

and medical interpretations of yellow fever. A commentary by Billy G Smith, a shrewd statistical re-creation of the epidemic by Susan E Klepp, and a discussion of the historiography of yellow fever by Margaret Humphreys round out this volume.

To evaluate an edited volume always provides difficulties, given the variation of the individual contributions. Estes's chapter is valuable because it sketches eighteenth-century medical interpretations of yellow fever while at the same time summarizing contemporary knowledge. Nord's recapitulation of the role of the press in community reconstruction is less persuasive; the evidence to support his contention is lacking. Griffith provides a valuable analysis of Carey, but cannot demonstrate that his account set the stage for future responses. Miller's penetrating analysis of Rush does not take into account the long and venerable history of bloodletting (a therapy that cut across all political ideologies). Occasional errors also creep into the volume. Smith, for example, notes that such bacterial diseases as tuberculosis and polio are developing resistance to antibiotics. The latter, of course, is a viral disease and therefore not treatable by antibiotics. Such criticisms notwithstanding, *A melancholy scene of devastation* is an important and valuable collection that should serve to stimulate further research on the impact, response, and epidemiology of epidemic diseases.

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Ibn al-Jazzār on sexual diseases and their treatment: a critical edition of Zād al-Musāfir wa qūt al-hādir, Provisions for the traveller and nourishment for the sedentary, Book 6, original Arabic text with an English translation and commentary by Gerrit Bos, The Henry Wellcome Asian Series, London and New York, Kegan Paul International, 1997, pp. 471, £65.00, \$110.00 (0-7103-0569-9).

Gerrit Bos is to be commended for making Ibn al-Jazzār's *Zād al-Musāfir* accessible, at

least in part, to modern scholars. This is one of the most attractive medical textbooks written during the classical age of Islam. It became celebrated during the Middle Ages and was translated into Latin, Greek and Hebrew. But, thanks to the plagiarism of Constantine the African, its Latin translator, its true authorship did not come to light until the last century. The story of how this discovery came about is an interesting one and it is a pity that the present editor omits it in his introduction. *Zād al-Musāfir* is a typical example of a genre of medical work, called in Arabic *kunnashat*, which consisted of compendia designed to provide the reader with a comprehensive account of medicine. They were meant for the use of practitioners and students and all had a similar style and lay-out. Diseases were classified in a head-to-toe arrangement, literally starting with diseases of the head and going down through the body to the feet. Separate sections on external diseases (what we might call dermatology), on fevers and on pathology were usually included. In addition, they frequently cited previous medical authorities, usually Greek, in lengthy quotations. Many of the books emphasized therapeutics at the expense of medical theory, and the present work is no exception.

The book is divided into seven *maqalat* or sections arranged according to the diseases from head to toe. *Maqala* six is on "the diseases of the organs of generation" and it is this which constitutes the present Arabic edition and English translation. Most of the *maqala* is concerned with what Gerrit Bos terms "sexual medicine", but is in fact a mixture of penile and testicular conditions in men and obstetric and gynaecological disorders in women. The last two chapters deal with sciatica and gout, as might be expected in the context of the head-to-toe arrangement of the book. Several short chapters deal with male sexual disorders such as impotence, priapism and spermatorrhoea. These are followed by chapters on swellings and ulcers of the penis and testicles, and on hernia. Ten chapters follow on diseases of women, including uterine disorders and complications of pregnancy such

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as difficult childbirth and ways of evacuating the placenta without, however, the use of surgical instruments.

Despite its potentially salacious nature, the subject matter is described in a manner devoid of erotic overtones. Throughout medieval times, there was a thriving Arabic erotic literature concerned with reversing impotence, improving male potency and ways of increasing sexual pleasure. Some of this material occasionally found its way into medical textbooks, but not in the case of *Zād al-Musāfir*. This and the other sociological aspects of the work are of great interest and should have been brought out in the editor's commentary. Although he makes some reference to them, the book's sociological side could have been better developed. Instead, he devotes much space and effort to tracing the Greek antecedents of Ibn al-Jazzār's account and presenting parallel passages from both sides to prove his point. There is nothing novel in the fact that Arabic medicine owed its origin to Greek and other older systems. The Arabic

writers took pride in this and were at pains to quote their sources, as Ibn al-Jazzār does abundantly. The implication, that his work was derivative and unoriginal, is in my view misconceived. For Arabic doctors to have adopted Greek medicine was inevitable in an age when tradition was revered and which, in any case, they believed to be the acme of knowledge. Overturning the Greek system would have been as unthinkable to them as abandoning bio-medicine by today's medical establishment would seem to us.

It would have been useful for the Arabic and English texts to have been set out opposite each other, and there are a number of presumably typographical errors and un-English constructions in the translation. Otherwise, this is a valuable text, diligently edited and translated, with a useful glossary of materia medica and an index of technical terms at the end.

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