

Book Reviews

beginning of a spectacular career for antimony in chemistry and medicine” (p. 14). The internal use of antimony and its compounds was most widespread during the seventeenth century: despite periodic warnings about its poisonous nature, its apparent ability to expel undesirable humours from the body—by promoting sweating, vomiting and purging—ensured its acceptance in medical practice, particularly as an alternative to bloodletting. Medical use declined during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and antimony is now found mainly in industry.

This volume is organized chronologically, and brings the medical history of antimony up-to-date by noting its use in homoeopathy, its importance to the followers of Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophical medicine, and the controversy that arose in the 1990s when it was suspected as a possible cause of cot deaths. The only currently accepted role for antimony in medicine is as a treatment for some tropical diseases. The book, which is richly illustrated, concludes with a useful list of antimony preparations used in medicine from the early modern period to the nineteenth century, and an appendix lists nearly a hundred antimony ores.

The author is a physician and expert on occupational health who has long been involved with the antimony processing industry, where his interest in the history of antimony in medicine began. Many aspects of this history are considered, most rather briefly (references to it in drama and literature; use in veterinary medicine; the persistent religious element in its medicinal use), and some in more depth (antimony cups; the importance of antimony in alchemy). However, this book is an expanded version of a lecture given in 1983, and the bibliography tends to reflect that fact: there is an admirable focus on primary sources, but there are very few references drawn from recent scholarship in the history of medicine and science.

This slim volume serves as a good

introduction to its subject matter; it also points to historical aspects of the use of antimony in medicine that merit closer study.

Katherine D Watson,
Wolfson College, Oxford

Dominik Wujastyk, *The roots of āyurveda: selections from Sanskrit medical writings*, New Delhi, Penguin Books (India), 1998, pp. xvi, 389, Rs 250 (0-14-043680-4).

Āyurveda, “the knowledge or science for longevity” of the Hindus, is the most widely practised of the various medical systems that make up “Indian” medicine in India today, and it is now established as part of complementary medicine in the rest of the world. Written in Sanskrit, the cultural language of the Hindus, the oldest surviving texts are tentatively dated 200 BC–AD 200. From the very large number of manuscripts available, Wujastyk has selected passages from six authors, ranging in date from the earliest times to AD 1300, to illustrate a holistic system of a regimen and ethical advice for healthy living, adapted to the individual’s constitution, his surroundings and the seasons, combined with the diagnosis and treatment of disease. His book carries a warning that the remedies described are for the purposes of study, and they are not to be put into practice.

The basic doctrines of āyurveda have come down through two main schools: that of Caraka mainly concerned with internal medicine, and that of Suśruta, who covers internal medicine, but adds large sections on the teaching and practice of surgery. Previous authors, and the classical texts themselves, have traced the origins of āyurveda to the Vedic literature. But Wujastyk points out that, although there are similarities, the Vedic texts are primarily religious, and only partly medical. He stresses the links of āyurveda with

Book Reviews

Buddhism, and suggests that āyurveda emerged in North India in the fifth century BC in literature preserved by Buddhist monks.

Āyurveda is a “humoral” system; the health of the body is controlled by three humours (*doṣas*). Wujastyk takes issue with the commonly held interpretation that “disease is caused by an imbalance of the humours”. He accepts that the idea of balance is certainly present, but he shows that disease may be more a question of misplacement than imbalance. Treatment is “allopathic”—the disease is to be countered by its opposite, as in western medicine. Remedies are largely plant, with some animal, materials. Āyurveda thus seemed immediately familiar to the first European traders, who brought with them the Galenic medicine that was practised in Europe up to the mid-seventeenth century.

The three main classical texts are those by Caraka, Suśruta and Vāgbhāta. The selections from Caraka deal with heredity, epidemics, and the early hospitals. Suśruta describes rejuvenation by *somā*, and has a large section on poisons and their antidotes. He details the training needed for a wide range of operative techniques, with their appropriate instruments. After his time, surgery disappeared from āyurvedic practice, to be taken over by itinerant practitioners handing down their crafts from father to son. Vāgbhāta (c. AD 600) included the work of Caraka and Suśruta in “the greatest synthesis of Indian medicine ever produced”; the selections are a general survey of medicine, the daily and seasonal regimen, the six savours, the humours, the vulnerable points on the body, and insanity.

The *Bower* manuscript is chosen for its information on the history of Indian medicine in the early fifth century AD, and for the importance of garlic in the āyurvedic materia medica. Kaśyapa (? seventh century AD—not previously translated) deals with the diseases of women and children, with miscarriages and the death of children regarded as the result of evil conduct in a

previous life. Śārṅgadhara (c. AD 1300) produced a relatively short text, which covered classical āyurveda, and added later techniques such as pulse lore and the use of metals in treatment. His prescriptions are now being used in the modern āyurvedic pharmaceutical industry.

Wujastyk describes the confusion that has always existed over the identification of medicinal plants, and he gives a useful bibliography for further work. There is an excellent index, English-Sanskrit and Sanskrit-English.

T J S Patterson,
Oxford

Ivan Garofalo, Alessandro Lami, Daniela Manetti and Amneris Roselli (eds), *Aspetti della terapia nel Corpus Hippocraticum. Atti del IXe Colloque International Hippocratique, Pisa 25–29 settembre 1996*, Accademia Toscana di Scienze e Lettere “La Colombaria”, Studi 183, Florence, Leo S Olschki Editore, 1999, pp. vi, 716, L. 130,000 (88-222-4798-1).

It was a good idea of the organizers of the 9th Colloque Hippocratique to focus on therapy, since this is the most baffling of all areas of ancient medicine. But after a useful beginning with a survey of some healing substances common to early Greece and the Near East (J Laskaris) and a magisterial survey by Jouanna of the therapeutic image of the Hippocratic physician, the problems posed by the theme to those without medical knowledge quickly become apparent. The authors, who are entirely classicists by training, are very good at tracing the influence of Hippocratic theories down into the nineteenth century, at lexical analysis, and at understanding the morality or guild behaviour that might lie behind the Hippocratic Corpus. They are often comfortable when dealing with magic and strange fumigations for women (excellent