

Book Reviews

female love, it being thought that women were destined to love each other anyway and passively lie in each other's arms, as pictured in dozens of illustrated Victorian calendars showing fair maidens intertwined in the meadow or caressing by the brook under a tree. White includes only a few female voices before the 1870s: Charlotte Brontë in a letter of 1837 to Ellen Nussey, and Adah Isaacs Mencken, a friend of Swinburne and Georges Sand. Brontë's letter conveys the same-sex affection commonly found down through the nineteenth century from Jane Austen to the young Virginia Woolf. Adah Mencken's poems treat of crass, uncaring men. Her own sexual orientation is far from clear. It might have been shrewder to print more of Michael Fields (the pseudonym of two women conflated into a fictional man) and Amy Levy, a precocious Jew who attended Newnham College, Cambridge, and later savaged English Jewry in *Reuben Sachs* (1888) for semitic intolerance of same-sex intimacy. After going to London, Levy attached herself to Oscar Wilde before committing suicide at twenty-seven in September 1889. A headnote providing information about Levy's GP would have been useful: what did he think of his Cantabridgian's pathetic suicide? If one takes the view that physicians should interest themselves in their patients' suicides, then this anthology ought to find some small niche within the history of medicine. In the nineteenth century, self-murder as the result of the inability to consummate same-sex love was becoming a recognized cause of suicide. In the twentieth?

G S Rousseau,
De Montfort University

À l'ombre d'Avicenne. Le médecine au temps des califes. Exposition présentée du 18 novembre 1996 au 2 mars 1997, Paris, Institut du Monde Arabe, and Gand,

Snoek-Ducaju & Zoon, 1996, pp. 329, illus., (hardback 2-906062-94-4; paperback 90-5349-227-5).

The four-month Paris exhibition which opened in November 1996 on medieval Islamic medicine sponsored by the Institut du monde arabe and the Bibliothèque nationale was a major event for the field. While materials relevant to the subject have been on view in numerous museums and libraries throughout the world, never before had such an ambitious exhibition been mounted in either the West or the Middle East. A wide range of professional expertise, led by a scientific committee comprising some of the best French scholars on the subject, was enlisted to identify and solicit material for display, and the exhibits, many on view for the first time, came from public and private collections across Europe and the Middle East.

À l'ombre d'Avicenne is the exhibition catalogue and displays the same ambitious conception and execution. Separate chapters cover 1) the emergence and efflorescence of the Arabic medical tradition, 2) therapy, materia medica and surgery, 3) the preservation of health, 4) medicine and society, and 5) the diffusion of the Islamic humoral tradition and its influence in other lands. Each chapter is further divided into sections in which illustrations are accompanied by brief but informative sketches written by leading authorities in the various topics covered, each with a short bibliography for further reading. The work as a whole has clearly been carefully edited and cross-referenced, and surprisingly few inconsistencies and misprints can be found.

The broad scope of the work can be seen throughout. In the chapter on the preservation of health, for example, one is unsurprised to find a sketch on the Galenic non-naturals; but this is followed by discussions and illustrations bearing on cuisine, the *ḥammām* (bath), and

Book Reviews

astrological and magical medicine. The account of the rise of the Arabic medical tradition also devotes attention to the emergence of Syriac as a language of scientific discourse, and later the diffusion of the tradition into Byzantium and India is discussed.

The illustrations are of course of special importance. These are all exceptionally well-presented, and include not only miniatures, diagrams, and sketches from manuscripts, but also medical instruments, weights, seals, balances, and views of monuments, markets, apothecaries' shops, and traditional medicine still in practice in the Islamic world.

A problem that such a work can hardly avoid is the fact that the desire to include the most significant artefacts and draw attention to the most important highlights of medieval Islamic medicine tends to give the impression that this is representative of the face of medicine with which most people were familiar. It is well, then, to recall that the material in this book was typical of a highly urbanized medical culture to which the vast majority—peasants in the agrarian countryside—probably had little access. And this observation in itself begs the question of how effective medicine could have been in a tradition that in both its Greek and Arabic dispensations arbitrarily classified both illnesses and therapeutic strategies under rubrics that clearly had little to do with the true nature of the problem and the measures required to combat it. The sophisticated medical compendia of leading figures like al-Majūsī and Ibn Sīnā were certainly important in their medieval context, but in many cases could not have helped a doctor's patients; the medieval hospital was a major step in the institutionalization of medical structures, but could never have played more than a minor role in the delivery of medical care.

But such are the perennial difficulties of presenting pre-modern medicine to a public rather than specialized audience. The

institutions and individuals whose labours are represented in this work are to be congratulated for bringing to fruition a truly monumental contribution to the field.

Lawrence I Conrad,
Wellcome Institute for the History
of Medicine

Hippocrates, *Places in man*, edited and translated with introduction and commentary by Elizabeth M Craik, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, pp. xxiii, 259, £45.00 (0-19-815227-2).

One of the earliest texts of the Hippocratic Corpus, and one of the most intriguing is *Places in man*, *περὶ τόπων τῶν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον*, *de locis in homine (Loc.)*, which, in its description of the body *a capite ad calcem* and adumbration of empirical (animal) dissection, serves, one might say, almost as a model for more sophisticated treatises. According to Craik, it “has everything: ‘factual’ information, scientific reasoning, clinical practice, ideological statements” (p. 13).

Although relatively neglected in recent years, the key study of this text by K Schubring (1941), R Joly's Budé edition (1978), and its inclusion in the Loeb series of Hippocrates (P Potter, 1995) illustrate a recrudescence of interest well served and augmented by Craik's edition. A lucid introduction sets *Loc.* within the context of its time, tradition and reception. The text, derived from Joly's edition, is clearly set out, the translation accurate and vigorous, the commentary thorough. There are two appendices, the first dealing with the question of affinities between *Loc.* and other relevant texts in the Corpus, including *VM*, *Art.*, *Flat.* and *Aff.* In this regard, I would have expected mention of *Morb. II* and *Carn.* The second appendix provides useful anatomical diagrams. There is an index of