

Book Reviews

those who found human dissection repulsive on religious and anthropological grounds, but also by those who claimed that knowledge of the internal parts revealed nothing about their pathological disorders and provided no guarantee of successful therapy. But if the arguments against dissection were so strong, asks Carlino, what encouraged university medical men to resume the practice in the fourteenth century? Three factors explain the matter: the circulation of authoritative texts which argued that theoretical medicine should be grounded in anatomy; the institutionalization of medical teaching which helped to legitimize dissection; and the use of autopsy which gave medical men a familiarity with handling cadavers.

But the public dissections which resulted were primarily didactic events that served to verify the anatomical knowledge of antiquity. How did dissection eventually become a tool for acquiring knowledge about the human body? Carlino finds the answer in the fact that masters came down from their lecterns and assumed the duties of dissectors, thus uniting theoretical learning with practical ability, while their students were permitted to open the bodies to see for themselves. This took place at a time when more bodies were becoming available, making possible more public and private dissections. The heroic figure in this story is Vesalius, who finally asserted the priority of observation over authority. Once this methodological principle was accepted, claims Carlino, the “epistemological norm that had constricted anatomy for over a millennium” was broken (p. 213).

Some readers may find Carlino’s non-linear approach and his long sentences difficult going at times. Moreover, though he makes many insightful observations on the cultural context of sixteenth-century anatomy, he is primarily interested in epistemological issues of authority and observation, theory and practice, and teaching and research. In the epilogue Carlino could have responded to more of

the research that has been done in this area since 1994. How, I wonder, would he reply to the claims made by Andrew Cunningham for the religious dimension to Vesalius’ work (*The anatomical Renaissance*, Aldershot, 1997)? How would he react to Andrew Cunningham and Tamara Hug’s reading of the frontispiece of *De fabrica* (*Focus on the frontispiece of the Fabrica of Vesalius, 1543*, Cambridge, 1994)? And what would he say to Roger French’s functionalist explanation of the same material (*Dissection and vivisection in the European Renaissance*, Aldershot, 1999)? But even without this, Carlino’s book still gives impressive evidence of the current vitality of research into sixteenth-century anatomy; and this translation now makes Carlino’s contribution to the debate all the more accessible.

Cornelius O’Boyle,

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL

Mirko D Grmek (ed.), *Western medical thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, coordinated by Bernardino Fantini, translated by Antony Shugaar, Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 478, £30.95 (0-674-40355-X).

Though in many ways a French (if not Paris) dominated enterprise, this collection was originally published in Italian in 1993 (as *Storia del pensiero medico occidentale I: Antichità e medioevo*, Rome, Laterza). It was then quickly translated into French, and also German, and now finally appears in English. Despite the interval, however, there seems to have been little revision (I could find only one item in the bibliography later than 1994), just translation; and that has not been carried out with quite the degree of care required for such a work. For, while the rendition into English is

generally workmanlike, the translation of technical terms, and the presentation of classical names in particular, is rather less satisfactory, and the text thus contains a number of errors and infelicities which could easily have been avoided.

These points aside, this publication still has a lot to offer Anglophone readers. The original enterprise, as its editor, Mirko Grmek, explained in his introduction, was intended as a large-scale synthesis: a collective effort to produce a series of pieces that would, between them, cover the entire course of medical thought in the ancient and medieval West in a historically integrated fashion. The generation, transmission, adaptation, and assimilation of medical knowledge over the period were all to be related to the various other cultural, social, economic, environmental and biological factors with which they are bound up. Inevitably, some aspects of this synthesis receive more attention than others, but a combination of considerable breadth of approach with sufficient unity of purpose is maintained across all the chapters, so that the book provides an overview of the subject which is both coherent and complex. Moreover, Grmek mustered an impressive list of contributors, mostly leading scholars from continental Europe, making many of the essays authoritative summaries in their own right.

Coverage is initially chronological—or at least mainly so, as chapters on Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman medicine (by Jacques Jouanna, Mario Vegetti, and Danielle Gourevitch respectively), are followed by pieces on the ‘Byzantine and Arab world’ (Gotthard Strohmaier), ‘Charity and aid in medieval Christian civilization’ (Jole Agrimi and Chiara Crisciani), and ‘Medical scholasticism’ (Danielle Jacquart)—and then more clearly thematic—with chapters on the concept of disease (Grmek again), drugs (Alain Touwaide), surgery (Michael McVaugh), regimen (Pedro Gil Sotres), and the ancient and medieval European “pathocenosis”

(Jean-Noël Biraben). This last term refers to the community of pathological conditions which may be present in a given population at a given time, and it was introduced into the history of medicine by Grmek himself, which serves to emphasize that his influence extended far beyond the editorship of this volume, and the sense in which it can be said to articulate, at least in part, a shared scholarly view present prior to the actual inception of the publication project itself.

This view, or approach, has its limits and biases—the “West” of this book, for instance, is predominantly Mediterranean, rarely reaching more northerly climes—but it also has a number of strengths, in particular the breadth of its methodological vision, which suffuses the volume. Thus this translation makes more readily accessible to an English-speaking audience, a summary of current (mostly) continental European scholarship on the history of medical thought in the ancient and medieval West; a summary of impressive scope and a distinctive flavour. That is where its real value lies.

Rebecca Flemming,
King’s College London

Helen King, *Hippocrates’ woman: reading the female body in ancient Greece*, London and New York, Routledge, 1998, pp. xvi, 322, £50.00 (hardback 0-415-13894-9), £16.99 (paperback 0-415-13895-7).

The subtitle is, perhaps intentionally, slightly misleading: while the bulk of the book deals with how women were seen in ancient Greek medicine, parts of it look also at what later (especially Victorian) doctors did with this medical tradition. Chapter 1 is an outline of Hippocratic gynaecology, using the myth of Pandora as an explanatory model for the concept of woman’s “dangerous insides”; the following two chapters deal with questions of