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Hellenistic medicine". The contributors have sought in their different ways to assert a place for the medicine of ancient Israel among her neighbours, and by stating what is known of a little studied subject, to provide a basis for further research and investigation.

In his study of pharmacology and dietetics in the Bible and Talmud, Fred Rosner gives a general overview of the subject and then deals in some detail with the balm of Gilead before discussing possible identities for the Hebrew term used to describe mandrakes and the disorders they were alleged to cure. He discusses various foods and describes how the therapeutic efficacy of chicken soup advocated by Maimonides to alleviate catarrh is still advocated by Jewish mothers today.

A trio of essays devoted to the relationship of Jewish medicine to Egyptian and Mesopotamian medicine follows. Walter Jacob traces ancient Israel's medical practice through her neighbours and disputes the assumption of a continuity from Biblical medicine to that of the Rabbinic period. To support his treatise, he lists Biblical plants with their provenance where known, and the symptoms they were used to cure in both Assyrian and Egyptian texts. Second, Marvin Powell discusses the difficulty in identifying both drugs and pharmaceuticals in ancient Mesopotamia where there was no clear distinction between medicine and magic. Various methods of medication are described but it is clear that the study of Mesopotamian pharmacopoeia is yet in its infancy. Third, Renate Germer, in discussing ancient Egyptian pharmaceutical plants and the Eastern Mediterranean, echoes Walter Jacob's argument that information about medicine in ancient Israel must be sought from her neighbours. Egypt, with its medical papyri and ostraca, provides a fruitful field of study, throwing light on medicinal plants of the Bible since many were, in fact, imported from the Holy Land.

An essay by Irene Jacob on *Racinus communis*, the castor oil plant, describes its various uses from antiquity to the modern age. This is followed by Dr Kottek's interesting contribution on medical drugs in the work of Flavius Josephus. The products of Jericho and Canaan, the importance of climate, the ingredients of ointments, and the plants in the mitre of the High Priest display Josephus' interest in *materia medica*. Finally, Stephen Newmyer shows the individual nature of Hebrew medicine in its concern for the poor, the ageing and the weaker members of society as reflected in the *Sefer Refuot* of Asaph, which at the same time draws on Greek medical writings, especially those of Dioscorides.

It is hoped that these essays will stimulate further study of the subject, which is of great interest but in which there is still much to be done.

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DUDLEY WILSON, *Signs and portents: monstrous births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, pp. ix, 215, illus., £50.00 (0-415-03236-9).

Dudley Wilson describes his subject as "the gradual change from superstitious to more scientific and medical attitudes to monstrous births" (p. 1), with a focus on the sixteenth, seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries. As that synopsis suggests, his book is shaped by an unexamined positivism that strongly limits its utility as a source for the history of medicine or science.

In general, Wilson appears much more at home with vernacular and lay texts than with the medical and scientific literature, and this is where the strength of his book lies. (The dust jacket identifies him as Emeritus Professor of French.) He is a diligent compiler of sources, both verbal and visual, and he includes two substantial chapters on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century broadsides, pamphlets, diaries, and memoirs; these lay out a wealth of fascinating and at some points largely new raw material for the history of lay attitudes toward monstrous births—material that raises important questions about how people saw and read both the world around them and the vernacular texts that described that world.

As more conventional medical history, however, this book leaves much to be desired. Wilson lacks control of the medical, philosophical, and theological texts and traditions that would have allowed him to engage the complicated theoretical issues raised by his subject matter, or to produce a convincing survey of the shifting patterns of professional interpretation he describes. He equates the rise of a "scientific" attitude toward monstrous births with the increasing currency of dissection in

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the years around 1700, while damning the persistent presence of theoretical inquiries—he calls them “philosophical meanderings” (p. 170)—concerning generation. Because early modern medical interest in monstrous births was largely motivated and structured by debates on generation, Wilson’s intolerance of, and unfamiliarity with them renders this aspect of his book at best unrevealing.

Yet he does not do much better with the early history of anatomical approaches to monstrosity, to which he claims to be more sympathetic. A number of sixteenth-century anatomists, including Berengario da Carpi, Andreas Vesalius, and Realdo Colombo, had much to say about the range of human variation based on their own dissections, yet their names do not even appear in the index. In fact, the shape and chronology of Wilson’s argument appears to be largely an artefact of his almost exclusive reliance on vernacular sources. His contention that the years around 1700 saw the emergence of a new, medical and “scientific” (i.e. anatomical) approach to monstrous births amounts for the most part only to the observation that anatomists and medical theorists were increasingly writing in the vernacular rather than in Latin.

Wilson is misleading and unreliable as a historian of medicine, and his work generally lacks an analytical edge. But his survey of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century vernacular and lay texts is a real contribution, and he has provided many useful references for which both cultural historians and historians of the body will be grateful.

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BRIAN LAWN, *The rise and decline of the scholastic ‘Quaestio Disputata’: with special emphasis on its use in the teaching of medicine and science, Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Leiden and New York, E. J. Brill, 1993, pp. x, 176, Gld. 90.00, \$51.50 (90–04–09740–6).

In 1963, Brian Lawn, a London physician, published *The Salernitan questions*, a fascinating study of a forgotten chapter in the history of medieval science and medicine. In it he showed how particular problems, debated in the school of Aristotle in the fourth century BC, were transmitted, in a variety of forms, to the Middle Ages, and were still being discussed in the sixteenth century. This book attempts the same for the *Quaestio disputata*, the discussion of doubtful points in medicine and science in a formal, logically structured manner within university teaching. We are led from twelfth-century Paris, via the Oxford philosophers of medieval Merton, and some of the greats of Padua and Siena, like Taddeo Alderotti, Ugo Benzi, and their Italian successors of the sixteenth century, Zimara, Vernia, and Nifo, to seventeenth-century Edinburgh and, finally, Paris.

There are many insights in both text and notes, but there are serious weaknesses overall, in part because the topic itself is never clearly defined. The *Quaestio* can be both narrow and wide, based on logical, syllogistic reasoning or designed to resolve a doubtful point, or any combination of these; it may refer to a particular educational form or to a stage in a university career. It is hard to grasp such a Protean concept, or to agree (or, equally, disagree) that it laid the foundation of the Scientific Revolution (p. 2). Its role in *physica* and medicine would have been clearer, had Dr Lawn had the opportunity to read J. J. Bylebyl’s essay on this theme in *Osiris*, 6, 1990.

Besides this problem of definition, the book suffers from a lack of perspective. If the “great days” of the *Quaestio* were over in theology by 1300, and in medicine by 1400 (p. 83), then its decline took remarkably long. The same topics continue to recur in seventeenth-century Wittenberg and in eighteenth-century France, as is shown by a mere glance at the many medical theses cited by L. W. B. Brockliss in his *French higher education* (1987), and in most of them, logic, rhetoric, and the analysis and citation of classic texts play much greater roles than any form of experimentation. The *Quaestio* turned into the thesis, but how and when, this book does not make clear. Certainly the *Quaestio* form was far from discredited, if in 1590 a German publisher thought it profitable to turn into *Problemata* sections of a large medical compilation by a long-dead Italian professor, itself the product of massive editorial reorganization (contrast p. 84, where Dr Lawn misrepresents the book).

Secondly, the fifteenth century disappears, along with most of the northern European universities. The *Quaestio* declined in popularity, we are told (p. 83), but, as Pesenti’s *Professori e promotori* (1984), shows, students and lecturers continued to ask *Quaestiones*, and they were debated at final