

Book Reviews

SERGIO SCONOCCHIA (editor), *Scribonii Largi Compositiones*, Leipzig, B. G. Teubner, 1983, 8vo, pp. xxiv, 130, M. 38.00.

Ten years ago, in Toledo, Dr Sconocchia discovered what is today the only surviving manuscript of an author whose life and works merit considerable attention. Scribonius Largus, a Roman pharmacologist, probably a bilingual Sicilian, came to Britain in AD 43 with the army of the emperor Claudius. He was aware of happenings in the royal household, and his book was dedicated to Caius Iulius Callistus, an imperial official. His preface, with its transmutations of the Hippocratic ethical ideal into a Roman context, has deservedly attracted scholarly comment, but his list of 271 recipes, despite being competently edited in the sixteenth century and again in the nineteenth, was neglected in favour of those of Dioscorides and Galen. Yet Scribonius has much to offer, and the sources of his drugs, his teachers, and his comments throw much-needed light on medical practice in Antiquity. The recommendation of Ambrosius, doctor of Pozzuoli, that in cases of the stone, a drug should be pounded by a wooden pestle by a person wearing no iron ring, is condemned by Largus as "superstition", while no. 231, an ointment to remove the marks of branding, reveals the fate that might befall shipwrecked sailors. Largus' references to the living emperor as a god are also worthy of note.

Dr Sconocchia's text represents a great improvement over its predecessors, not simply because of his new manuscript. He has made judicious use of parallels in Galen and Marcellus Empiricus, and he is well aware of the pitfalls of over-emendation; his treatment of *bdella/bdellium* is instructive. What is now needed is a commentary to rival this excellent edition.

Yet at one point the unwary reader may be led astray. On pp. VIII and XI, Dr Sconocchia refers to Galen (strangely, still given the name of Claudius) as having made direct and frequent use of Largus. The patient labours of Cajus Fabricius, *Galens Exzerpte aus älteren Pharmakologen*, Berlin, 1972, have shown that in none of the passages cited is Galen using Largus directly. His information comes either from Asclepiades the pharmacist or from the younger Andromachus, both active in the seventies and eighties, or is already recorded by a slightly older Greek contemporary, Heras, fl. AD 15. The references to manuscripts of Largus are thus not evidence for his survival for a further century as an important medical author, but are comments made by his own contemporaries. There is, in short, no proof that Galen knew his works directly or owned a copy of them; his remedies are taken at second or third hand, and sometimes from Largus' own source. It is also probable that Asclepiades and possibly Andromachus knew Largus' drugs only from their original Greek, for, as Dr Sconocchia rightly points out, he seems to have been bilingual and to have written in both tongues.

This misconception should not be allowed to mar a commendable piece of editing which at last frees us from the duty to call the book 'Conpositiones'.

Vivian Nutton
Wellcome Institute

London Feminist History Group, *The sexual dynamics of history: men's power, women's resistance*, London, Pluto Press, 1983, 8vo, pp. x, 226, £4.95 (paperback).

The title of this book, and the blurb on the cover, lead one to anticipate polemic rather than history. While the polemical intention, and the theoretical position of the contributors, are clearly set forth in the Preface and Introduction, the contributions themselves are, in fact, sober articles on various un- or under-explored aspects of women in history. The only one of which this cannot be said is Sheila Jeffreys' 'Sex reform and anti-feminism in the 1920s', which concentrates misleadingly on a few extremist anti-feminist writers, while supporting her thesis by selective quotation from other writers who were certainly not in sympathy with their views. Furthermore, Marie Stopes is almost ignored, although *Married love* was a bestseller during the 1920s and surely more widely read and influential than A. M. Ludovici's works, which are extensively cited in this paper.

While it is pleasing to see that no "party-line" of opinion has been imposed on the contributors to this work, it is somewhat odd to encounter the juxtaposition of Sheila Jeffreys' paper with that of Barbara Brookes on abortion: in the latter, Janet Chance, Stella Browne, and Dora Russell appear as heroines willing to identify themselves with an unpopular, even scandalous

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cause, (the legalization of abortion) for the benefit of women less fortunate than themselves; while in the former, these same women are vilified as collaborators in the imposition of male hegemony, along with Isabel Hutton. The latter's pioneering career in psychiatric medicine was seriously disrupted by marriage: the imposition of marriage bars in the 1920s and the attitudes behind it are discussed with reference to the teaching profession in Alison M. Oram's 'Serving two masters?'

The general impression given by these contributions is the rejection of simplistic monolithic interpretations: for example, in Ginnie Smith's discussion of the apparently tyrannical domestic ideology of the advice book writer Tryon. She shows that his ideas held considerable attraction for certain classes of women as well as for men. Charlotte Mackenzie suggests that women's role in the care of the insane was bound up with conceptions about the innately feminine qualities of care and compassion, and the devaluation of these qualities with the rise of a professionalized (male) medical model of psychiatric care. Myna Trustram's 'Distasteful and derogatory? Examining Victorian soldiers for venereal disease' is a fascinating exploration of the murky waters of mid-Victorian attitudes to sex and class. The papers by Anna K. Clark and Nazife Bashar on rape are excellent in their examination of the differences between legal theory and legal practice and the influence of popular myth and stereotype.

The preface to the volume, 'Writing our own history', contains a number of suggestions to those interested in pursuing their own research which I, as an archivist, find admirable; for example, that bibliographies should be consulted at an early stage (though perhaps even more emphasis should be given to the need to consult relevant secondary works before plunging into primary sources). I am also pleased to see the advice to write to record offices in advance: this practice cannot be too highly commended.

Lesley Hall
Wellcome Institute

FRANZ-JOSEF KUHLEN, *Zur Geschichte der Schmerz-, Schlaf- und Betäubungsmittel in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, (Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Pharmazie, Bd 19), Stuttgart, Deutscher Apotheker Verlag, 1983, 8vo, pp. xiv, 445, DM. 68.00 (paperback).

In a scholarly work, Kuhlen has reviewed the history of pain, sleep, and narcotic agents.

In Part 1, sleep is considered from the earliest concepts such as the departure of the soul from the body, the neutralization of the will, and the switching-off of all body regeneration and synthesis to the modern ideas of body rhythm and the variation of sleep by drugs.

Similarly in Part 2, the author discusses opinions on the origin and nature of pain through the centuries, including ideas such as punishment for sin, disturbance of normal body phenomena, specific function of certain nerve fibres, different pain in different organs, variations in conscious stimulus activity, and summation effects of subliminal stimuli.

A fascinating section (Part 3) surveys the historical development of remedies, detailed information being presented on types of preparations and the ranges of drugs employed especially in the period 1000–1850 when opium and nightshade combinations abounded. In the appended formulary, some 103 prescriptions are given, including formulations such as sponges, plasters, poultices, oils, salves, fumigants, ointments, suppositories, pills, and lozenges, spanning the ninth to seventeenth centuries. Predominant are the Solanaceous (nightshade) drugs such as mandragora and hyoscyamus and, inevitably, opium.

The origins of witchcraft in the context of the religious, intellectual, and social unrest in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries are considered in Part 4. The use of drugs by witches in salves and for trances reached a peak in the fifteenth century and declined due to the side-effects of the narcotic and hallucinogenic agents. The factors encouraging drug abuse then have changed little for today's society. The twenty-five "diabolical" prescriptions, including the witches' brew from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, make interesting reading.

The text is annotated with 800 references and indexes of persons and drugs are appended, together with information on the twenty-four illustrations, which are unfortunately not well reproduced.