

Book Reviews

Perhaps the best tribute I am in a position to make to Professor McKeown, who died in June of 1988, is simply to praise this, presumably his final book. I find that easy to do because it is obviously the product of deep reading and years of pondering, but I would like to take one step more. Thomas McKeown was a philosopher and a moralist, as well as a historian, of medicine. In an age when medical "miracles" are commonplace, he did not kneel before technology, but maintained and taught the ancient wisdom that the practice of medicine is as much ethical and philosophical as scientific. For instance, he repeated again and again that the "cure" for the maladies of poverty today is the same one that began to work in Great Britain 200 years ago, i.e., decent diet. A few magical clinics, an investment of a few millions in tomography X-ray machines, will not provide humanity a sufficiency of good food. For that you have to change society. Professor McKeown knew that; and I wish I had known him.

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MIRKO D. GRMEK, *Diseases in the ancient Greek world*, trans. Mireille Muellner and Leonard Muellner, Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. xii, 458, £29.00.

In this scholarly work, first published in Paris, 1983, the diseases once endemic in the European communities are examined in the setting of ancient Greece, using the concept of "pathocoenosis" and "pathocoenotic dynamism", i.e., an ensemble of the maladies simultaneously present in a specific population, the inter-dependence of each disease in frequency and overall distribution to all the rest, and their evolution and development. Difficulties of interpretation inherent in the process of discovering the "pathological reality" underlying the ancient Greek case histories, are shown to be not only problems of textual authenticity or precise translation, but of a differently based theory of disease and diagnosis, allied to a nosological terminology changed in its application over the centuries. To supplement consequent deficiencies of information obtained from textual sources, researches by medical men and scholars of many disciplines and nations, both ancient and modern, are combined with evidence from medical ex-votos, bas-reliefs, etc., to make this a book of great detail and authority.

Given the extreme care taken to ensure the accuracy of the numerous technical terms in the English translation, the occasional printing error, e.g., "public" for "pubic" and turn of phrase, such as, "binges of slaughter" or "slob", in otherwise conventional passages, are unfortunate. The transliteration of Greek terms when accompanied by translation appears an unnecessary aid, but some kind of visual representation, especially of the ex-votos described, as well as a listed bibliography would have proved invaluable for further research, as Brothwell commented in his review of the French edition (*Med. Hist.*, 1986, 30: 97).

Although the author disclaims exhaustive coverage of his theme, it is extensive, even including the allergic properties of broad beans. This is a work which undoubtedly deserves and rewards detailed study.

G. M. Longfield-Jones

RALPH JACKSON, *Doctors and diseases in the Roman Empire*, London, British Museum Publications, 1988, 8vo, pp. 208, illus., £17.50.

This is an attractively presented and entertaining discussion of medicine in its social context in the period of the Roman Empire. The reader will find, after a brief treatment of the background in Classical and Hellenistic medicine, chapter-length treatments of the health regime prescribed by doctors (for their predominantly upper-class patients), women's disorders, birth and post-natal care (and, on the other hand, contraception and infanticide or exposure), medicine as practised in the Roman army (with special reference to surgical equipment and techniques), the role of "irrational beliefs" as distinct from "scientific medicine", and diseases (degenerative and infectious) and death.