

Book Reviews

in the birth process" (p. 3) and, as one of the manuscripts acknowledges explicitly, there are questions that "every whoman knowyth" (p. 36).

There is one final point I should like to raise. Expressions that might imply a value judgement, while projecting modern knowledge onto the past, should be used with care. Medieval texts on healthcare often record practices which may seem absurd to a modern reader. Nevertheless, it is not the role of the historian to question people's beliefs but, on the contrary, to explore their historical meaning, especially when they have been widely recorded in other sources. In my view, qualifying as "good sense" or "good judgement" (p. 32) the scribal decision to omit "superstitious passages" is a historiographical error of perspective that, besides, does not offer a satisfactory answer to the real meaning of the omission. However, apart from these minor differences with Barratt's approach, I believe that the publication of this book is extremely valuable for the history of women's healthcare in the Middle Ages. It provides us with new, painstakingly edited material and the scholarly resources of the general and textual introductions and the glossary.

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Armelle Debru and Nicoletta Palmieri in collaboration with **Bernard Jacquinod** (eds), "*Docente natura*". *Mélanges de médecine ancienne et médiévale offerts à Guy Sabbah*, Université de Saint-Étienne, 2001, pp. 329, €30.00 (paperback 2-86272-230-8).

Thirty years ago, Guy Sabbah was seconded to the fledgling university of St Etienne to be its first professor of Latin. An expert on the late Latin historian Ammianus Marcellinus, he soon turned his attention to Latin medical texts, and established his department as the main clearing house for information on this area of medical history. He has organized conferences, created

bibliographical tools, and published a valuable series of *Mémoires* on ancient medicine. Fifteen friends and pupils have joined together in his honour to offer him a bouquet of studies.

Most are concerned with philological problems in Latin, in Pliny, Scribonius Largus, Fronto, Nemesienus, Caelius Aurelianus, and the Ravenna commentators, but there are also emendations to the Alexandrian commentators and to Aretaeus. Klaus-Dietrich Fischer's discovery of "recycled" fragments of earlier authors in medieval texts is important both for its methodology and for its encouragement to look at later compendia. Alongside wider surveys of Methodism in Cassius Felix, and Hippocratic and Galenic references in St Jerome, three essays discuss the terminology for the voice, respiration, and antidotes. Nicoletta Palmieri offers further thoughts on the sources and development of the late commentaries from Ravenna, while Danielle Jacquart publishes the advice of Jean Le Lièvre, a member of the Paris Faculty from 1392 to 1418, on how to prepare dragées and sweetened waters to soothe the patient. In an essay that ranges widely from Galen's dissection of the elephant to the contagion of leprosy, Danielle Gourevitch raises a series of fascinating questions. I am not entirely convinced by her explanation for Galen's belief that he had found a bone in the heart of the emperor's elderly elephant. Her initial supposition, that he had seen ossified fibres separating ventricles from auricles, seems to me far more likely. This was the explanation given to me years ago by the late Dr Hugh Cott, FRZS, who had seen this phenomenon several times in his years in Africa.

These essays are of a uniformly high quality, and reflect the breadth of studies now being pursued into the medical writings in Latin. What was, thirty years ago, a forgotten area, neglected because it was not Greek, or because its writers did not, on the whole, employ the style and vocabulary of Cicero, has now very much come of age, and no one interested in classical medicine or in the history of Late Antiquity can afford to ignore it. Although he himself has written relatively little on this theme, Guy Sabbah has constantly advised and encouraged others.

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This tribute of friendship is both appropriate and well deserved.

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Gerald D Hart, *Asclepius, the god of medicine*, London, Royal Society of Medicine Press, 2000, pp. xx, 262, illus., £17.50 (paperback 1-85315-409-1). Orders to: Hoddle, Doyle Meadows Ltd., Station Road, Linton, Cambs CB1 6UX, UK.

Hart's book is a work of enthusiasm by an "amateur" historian of ancient medicine—but a far from amateur doctor. An impressive array of credentials in medicine are augmented by his publication of works on haematology, oncology, palaeopathology, numismatics and the history of medicine. As such, he, like all historians of medicine, brings a particular angle to the diverse material he has collected in this book, which I can easily recommend as a starter to those unacquainted with ancient medicine, with one caution. Hart's work does not necessarily belong in the main stream of historical studies that (rightly, on the whole) problematize the specific nature of ancient evidence, and treat it in its cultural context: but I am not sure that it is supposed to.

The book contains a useful, and wide, range of evidence from the ancient world dealing with Asclepius, including coins, the myths and various depictions of the god. An overview of Asclepius and medical treatment through the (ancient) ages is pursued, from the first mythical signs of the god, through antiquity, and into the Christian period: it culminates in a discussion of "Asclepius and medical practice today". This includes a brief history of the somewhat over-emphasized Hippocratic Oath, whose position in antiquity is rightly said to be obscure and quite possibly extremely marginal.

Hart's reasons for writing the book become clear in this final chapter: the ethics of medicine

is discussed in a historical context, with reference to the Pythagoreans, modern abortion and suggestions for "updating the Hippocratic Oath and new guidelines for medical practice", where we discover, amongst other things, that "an experienced physician of today using the methods of the Hippocratic school is able to diagnose 88 per cent of cardiac, pulmonary, gastrointestinal and certain other diseases" (p. 230). Further, Hart cites various studies that seem to indicate success in "religious" and other "alternative" treatments: as he dryly notes, these "will no doubt generate a great deal of discussion".

Hart closes by arguing that there is a direct continuity between the medicine of the modern and the ancient worlds—including the Asclepian—and that the sense of historical continuity with Asclepius should, and will, continue to thrive. Of course it is possible to see instead the *lack* of continuity, the particular problems that no longer apply, the particular culture-laden treatments of ancient medicine, and these are rightly handled in most historical studies of ancient medicine and Asclepius. But I am not sure that this was ever Hart's intention.

Hart seeks to emphasize the similarities rather than the differences but goes beyond that, to use the ancient material as a basis for discussion of what he perceives to be current concerns within modern medicine. *Asclepius, the god of medicine* is a doctor's, not a classicist's, history of Asclepius. And this "hands-on" approach is revealing in many ways: it not only restores those concerns—students of ancient medicine are perhaps too used to dealing with a rather far-away world where nothing can now be done for the long-lost patient—even though it does so with some anachronism; it also belongs in a tradition that persistently reinvented itself for the present in the mirror of the past. Pliny the Elder would have approved.

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