

Book Reviews

The author has a good prospect of achieving his aim of reaching and informing the general reader. The book has less to offer the scholar, since it does not aspire to be a history of Roman medicine and bypasses questions that interest the professionals, beginning with the crucial preliminary problems of how Roman was Roman medicine, and where key figures like Galen and Soranus (both Greeks) belong in the tradition of medical writing and practice. In general, the author eschews in-depth discussion of the ancient medical literature, preferring the technique of illustrative quotation from the more accessible writers, and embellishing the text with a wide variety of items of general interest such as the diets of the rich, the setting of Pliny's villa, and the experiences of the hypochondriac Aelius Aristides at the Asklepieion of Pergamum.

Where the author does possess formidable technical skills and knowledge is in the archaeology of medicine, and it is in this area that he makes his main contribution. The book is a mine of information, much of it fascinating, on surgical instruments, anatomical votive offerings, latrine deposits, and the layout of Asclepieia. The chief disappointment in this area is the lack of interest shown in recent developments in palaeopathology, in particular the detection of cumulative dietary deficiencies and episodic stress through the analysis of human skeletal remains.

As social history, the book is usually reliable as well as readable, but the reader will find judgments that are less than sound or up-to-date about food supply systems in Rome and elsewhere (Rome was the only city in which a substantial portion of its plebs was given free grain over a period of centuries: cf. p. 39), the exposure of children and infanticide (it is unacceptable to label these practices "barbaric" without reference to the social and cultural context: cf. p. 106–7), or the demographic inferences to be drawn from funerary inscriptions (cf. p. 185). In general, however, the book is successful within its self-imposed, modest limits.

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SORANOS D'ÉPHÈSE, *Maladies des femmes*, vol. 1, bk. 1, texte établi, traduit et commenté par PAUL BURGIÈRE, DANIELLE GOUREVITCH et YVES MALINAS, Collection des Universités de France, Publiée sous le patronage de l'Association Guillaume Budé, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1988, 8vo, pp. ci, 131, illus., [no price stated].

The new Budé edition of Soranus, *fl.* AD 100, is the collaborative effort of a philologist, a physician, and a medical historian. It deserves a warm welcome, not least because it makes the Greek text of this ancient physician available for the first time since Ilberg's great edition of 1927. The tripartite introduction comprises an excellent survey of Soranus and medical Methodism, which incorporates much of the recent reappraisal of this controversial sect, a short appreciation of Soranus viewed against modern medicine, and a history of the text and its editions. The French translation is clear and generally accurate—I note an isolated misunderstanding at 30.3 = gr. 10.42—and there is a generous and helpful commentary. A series of diagrams of female anatomy is also included for the benefit of those without the necessary medical knowledge.

Soranus' tract on the diseases of women has been preserved in a single Greek manuscript, Paris, BN gr. 2153 = P, written in the late fifteenth century. The evidence of this late manuscript, which shows evident signs of rearrangement and contamination with other medical writings, can occasionally be checked against statements ascribed to Soranus by Oribasius, the medieval Latin compiler "Mustio", and, in particular, Aetius. Book XVI of the latter's compendium contains large extracts from Soranus, and, in turn, some sections from Aetius have been incorporated into P. Such a slender line of transmission has one important consequence for the philological editor: the Greek of P has often to be corrected and emended to give reasonable Greek. The editor(s) must be aware of the problems of interpolation, and of all sorts of textual corruption. This new edition brings many emendations to the text, some stylistic, others, as at 11.40 or 18.50, changing the meaning of the Greek considerably. Most I consider acceptable, others, as at 2.14, appear unnecessary. It is unfortunate that the argumentation in favour of some of these changes was published only in a periodical not available in Cambridge or London. But, on the whole, the text is an improvement over Ilberg's.

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The relationship of P to Aetius, however, is not satisfactorily resolved. There is no clear line on what to do with passages in P suspected of being interpolated from Aetius. Some are banished completely from both text and apparatus; others are relegated to an appendix; still others are included in the text but in smaller letters. It would perhaps have been best to print the whole of P's text, indicating with brackets and smaller print the passages rejected by the editors. As it is, there is still doubt as to the editors' views of the status of the various passages. Conversely, at 11.46–49, we ought to have been told whether the marginal note is in the same hand as that of the text, for this has a bearing on the authenticity of these lines and of the various scribal rearrangements (at 31.21, I would delete the penultimate word as an early gloss on the (superfluous) word that follows).

What do these philological changes mean, particularly for an English readership accustomed to the Baltimore, 1956, translation? For an overview of Soranus, the English translation is still useful—indeed, its rendering of ch. 2 is more accurate than the French—but for any work on details, the new Budé is essential, not least for its introductions and commentary. The remaining books are eagerly awaited.

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ACHIM KELLER, *Die Abortiva in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, with an Introduction by Rudolf Schmitz, *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Pharmazie*, Bd. 46, Stuttgart, Deutscher Apotheker Verlag, 1988, 8vo. pp. ix, 300, DM 58.00, (paperback).

In this thought-provoking study, Achim Keller has carefully and comprehensively assembled the evidence for the practice of abortion in the Roman empire. The book is divided into two parts—'Die Abtreibung in der Kaiserzeit' and 'Die Abortivdrogen'—with a full introduction and concluding summary.

The first part is a significant and welcome addition to the surprisingly limited literature on abortion in the classical world. Keller examines, develops, and challenges current views on the subject and offers some perceptive insights and stimulating new theories, as in his discussion of the seemingly conflicting evidence within the Hippocratic Corpus: on the one hand is a not inconsiderable list of abortifacients, on the other the celebrated passage in the *Oath* forbidding the administration of abortive substances. Keller suggests this is a matter of semantics and proposes a fresh and convincing explanation. Forbidden are "*phthoria*", given in the form of vaginal pessaries, which kill the foetus. Acceptable are "*ekbolia*", drugs which induce a miscarriage and pose less danger to the mother. The writer of the *Oath*, it is argued, was concerned for the mother's safety, not the life of the foetus.

The second part, a corpus of over 200 abortive drugs mentioned by classical authors, breaks new ground as the first systematic study of the drugs from a pharmaceutical rather than a botanical viewpoint. Though the author modestly describes this work as a basis for further study—for which it is admirably suited—he draws a number of important conclusions, not least that most of the drugs did contain active abortive substances. The majority were aromatics, particularly toxic to the foetus but comparatively safe for the mother. Keller also identifies some interesting connections which he relates to the way in which the womb and foetus were regarded. First is the overlap between abortifacients and purgatives, diuretics and emmenagogues. Because the uterus was classed with the other secreting organs the emptying of its contents was perceived as a like treatment. Less obvious is the overlap between abortive drugs and those used for the eradication of vermin, but Keller links this to the contemporary view of the human foetus as a parasitic animal within the body, whose "infestation" could be resolved by similar methods. The bibliography is not extensive. Major omissions are Enzo Nardi, *Procurato aborto nel mondo greco-romano* (Milan, 1971) and Marie-Thérèse Fontanille, *Avortement et contraception dans la médecine gréco-romaine* (Paris, 1977).

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