

Book Reviews

Celse, *De la Médecine, Tome I, livres I–II*, trans. Guy Serbat, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1995, pp. lxxvi, 179, FFr 350.00 (2–251–01384–9).

The new Budé edition of the Roman encyclopaedist Celsus begins promisingly. It marks an improvement over the standard, 1915, edition of F Marx, from which W G Spencer made his Loeb translation, not only by removing many of its idiosyncratic spellings but also by being able to take account of a new manuscript, Toledo 97.12. While in general agreeing with MS. J., the new manuscript alone has the complete text of Book 4, and its readings help to decide between those of the three main witnesses, the Carolingian manuscripts, V, F and P. However, Serbat makes no mention in his preface of the important survey of the manuscript tradition by Michael Reeve, in L D Reynolds *et al.*, *Texts and transmission*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 46–7, or of the illuminating study of Celsus' Latin by H D Jocelyn, *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar 5*, 1986, pp. 299–336. It is unfortunate, too, that Serbat could not take advantage of the essays in P Mudry (ed.), *La Médecine de Celse*, St Etienne, 1994, but doubtless the benefits from these conference proceedings will appear in future volumes.

The format of the series presents its usual difficulties, with notes being split inconsistently between footnotes and endnotes. While references and quotations are generally accurate, the notes focus excessively on Celsus' use of Hippocrates, and on linguistic parallels elsewhere in Latin. Few, though, will be convinced of the influence of Ovid from the evidence put forward on p. ix. This is a philologist's edition for philologists, and medical historians and others wishing to read Celsus for the information he provides may need rather more help than is here given.

In his preface, as well as describing the contents of the first two books of *On medicine*, Serbat sets out his views on Celsus and his relation to the medicine of his time. He rightly affirms that Celsus is no mere compiler or translator from the Greek, but has his own axe to grind, and has had a certain amount of

experience in treating the sick as a landowner on his own estate. His famous preface, although historically orientated, is not designed as history as such, but as a contribution to the understanding of contemporary debates on medicine. Celsus tries to steer his own path through the arguments going on in Rome and the Greek world between the various medical sects, and he should not be seen as a committed follower of Asclepiades or the Methodists. He is a rationalist, although one should be careful about what that word means, and his rationalism need not correspond in every detail to that of the Hippocratics or of any other famous doctor of Antiquity.

This assertion of the independence of Celsus is to be welcomed, especially against those who still stick to the view of him as a mere compiler. But wider questions are rarely asked by Serbat, or are glossed over. If, as is most likely, Celsus was writing in the 20s or 30s, his silence on the Pneumatists requires some comment, especially since many modern scholars would date the beginnings of that influential sect to the last decades of the first century BC, a generation or so before Celsus. Equally, Serbat's vague comment that Asclepiades lived in the early first century BC, and was heard by Themison hardly allows the unwitting reader to know of the vigorous debate between Pigeaud and Gourevitch over precisely this question of dating, or of the important consequences for the development of Methodism that follow from adopting one view or the other. One misses too any sense of the wider context of Celsus' work as an encyclopaedist. Comparison with his fellow writers of encyclopaedias, Varro and Pliny, would point up the significant features in what is perhaps the single most important treatise on medicine written in Latin.

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William Turner, *A new herball*, Part I, eds George T L Chapman and Marilyn N Tweddle, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 362, illus., £65.00, \$100.00 (0–521–44548–5).