

Book Reviews

Anne Van Arsdall and Timothy Graham (eds), *Herbs and Healers from the Ancient Mediterranean through the Medieval West: Essays in Honor of John M. Riddle* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), pp. xi, 377, illus., £63.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-4094-0038-7.

The volume under review is a Festschrift in honour of John M. Riddle, distinguished professor emeritus of history at North Carolina State University. It comprises eleven essays by distinguished scholars in the fields in which John Riddle has been most active – the history and practice of pharmacology in the ancient Mediterranean world and its reception into the world of medieval Europe and beyond.

John Riddle began his published studies in 1964 with work on the use of amber in Roman times; however, through a variety of publications (ninety-five are listed in a helpful catalogue at the end of this volume) he has engaged with the history and reception of pharmacological knowledge from antiquity to the early modern period. The papers here act as both homage to and commentary on this intellectual journey, moving chronologically from the eastern Mediterranean in antiquity towards medieval western Europe. In a concise and helpful introduction, Alain Touwaide divides these essays into four main parts: the first deals with antiquity and the eastern Mediterranean; the second, with the western Mediterranean in the early Middle Ages; the third with northern Europe and the beginnings of modern botany; and the fourth closes with papers devoted to herbs as we understand them today and the classification of ancient *materia medica*.

The opening chapters exemplify the scholarly range of this work: John Scarborough's piece on the court of Cleopatra VII of Egypt explores pharmacological knowledge in antiquity through an episode (Cleopatra's suicide) well known to a wider audience; Alain Touwaide's 'Quid pro Quo: revisiting the Practice of Substitution in Ancient Pharmacy' deals with a subject which, though perhaps less familiar to the general reader, is nevertheless rather vital - namely, the importance for physicians in the post-antique world of finding and naming substitutes for materials which could not be readily found. This is a key topic for the history of pharmacy in general, despite a lack of scholarship to date.

Subsequent chapters take matters further west and into the Middle Ages, addressing the problems which the transmission and reception of earlier texts created. Florence Elize Glaze discusses glossing practices in medieval Italy, Faith Wallis examines a twelfth-century commentary on the Constantinian *Liber Graduum*, after which Winston Black explores what is preserved of Constantine the African in northern European medical verse. Indeed, the next essay, Maria Amliad' Aronco's 'Problematic Plant Name; *elehtre*', though dealing with the Anglo-Saxon world, and hence cast in the introduction by Alain Touwaide as belonging to discussions about northern Europe, has much in common with the preceding essays, showing via a cunning examination of the glosses relating to the word *electrum* how the plant term *elehtre* may conceal more than has often been thought.

The central part of this volume consists of three papers which relate to the aftermath of the Middle Ages in northern Europe. Linda Ehrsam Voigts picks up instances of satire about doctors and drugs in Chaucer (though it might have helped to point out that this was entirely in keeping with tradition: both subjects had been the source of such criticism since

the time of Pliny the Elder). Gundolf Keil examines in some detail the textual history of a medical text in Old Silesian, the *Aphorisms of Roger*, which carried excerpts from Roger of Salerno's (fl 1170) *Surgery*. Last in this section comes Karen Reed's discussion of St John's Wort – a discussion well in keeping with Riddle's ideas, in as much as the herb has been celebrated recently for a variety of therapeutic actions, but has historically been attested with other, competing claims, amongst which was its role as an abortifacient.

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Angela Ki Che Leung and Charlotte Furth (eds), *Health and Hygiene in Chinese East Asia: Policies and Publics in the Long Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. vii, 337, \$23.95, paperback, ISBN: 978-0-8223-4826-9.

This volume, which encompasses contributions from scholars of history, sociology, and public health, presents overlapping themes, shifting medical paradigms, and cosmopolitan approaches to medical history. To facilitate the reader's understanding of the dialogue among the research works in the volume, the editors have arranged the essays in approximately chronological order, but they have also grouped them into three thematic sections: tradition and transition, colonial health and hygiene, and campaigns for epidemic control. All three sections provide a powerful exposition of embedded local practices and traditions together with their interactions with international and transnational influences as the shapers of public health policy and practice.

The first section of the volume assesses the change in conceptions of cleanliness, public order, and epidemic disease that drastically altered ideas about what is needed for a vigorous body and a healthy environment in the geographic region that the book covers. The issues addressed in this section remind students of medical history that philological treatment is necessary in the study of medical and public health systems. Change and progress required not only a linguistic transference but also a cultural transference and epistemic transference as indigenous understanding and concepts may not encompass certain basic ideas behind 'modern' public health introduced by the West.

In precisely this context Angela Leung undertakes an in-depth study of the evolution of the concept of *chuanran* (contagion) from ancient to modern times and discovers that the Chinese idea of *chuanran* is strikingly similar, epistemologically, to the English notion of infection. She argues that the new understanding of *chuanran* in late Qing traditional Chinese medical texts was crucial in fighting the 1910–11 Manchurian plague epidemic, although the term *chuanran* in fact both 'facilitated and at the same time distorted' the introduction of germ theory into China (p. 46). Also scrutinising the 1910–11 Manchurian plague, Sean Lei's research in the same section demonstrates as well how the plague helped stage a 'conceptual breakthrough' (pp. 74–5) from the traditional term *wenyi* (epidemics) to the modern understanding of *chuanranbing* (infectious/contagious disease, meaning 'an acute and widespread epidemic that was transmitted by direct and intimate human interaction') as a new disease category (p. 89). Although YuXinzhong's nuanced study in the same section does not directly discuss the changing meaning of any terms, it nonetheless sheds light on different stakeholders' changing perceptions of night soil