and of method. Our literary information depends on a small number of papyri, extremely old, lacking in any exposition of theory, and often obscure or controversial in meaning. Bones, skeletons and mummies provide much archaeological data, but a systematic survey of surgical instruments is still lacking (cf. *L'Information dentaire*, 1992, 32: 2792–802). Besides, one must know Egyptology, archaeology, papyrology, medical history, palaeopathology, medicine, etc., and have an up-to-date awareness of the burgeoning secondary literature. There are also two dangers: of attributing to the ancient Egyptian doctor modern medical understanding, and of explaining Egyptian