

copyist, or commentator — namely, that Dioscorides attempted to arrange the chapters on individual substances in terms of drug affinities, based on empirical observation and classification of the medical properties of the drugs and their similar physiological effects. Particularly illustrative is the discussion (pp. 106–111) concerning the tropane alkaloids of the *Solanaceae* family and Book IV, chapters 68, 70–75 of the *de materia medica*. Albeit speculative, but reasonable, is Riddle's conclusion in chapter five that Dioscorides' theoretical system was not acceptable or appreciated because of competitive, alternative theories and/or because he failed to expound explicitly his arrangement and classification of drugs.

Inevitably, there will be disagreement on points of interpretation: the important relationship between popular medicine and the professional art of the Greek *medici* with regard to the *de materia medica* does not appear well examined. In placing Dioscorides in the historical and medical context of the first century AD, Riddle merely comments in passing that “Dioscorides normally omitted what we would call the magical or irrational elements” (ch. 1, p. 18); his discussion later in chapter 2 (pp. 82–88) of “magical usages” is cursory and again stresses “how relatively free Dioscorides' work was of the magical element” (p. 88). Many issues are not raised. For example, not addressed is Temkin's contention “that it is the pharmacological rather than dietetic side of ancient medicine which tended toward magic belief” and his statistics for epilepsy: of forty-five substances recommended by Dioscorides for the malady, over one-third have a superstitious connotation (see O. Temkin, *The falling sickness*, Baltimore, 1971, pp. 78–81). Or with regard to the assimilation of “popular elements” one wonders how the *de materia medica* compares to the relatively contemporary works of Celsus and Scribonius Largus (see, U. Capitani, ‘Celso, Scribonio Largo, Plinio il Vecchio e il loro atteggiamento nei confronti della medicina popolare’ *Maia*, 1972, 24: 120–140)?

Disappointing are several technical aspects: most serious is the frequent mistranslation of the Greek texts (e.g., see the passages, pp. 84–85); ambiguities exist with regard to the author's other writings on Dioscorides: for example, Naples MS. Gr. 1 (saec. VII) is correctly cited (p. 191) (cf. G. Pierleoni, *Catalogus codicum graecorum bibliothecae*. New Series 8, Rome, 1962), but in Riddle, *Dictionary of Scientific Biography (DSB)*, vol. 4, p. 122, n. 7, and *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum (CTC)*, vol. 4, Washington, 1980, p. 5, the manuscript is cited as Vienna MS. Suppl. Gr. 28; Munich MS. 337 is dated to the tenth century (e.g., p. 199), but in *DSB* (p. 121) to the eighth century; the Codex Anicia Iuliana (Vienna MS. Gr. 1. saec. VI) is described as a gift to the Princess Anicia Iuliana in gratitude for her founding of a church in Constantinople, but in *DSB* (p. 120) and *CTC* (p. 4) the manuscript is described as a “wedding gift” and more recently, in Riddle, ‘The herbal in history’ (in Hans Biedermann, *Medica magica*, Birmingham, Alabama, 1986, p. 9) as a “birthday gift”; finally, *lector, cave*: typographical errors abound and are multifarious: for example, p. 35 Paul of Aegina (6th c. AD) for (7th c. AD); p. 181 (cf. p. 280) Clavius Anicius Olybrius for Flavius; p. 279 (cf. p. 212) M. Diehl for C. Diehl; p. 220, n. 4 Dierback for Dierbach, (cf. p. 87 = 279) Behrendes for Berendes; p. 264 Temkins for Temkin; p. 279 Albutt for Allbutt; p. 273 Saumaise . . . Paris, 1689 for Utrecht, 1689 (or Paris, 1629).

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VALENTIN LÖTSCHER (editor), *Felix Platter. Beschreibung der Stadt Basel 1610 und Pestbericht 1610/11* (Basler Chroniken, Band 11), Basle and Stuttgart, Schwabe, 1987, 8vo, pp. xiv, 616, illus., SFr.148.00.

Felix Platter (1536–1614) was one of the most remarkable and prolific of the physicians of Basle. He enjoyed a European-wide reputation, but remained closely attached to his native city, which he served loyally for more than half a century. In 1610, there occurred there a severe outbreak of plague, the seventh in Platter's lifetime. Towards its close, in 1611, he drew up a list of every house in the city, carefully noting its owner. A few weeks later, in April 1611, helped by his half-brother Thomas and occasionally others, he retraced his steps around the town to

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compile a plague survey. He carefully marked down which inhabitants had caught the plague, whether they had recovered or not, and if they had left the city. He added a list of the inmates of the hospital, as well as of the families who had died, and of the various tradesmen and councillors. He preceded his account with a survey of the previous outbreaks he had known, attempting to provide statistical data for each. He finished the main draft by July 1611, although small additions were made until 1612.

Dr Lötscher's edition is the first complete publication of these two tracts, which are preserved in manuscript in Basle. As well as a transcription, he has provided a detailed commentary on the *Stadtplan*, recording other house-owners as well as the present state of the property (and it is remarkable how little has changed), as well as reproductions of old printings and photographs. A separate brochure of maps, including the famous "bird's eye-view" Merian map of 1616, enables the streets and houses to be located easily. Finally, the introduction sets out the most significant conclusions to be drawn from Platter's descriptions for the history and topography of Basle, and, to a lesser extent, for medical history. The section on Basle and the plague is more informative than the more general survey of plague, but the close focus on Basle, which is the great strength of this book, also has its weaknesses. The uniqueness of Platter's detailed statistics needs more discussion, as do his sources: personal observations and burial records were used, but it is unclear how far Basle resembled its Italian and German neighbours in its plague organization and documentation. But this is a mere quibble compared with the abundant riches of this volume, which is of prime importance for any historian of plague. One can only regret that the editor did not live long enough to receive the thanks of his readers.

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WOLFGANG SCHNEIDER, *Paracelsus — Neues von seiner Tartarus-Vorlesung (1527/28)*, Brunswick, Braunschweiger Veröffentlichungen zur Geschichte der Pharmazie und der Naturwissenschaften, Band 29, 1985, 8vo, pp. iv, 76, DM. 15.00.

A seventeenth-century Paracelsus manuscript from the editor's possession has here been edited. These are students' notes of lectures given by Paracelsus at Basle University during the winter semester of 1527/28 in German instead of the usual Latin. No other manuscript of this lecture course is extant. A Latin version has been printed twice, one by Adam von Bodenstein in 1536, and one by Johann Huser who used a manuscript from the collection of Montanus in 1589. Schneider comes to the conclusion that Bodenstein's version is the better one, although Sudhoff, the modern editor of Paracelsus, thought Huser's was nearer the original. Schneider also thinks that all versions go back to one student's notebook and were modified only in the transmission, otherwise there would be greater divergencies.

The lectures are a collection of prescriptions for different conditions caused by what Paracelsus calls *tartarus*, a sediment causing constrictions of the arteries and of the chest, calculi, pus, and other complaints. The chief remedy in most cases is the oil of various plants. The remedies were unorthodox because the diagnosis and view of disease was unorthodox, and Paracelsus had to flee Basle for more than one reason.

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