

Book Reviews

the bibliography section of each chapter, or in the chapter contents, for individual infectious agents and diseases. It should not detract from the enjoyment of a volume which otherwise impresses by its completeness, and which should be on the shelf of everyone writing on infectious diseases, past and present.

Lise Wilkinson, Royal Postgraduate Medical School, London

GEORGE MORA (ed.), *Witches, devils, and doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyer, 'De praestigiis daemonum'*, assoc. ed. Benjamin Kohl, transl. John Shea, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 73, Binghamton, State University of New York Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1991, pp. xcii, 790, illus., \$33.00 (0-86698-083-0).

Widely acknowledged today as one of the key texts of Renaissance demonology, the publication in English translation of the sixth edition (1583) of Johann Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum* represents something of a landmark. The work itself, familiar to specialist scholars of the period, is both long (584 pages) and complex, and includes much material absent from the first edition of 1563. Now for the first time available in English, its value as a primary source will undoubtedly grow, and a large debt is consequently owed to the editorial team responsible for producing such a fine, free-flowing translation. In addition, the text is accompanied by copious notes on sources and subject matter, with a useful appendix containing a more substantial, though basic, glossary of authors and terms.

The most disappointing aspect of the volume however, which may stem from the group nature of the project, is the introductory essay which I found poorly organized and unconvincing. Apart from the plethora of unfortunate typographical errors, inconsistencies of nomenclature and eccentric or misleading comments, the overall attempt to place Weyer's life and work within the context of his age lacked conviction. Excessive introductory material—much of it out-of-date—detailing the theological, scientific and medical background of Weyer's thought could have been dealt with more succinctly, whilst far too little emphasis was placed upon the need to provide a fresh analysis of the nature and meaning of Weyer's work in the light of recent scholarship. For example, no attempt has been made to assess the contribution of Weyer to later debates on the subject of witchcraft. Nor do the editors make any attempt to elucidate or explain the glaring inconsistencies and lacunae in Weyer's arguments. The traditional depiction of Weyer as an enlightened sceptic and moderate Erasmian is taken at face value and, quite extraordinarily, little attention is paid to Christopher Baxter's persuasive reading of Weyer as an intolerant Lutheran polemicist who wrote *De praestigiis daemonum* as a thinly-veiled assault upon the superstitious practices of the Roman Catholic church.

Despite declarations to the contrary, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the authors here wish to preserve a rather traditional view of Weyer as an enlightened precursor of scientific and medical rationalism whose psychological insights anticipated the work, amongst others, of Sigmund Freud. Such an interpretation has its pitfalls, and I am left with the overall feeling that on this occasion the editors should have employed a specialist in the field to write an introduction to Weyer and his work. Despite such comments, however, nothing can undermine the tremendous achievement of the editorial team in producing such a readily accessible and decently-priced edition of Weyer's classic text. Not only will it prove invaluable to specialists working in the fields of early modern medicine, psychology and demonology, but equally importantly, it will provide a new generation of undergraduate and graduate students with easy access to a seminal text of the period.

Peter Elmer, Harlaxton College, Grantham

CARLO M. CIPOLLA, *Miasmas and disease: public health and the environment in the pre-industrial age*, transl. Elizabeth Potter, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1992, pp. x, 101, £16.95, \$25.00 (0-300-04806-8).

This latest of Professor Cipolla's tales of Tuscan epidemics offers less of his own interpretation and general context but more of the actual documents. Its core is a series of reports from medical health officials on outbreaks of disease in small Tuscan towns between

Book Reviews

1610 and 1622. From them one can see how different their view of epidemic disease was from our own, and, in passing, they reveal their awareness of the appalling social and economic consequences if they announced the arrival of plague. Cipolla's doctors uncover a variety of diseases, influenza, malaria, typhus, smallpox, which they treat with a variety of therapies. They note the consequences of poverty and malnutrition, often invoke government help in their relief. Venesection is rarely and carefully advocated, a far more typical situation than the mass bleeding implied elsewhere by Cipolla.

As always, his vignettes give a whiff of the malodorous life of the past, but one looks for a more extended commentary on the ideas behind the epidemiology. Ann Carmichael's studies of the variety of epidemic disease in Florence and Milan go unnoticed, and the claims for the superiority of North Italian Health Boards, p. 1, neglect the parallel developments at this period in Holland and in some German cities. Transcription and translation are also shakier than previously: e.g. p. 44, the Hippocratic quotation should read "hebetantes et" (Latin is left largely untranslated); p. 8, Asburgo-Lorena is more familiar as Hapsburg-Lorraine; and p. 35, Dr Cartegni held the Ordinary Chair in Medical Theory, not in the theory of ordinary medicine.

Vivian Nutton, Wellcome Institute

GUY SABBAH (ed.), *Le latin médical: La constitution d'un langage scientifique*, Actes du III^e Colloque international 'Textes médicaux latins antiques' (Saint-Étienne, 11–13 septembre 1989), Centre Jean-Palerne Mémoires X, Saint-Étienne, Université Jean Monnet, 1991, pp. 424, illus. (paperback, 2-86272-016-X).

The vigorous revival of studies in Roman medicine is due in no small part to the work of the directors and collaborators of the Centre Jean-Palerne in Saint-Étienne. This is the fifth volume of their *Mémoires* to be dedicated to this field.

Those interested in the theory and practice of ancient medicine should not be put off by the title; neither should philologists and linguists raise their hopes too high. The collection covers all aspects and periods of Roman medicine (including two papers on veterinary medicine), and the overall standard of the contributions, including notes and references, is very high, but the yield in insights into the express focus of the conference and its proceedings is meagre.

The book—it is presented as a book—falls into three sections. I ('La tradition latine') contains seven contributions on the Latin (and Arabic) textual tradition of Greek medicine; the last of these makes some valuable remarks on central linguistic issues and belongs properly in section III. II ('Les mots et les choses') comprises seven articles on miscellaneous *realia* lying behind expressions in medical texts. III ('Le latin médical') embraces seventeen pieces in 250 pages ostensibly on the subject of the title of the whole; several are concerned more with points of history, ancient theory, textual criticism and similar matters than with the formation of a Latin medical language, and could have constituted a fourth section.

The idea of a collection on (ancient) medical Latin is a good one. A more than superficial treatment of the subject is much needed and a perfectly feasible project, given the groundwork for linguistic research laid by editors, historians of medicine and archaeologists. Unfortunately, for all the promise of the title, the sub-title and the preface, there is little here on the formation and development of a scientific language of medicine in Latin. Of the thirty-one papers presented, only eleven are primarily linguistic in intent and substance. Important linguistic questions about medical Latin, which are adumbrated in a most promising fashion in the preface (pp. 5–6), receive attention only in footnotes and in odd general remarks here and there, in what seems to be mere lip-service to the professed theme of the whole.

The concepts "scientific language", "technical terminology" receive little attention, although reflection in general terms and comparison with the modern world may be helpful. For instance, a modern scientific language is not less worthy of the name for showing (like medical Latin) considerable variation in its terminology along parameters other than the time-axis, nor for containing a large number of fully-integrated loanwords (contrast p. 96).