

## 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.

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The author has a good prospect of achieving his aim of reaching and informing the general reader. The book has less to offer the scholar, since it does not aspire to be a history of Roman medicine and bypasses questions that interest the professionals, beginning with the crucial preliminary problems of how Roman was Roman medicine, and where key figures like Galen and Soranus (both Greeks) belong in the tradition of medical writing and practice. In general, the author eschews in-depth discussion of the ancient medical literature, preferring the technique of illustrative quotation from the more accessible writers, and embellishing the text with a wide variety of items of general interest such as the diets of the rich, the setting of Pliny's villa, and the experiences of the hypochondriac Aelius Aristides at the Asklepieion of Pergamum.

Where the author does possess formidable technical skills and knowledge is in the archaeology of medicine, and it is in this area that he makes his main contribution. The book is a mine of information, much of it fascinating, on surgical instruments, anatomical votive offerings, latrine deposits, and the layout of Asclepieia. The chief disappointment in this area is the lack of interest shown in recent developments in palaeopathology, in particular the detection of cumulative dietary deficiencies and episodic stress through the analysis of human skeletal remains.

As social history, the book is usually reliable as well as readable, but the reader will find judgments that are less than sound or up-to-date about food supply systems in Rome and elsewhere (Rome was the only city in which a substantial portion of its plebs was given free grain over a period of centuries: cf. p. 39), the exposure of children and infanticide (it is unacceptable to label these practices "barbaric" without reference to the social and cultural context: cf. p. 106–7), or the demographic inferences to be drawn from funerary inscriptions (cf. p. 185). In general, however, the book is successful within its self-imposed, modest limits.

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SORANOS D'ÉPHÈSE, *Maladies des femmes*, vol. 1, bk. 1, texte établi, traduit et commenté par PAUL BURGIÈRE, DANIELLE GOUREVITCH et YVES MALINAS, Collection des Universités de France, Publiée sous le patronage de l'Association Guillaume Budé, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1988, 8vo, pp. ci, 131, illus., [no price stated].

The new Budé edition of Soranus, *fl.* AD 100, is the collaborative effort of a philologist, a physician, and a medical historian. It deserves a warm welcome, not least because it makes the Greek text of this ancient physician available for the first time since Ilberg's great edition of 1927. The tripartite introduction comprises an excellent survey of Soranus and medical Methodism, which incorporates much of the recent reappraisal of this controversial sect, a short appreciation of Soranus viewed against modern medicine, and a history of the text and its editions. The French translation is clear and generally accurate—I note an isolated misunderstanding at 30.3 = gr. 10.42—and there is a generous and helpful commentary. A series of diagrams of female anatomy is also included for the benefit of those without the necessary medical knowledge.

Soranus' tract on the diseases of women has been preserved in a single Greek manuscript, Paris, BN gr. 2153 = P, written in the late fifteenth century. The evidence of this late manuscript, which shows evident signs of rearrangement and contamination with other medical writings, can occasionally be checked against statements ascribed to Soranus by Oribasius, the medieval Latin compiler "Mustio", and, in particular, Aetius. Book XVI of the latter's compendium contains large extracts from Soranus, and, in turn, some sections from Aetius have been incorporated into P. Such a slender line of transmission has one important consequence for the philological editor: the Greek of P has often to be corrected and emended to give reasonable Greek. The editor(s) must be aware of the problems of interpolation, and of all sorts of textual corruption. This new edition brings many emendations to the text, some stylistic, others, as at 11.40 or 18.50, changing the meaning of the Greek considerably. Most I consider acceptable, others, as at 2.14, appear unnecessary. It is unfortunate that the argumentation in favour of some of these changes was published only in a periodical not available in Cambridge or London. But, on the whole, the text is an improvement over Ilberg's.