interrelated combination of philosophy and practice" (p. 41). When speaking of conception, Trogawa accepts the Western biological notion of the union of semen and ovum (p. 48), which, as pointed out by Nawang Dakpa in his paper, 'Certain problems of embryology according to the Tibetan medical tradition' (pp. 82–95), is unknown to traditional Tibetan medicine (p. 84). Nawang Dakpa deals with some points of embryology according to the *Vaiḍūrya sngon-po* ('Blue Beryl'), the famous commentary to the *rGyud bzhi*, written in 1678–1688 by the great scholar and lay regent of Tibet, Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho. The whole process of conception and birth is conveniently illustrated by two of the twelve black-and-white plates appended to Emmerick's paper (ES 16).

Emmerick's contribution, 'Some Tibetan medical tankas' (pp. 56–78), is a detailed analysis of sixteen painted scrolls photographed during the author's visit to the Medical and Astrological College of Lhasa in 1983. Emmerick has compared these pictures with relevant Tibetan medical iconographic sources published up to 1988. The paintings belong to a series of seventy-nine scrolls, the earliest set of which was commissioned by Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho to illustrate his *Vaiḍūrya sngon-po*. Although a set has been recently published by Serindia in *Tibetan medical paintings* (by Y Parfionovitch, G Dorje and F Meyer, London, 1992), Emmerick's contribution is interesting in as much as it shows variants between paintings belonging to different sets, both in the iconography and in the captions.

A place apart is occupied by Charles Bawden's paper, 'Written and printed sources for the study of Mongolian medicine' (pp. 100–25), where the author, besides classifying the literature on the subject, attempts to assess the bearing which the Tibetan medical tradition had upon Mongolian medicine. Biographical notes on the contributors are appended to the volume (pp. 126–8).

It is a pity that the publication of these proceedings should have been delayed for so many years and followed that of *Tibetan medical paintings*, which have provided so much new information, especially concerning the Tibetan materia medica. In spite of this handicap, *Aspects of classical Tibetan medicine* is a useful contribution to the history of Tibetan medicine and shows that the only possible approach to such a complicated topic is the close collaboration of Western and Tibetan physicians, linguists and historians.

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David Owusu-Ansah, *Islamic talismanic tradition in nineteenth-century Asante*, African Studies, vol. 21, Lewiston, NY, and Lampeter, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991, pp. xii, 253, illus., £39.95, $69.95 (0-7734-9726-9).

This book comprises the results of the author's research on a large corpus of magical formulae and prescriptions for making amulets, contained in a bundle of Arabic manuscripts brought from Asante, on the so-called Gold Coast of Africa, to the Danish Royal Library in Copenhagen in 1826. The texts are often in poor physical condition, and are in most cases written in halting or primitive hands in bad Arabic. Owusu-Ansah has thus opted—and rightly so—for presenting the Arabic texts in facsimile, which also allows the reader to see the often enigmatic formulae and magical diagrams (*khawātim*) exactly as the scribes had recorded them. The English renderings are organized according to topic, and texts full and clear enough for translation are presented separately from those which only allow for paraphrase. Most of the book, however, is devoted to the author's efforts to interpret this material against the background of Islamic influences and the role of magic and talismanic tradition in Asante society.

A popular herbal folklore provided responses to many medical complaints in Asante, but deeply entrenched beliefs in the supernatural in general, and in the power of pagan deities and deceased ancestors in particular, guaranteed that magic would also

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play an important role here, as in many other aspects of everyday life. In medicine, amulets were used to gain longevity, cure certain problems (e.g., madness, alcoholism, leprosy, headache, and bedwetting), ward off epidemics, guarantee fertility or sterility, and bring pregnancy to a safe conclusion; in other areas, they served to protect against weapons, cancel the effects of other amulets, defend against demons, secure success or prosperity, harm enemies, and gain protection in general.

Asante was heavily influenced by the popular talismanic tradition of Islamic North Africa. The incantations in the amulets are full of Qur'ānic quotations and paraphrases, and bear excerpts from the Islamic biographical tradition on Muḥammad, names of Islamic religious figures (e.g., angels), and Arabic terminology (such as references to the *jinn*). Owusu-Ansah demonstrates that these charms were produced and sold in Asante by a Muslim trading community. Though the local folk were pagans and prevented Muslim proselytization, they esteemed the Qur'ān for its magical power. There was a brisk market for Islamic talismans generally, and a six-line amulet could be sold for half an ounce of gold.

Owusu-Ansah stresses—again quite rightly—that his corpus is not a collection of amulets, but rather consists of instructions for making these charms. Amulets usually do not indicate, in and of themselves, how they are to be made and used, and Owusu-Ansah provides this type of information from the material in the Copenhagen corpus, research in western accounts of practices and beliefs in Asante in the early nineteenth century, and numerous interviews and other field work. The belief system revolving around these amulets proves to be very complex. Individual incantations were deemed effective only against specific problems, and not everyone could make them. Those bearing (or thought to bear) verses from the Qur'ān were considered effective only by the permission of the God of Islam, and so were not expected to work immediately, while others were regarded as having instantaneous effect irrespective of the influences of other spiritual powers. Some amulets were worn; others were buried in the corners of a house; others were washed or soaked in water, thus producing a liquid (for drinking or washing) to which the power of the charm was transferred.

Owusu-Ansah's work is an important contribution to the history of a body of magical lore in which medicine and medical concerns loomed very large indeed, and is relevant to the history of popular medicine in the numerous other cultures where such charms were used. There is a tendency in modern medical-historical scholarship to dismiss such material as superstitious nonsense, but this book shows how much of value can be learned by those willing to take it seriously, as, indeed, Sir Henry Wellcome—collector of over 17,000 such amulets—had already done half a century ago.

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Haskell D Isaacs, *Medical and para-medical manuscripts in the Cambridge Genizah Collections*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. xx, 144, illus., £70.00, $110.00 (0-521-47050-1).

Just before writing this review I was informed of the passing away of Haskell Isaacs, a physician and scholar, who had devoted the last years of his life to cataloguing the Genizah medical material now in Cambridge. Though I met him only twice, he made a strong and lasting impression upon me. I still recall his friendliness, openness and personal warmth. When I received the message of his death my first thought was, if I may say so, what a blessed man, to die at a good age and to have seen the fulfilment of the dream of his life, namely, the publication of his catalogue on the Genizah medical fragments. For his was a truly Herculean task involving the description of more than 1,600 fragments which are often hard to decipher, and sometimes anonymous as well. But he acquitted himself of this undertaking with unabated enthusiasm and energy. Enjoying the assistance of Colin Baker, he erected himself

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