

## Book Reviews

The symposium papers edited by Simpson will be a valued source for students of Black. The eight papers offer a number of insights on various aspects of Black's career. Robert Anderson provides a handy outline biography; Christopher Lawrence analyses Black's personal and intellectual links with Hume and Adam Smith, as well as contemporary natural philosophers; Henry Guerlac presents a stimulating evaluation of Black's work on latent heat; Andrew Doig examines Black's abilities as a physician. The institutional context of Black's work is explored by two papers: one on Glasgow by Peter Swinbank, and one on Edinburgh by W.P.Doyle. W.A.Cole provides an invaluable reference tool for locating manuscripts of Black's lectures, while John Christie queries the authenticity of Robison's edition of the lectures. He argues convincingly that it is Robison's view of what Black ought to have said, rather than what Black himself said.

It is to be hoped that both books will be rather more readily available than museum publications sometimes are.

Gerrylynn K. Roberts  
Open University

S. GRISOLIA, C. GUERRI, F. SAMSON, S. NORTON, and F. REINOSO-SUAREZ (editors), *Ramon y Cajal's contributions to the neurosciences*, Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1983, 8vo, pp.xviii, 267, illus., Dfl. 190.00.

Was it not Geoffrey Jefferson who designated neurology's three saints as Jackson, Cajal, and Sherrington, with Gowers and Charcot only a little lower in the hagiolatry? The works of four of these are universally known, but Cajal, alas, wrote in Spanish. His monumental *Degeneration and regeneration of the nervous system* appeared in 1913–14, thanks to the generosity of Argentinian colleagues. Not until 1928 was it translated into English. Cajal's two-volume autobiography was rendered into English in 1937. His life and works were made known to us in the excellent appreciation by Fielding H. Garrison (1939), while ten years later Dorothy Cannon wrote her outstanding work entitled *Explorer of the human brain*, with a memoir by Sherrington.

We welcome, therefore, this little book, which represents the proceedings of a symposium held in 1982 in Valencia to mark the centenary of Cajal's career. The majority of the papers are by Spanish research workers, but there are also at least four from Great Britain and others from the USA. Neuroanatomists will be delighted with this well-illustrated volume which brings up to date the seminal work of Cajal, as amplified by such modern techniques as electron microscopy and the computer sciences.

Medical historians will be particularly interested in the personal memories as recorded by R. Martínez Pérez, as well as the account by F. Tello Valdivieso of some aspects of the master's personality. Unfortunately, much which would particularly appeal to the historian is left unsaid. Some will recall the meeting in Madrid in 1953 marking the 101st anniversary of his birth. An unfortunate failure in the city's electricity supply obliged Russell Brain to finish his address with the aid of candles and hurricane lamps.

Not only was Ramon y Cajal a histologist of genius and dedication, but he was an artist of precision and a philosopher full of wise saws and modern instances. As is unfortunately so often the case, Cajal had to share his Nobel prize. Golgi, the other recipient, hogged the ceremony with a pompous and verbose self-eulogy, leaving little time for the modest Cajal to express his grateful thanks.

Macdonald Critchley  
Nether Stowey, Somerset

JEROME O. NRIAGU, *Lead and lead poisoning in antiquity*, New York and Chichester, John Wiley, 1983, 8vo, pp. xiii, 437, £47.50.

This book is a gathering together of a great host of material that has been written about lead in the ancient world; there has been little attempt to go back to primary sources and much of the material is reviewed in an uncritical fashion.

The first chapter is a curious hotchpotch of unconnected items, which has almost no

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connexion with the remainder of the book, and I cannot see what purpose it serves. Chapters two to five comprise the bulk of the book and are by far the best and the most rewarding of study. A good account is given of lead mining in the ancient world, of smelting and of cupellation, and there is also much information on the lead mines of antiquity and an excellent chapter on the production and uses of lead.

The final chapter, which accounts for half the title but only a quarter of the substance, is the weakest. There is an interesting account of occupational and non-occupational exposures, and the dreadful plight of the lead miners of antiquity is brought to notice again. The section on non-occupational exposure discusses in some detail the well-known sources, water, food, wine, cosmetics, and drugs. It is interesting—as the author reiterates—that the Romans were aware of the dangerous potential of water conducted through leaden pipes and that water from such a source was more harmful than water delivered from earthenware pipes, which were to be preferred. This did not stop them from using leaden vessels for preparing *sapa*, however, and there can be no doubt that the Romans were greatly exposed to lead from this source.

Only in the last forty pages or so does the author discuss lead poisoning in antiquity, and he displays an unfortunate tendency to count any description of abdominal symptoms as lead poisoning, he also appears to have been somewhat misled by the notion propounded by some modern writers that almost any symptom may occur in lead poisoning. Nriagu seems to reason that if the disease may produce any symptom, then any symptom may be attributable to it. In fact, lead poisoning is not nearly as difficult to diagnose as some writers would have us believe, and it is not difficult to recognize accounts of true lead poisoning in the ancient literature. I would not accept any of the descriptions in the Hippocratic corpus as being those of lead poisoning, and certainly not that given from the Sanskrit *Sushruta* which is quoted at some length on page 391.

Finally, the author speculates on the role of lead poisoning in the Fall of Rome and falls sadly into error. His statements that “The one incontestable historical fact about the Roman aristocracy is that its ranks declined quite rapidly during the last century of the Republic and during the early centuries of the Empire” (p. 407) and “Ancient historical records leave ample evidence about the common infecundity of the aristocracy. . .” (p. 409) are both astonishingly bald and unsupported. The effects which their exposure to lead may have had on the Roman aristocracy needs much more thoughtful consideration than that given in the present book. Statements such as, “‘Aristothanasia’ must have been calamitous to Roman civilization” at one point (p. 411), and that, because of lead poisoning, “. . . one would expect the progeny of great men to be mainly imbeciles and underachievers”, are those of an author groping for weak straws to support his rapidly drowning hypothesis. The decline of the Roman Empire is a phenomenon of great complexity, as historians have shown, and it is simplistic to a degree to ascribe to it a single cause.

This book is not cheap but I can recommend it if only because it brings together much otherwise scattered material and cites many references which can be followed up by those with a mind to do so; all references to early material are to translations. The middle chapters of the book may be read with advantage, but I would urge those coming to the final chapter to treat it *cum grano salis*.

H.A. Waldron  
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine,

DANIELLE GOUREVITCH, *Le triangle hippocratique dans le monde gréco-romain: le malade, sa maladie et son médecin*, Rome, École française de Rome, 1984, 8vo, pp. 569, [no price stated].

DANIELLE GOUREVITCH, *Le mal d'être femme. La femme et la médecine à Rome*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1984, 8vo, pp. 276, illus., Fr. 125.00 (paperback).

With these two books Mme Gourevitch has performed a valuable service for students of ancient medicine by directing their attention to the abundant evidence available from Roman and later Greek sources for the understanding of medicine in the centuries that followed Hippocrates. Her confrontation of medical texts with the praise given to physicians by grateful