

Book Reviews

In the end, Patterson's historical perspective on cancer tells us much about shifting American values and attitudes, about physicians and scientists, politicians and environmentalists, journalists and laypersons. Deeply imbedded in our culture, the cancer story, like Ariadne's thread, is a valuable guide to American fears, hopes, and foibles.

Guenter B. Risse
University of California, San Francisco

ALINE ROUSSELLE, *Porneia: on desire and the body in antiquity*, trans. Felicia Pheasant, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988, 8vo, pp. x, 213, £19.95.

This is a provocative, innovative, and erudite study of attitudes towards the body in antiquity, and, in particular, in the Roman Empire during the transition from paganism to Christianity from the second to the fifth century. Dr Rousselle breaks away from the usual range of literary sources in her attempt to reconstruct the *mentalité* of late antiquity. She contrasts information contained in the medical encyclopaedia of Oribasius, a militant pagan writing c. 360, with Roman legal decisions on marriage and fornication, and with the *Apophtegmata Patrum*, a collection of sayings and stories of Egyptian monks in the desert. Not surprisingly, the ensuing picture is both more varied and more lifelike than one based largely upon poetry or sermons. The fluent English translation adds to the delight of discovering these unusual sidelights.

Yet, for all its many virtues, this is an ultimately unconvincing book. Chronology is not Dr Rousselle's strong point, and some of her medical authorities are placed in the wrong century. More seriously, by taking Oribasius and, as far as can be seen, not checking back on his sources where they exist, she falls into the trap of losing the context of the original statements. As with the law codes, she interprets the prescriptions of the doctors as if they were universally followed, with some curious consequences. Thus, having brilliantly shown how an unwanted child could be disposed of at birth, she argues that most female children were disposed of swiftly. Later on, however, she discovers a superfluity of women available for legitimate sex (not all of whom could be out-of-work actresses). Her notion that a Roman male before intercourse took careful account of the legal status of his partner for fear of severe punishment he might suffer if he picked the wrong person is a charming antiquarian fancy. Her claim that women were largely treated by women, which neglects the evidence for male midwives, Galen, and the comic and deontological traditions of the doctor having sex with his patient, is on a par with her belief that Roman women, unlike their counterparts in Hippocratic Greece, stopped examining their own bodies. In short, while Dr Rousselle has given us much food for thought, a more critical attitude to her sources would have provided a sounder basis for her theorizing. Her account of a transition from pagan to Christian may, in the end, be no more than a change in the type of literature on which she relies, for Christian (and Muslim) physicians continued to repeat many of the same prescriptions as Oribasius with apparent unconcern for an altered religious climate.

Vivian Nutton
Wellcome Institute

GUY SABBAH, PIERRE-PAUL CORSETTI, and KLAUS-DIETRICH FISCHER (editors), *Bibliographie des textes médicaux latins. Antiquité et haut moyen âge*, Centre Jean-Palmerne, Mémoires 6, St. Étienne, Publications de l'Université de St. Étienne, 1987, 8vo, pp. 174, [no price stated], (paperback).

Latin medicine has always been the poor relation of Greek, not least in the accessibility of its texts. Few, even among classicists, know of more than Cato and Celsus; still fewer have read even these authors. To help remedy this ignorance, the Centre Jean-Palmerne has published this excellent bibliography of Latin medical writings down to the time of Salerno. It is clearly organized, well printed, and with very few errors. The bibliography lists only texts, editions, and translations; studies of the contents of the texts are not included. There are valuable indexes and cross references to manuscripts, perhaps pointing towards a revision of Beccaria's list of pre-Salernitan manuscripts of medicine. I have already found it of great value in attempting to identify fragments of the (in part pseudo-)Galenic corpus in Latin in a Durham manuscript.

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Omissions are minor. English readers might miss a reference to Charles Singer, 'A review of medical literature of the Dark Ages', *Proc. R. Soc. Med.*, 1917, 10: 107–60, which contains, (p. 133), a *Prognostica vera e libro Galieni*, which should be added to the list on p. 103, cf. also *Med. Hist.*, 1970, 14: 96–8. The text on falconry medicine, certainly written before 950, which was published by Bernhard Bischoff, (*Anecdota novissima*, 1984, pp. 171–82), should perhaps also have been included, given the laudable decision to describe texts on veterinary as well as on human medicine. Finally, it is worth noting that good photostats of many of the manuscripts of Dark Age medicine, including part of the now destroyed Herten manuscript, were made by Sigerist and can now be consulted at the Institute for the History of Medicine in Baltimore. All in all, the Centre Jean-Palmerie must be congratulated on an excellent and most useful collaborative work.

Vivian Nutton
Wellcome Institute

PIERRE DE SPIEGELER, *Les Hôpitaux et l'assistance à Liège (X^e–XV^e siècles): aspects institutionnels et sociaux*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège, Fascicule CCLIX, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1987, 8vo, pp. 225, illus., [no price stated], (paperback).

The first modern study of medieval Liégeois hospitals, this is a well-researched, thoughtful and scholarly addition to the growing list of regional monographs on institutional poor relief in the Middle Ages. The area chosen is particularly interesting, moreover, in that it possessed well-established communal forms of relief (the so-called *tables des pauvres*) as well as hospitals. Much of the terrain is now well-trodden. The author underlines the longevity and durability of hospital foundations; their multiplicity (15 in a city of about 20,000 in the late fifteenth century); the chronology of their foundation (the origins of most lie in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries); and their diversity (there is from early on a leper-house, while later provision extends to the insane and to plague victims). As is regrettably usually the case with such monographs—if inevitability so, given the nature and shortcomings of the evidence—the reader learns less about the recipients of charity than about the institutions which catered for them and the buildings which housed them. Poor relief prevails over the poor themselves, and the mustiness of the ledger wins out over the aroma of flesh and blood. Nevertheless, Dr de Spiegelers does squeeze his material hard to extract something of the human from often unpromising sources. There are some excellent passages in particular on the religious communities who came to take over the running of the hospitals. These communities were especially numerous in this area and had some unusual developments—many of the female groups converting into *béguines*, for example. Dr de Spiegelers also highlights the tardiness of the “medicalization” of these hospitals: a number became crowded out with pensionaries, while the advent of medical personnel was late by standards elsewhere in Europe. The conclusion that prior to this hospitals were not medical institutions at all is perhaps a little shaky, in that, by his own admission, “l’organisation quotidienne demeure la grande inconnue”, but it tends to fall in with other analyses. Moreover, his analysis of charitable benefactions in wills confirms the widely-held view that piety and communal exigencies, rather than social need, were the dominant motivating factors behind the creation and support of charitable institutions. When faced with a social crisis, charitable institutions simply could not cope. Seemingly the most fragile aspect of medieval hospitals was precisely that which related to the provision of care for the poor and needy.

Colin Jones
University of Exeter

DAVID C. GOODMAN, *Power and penury: government, technology and science in Philip II's Spain*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. xii, 275, illus., £30.00/\$44.50.

In December 1561, writing to Gabriele Fallopio from the court of Philip II in Madrid, Andreas Vesalius recalled gloomily “the very happy life I enjoyed while teaching anatomy in