

## Book Reviews

SERGIO SCONOCCHIA (editor), *Scribonii Largi Compositiones*, Leipzig, B. G. Teubner, 1983, 8vo, pp. xxiv, 130, M. 38.00.

Ten years ago, in Toledo, Dr Sconocchia discovered what is today the only surviving manuscript of an author whose life and works merit considerable attention. Scribonius Largus, a Roman pharmacologist, probably a bilingual Sicilian, came to Britain in AD 43 with the army of the emperor Claudius. He was aware of happenings in the royal household, and his book was dedicated to Caius Iulius Callistus, an imperial official. His preface, with its transmutations of the Hippocratic ethical ideal into a Roman context, has deservedly attracted scholarly comment, but his list of 271 recipes, despite being competently edited in the sixteenth century and again in the nineteenth, was neglected in favour of those of Dioscorides and Galen. Yet Scribonius has much to offer, and the sources of his drugs, his teachers, and his comments throw much-needed light on medical practice in Antiquity. The recommendation of Ambrosius, doctor of Pozzuoli, that in cases of the stone, a drug should be pounded by a wooden pestle by a person wearing no iron ring, is condemned by Largus as "superstition", while no. 231, an ointment to remove the marks of branding, reveals the fate that might befall shipwrecked sailors. Largus' references to the living emperor as a god are also worthy of note.

Dr Sconocchia's text represents a great improvement over its predecessors, not simply because of his new manuscript. He has made judicious use of parallels in Galen and Marcellus Empiricus, and he is well aware of the pitfalls of over-emendation; his treatment of *bdella/bdellium* is instructive. What is now needed is a commentary to rival this excellent edition.

Yet at one point the unwary reader may be led astray. On pp. VIII and XI, Dr Sconocchia refers to Galen (strangely, still given the name of Claudius) as having made direct and frequent use of Largus. The patient labours of Cajus Fabricius, *Galens Exzerpte aus älteren Pharmakologen*, Berlin, 1972, have shown that in none of the passages cited is Galen using Largus directly. His information comes either from Asclepiades the pharmacist or from the younger Andromachus, both active in the seventies and eighties, or is already recorded by a slightly older Greek contemporary, Heras, fl. AD 15. The references to manuscripts of Largus are thus not evidence for his survival for a further century as an important medical author, but are comments made by his own contemporaries. There is, in short, no proof that Galen knew his works directly or owned a copy of them; his remedies are taken at second or third hand, and sometimes from Largus' own source. It is also probable that Asclepiades and possibly Andromachus knew Largus' drugs only from their original Greek, for, as Dr Sconocchia rightly points out, he seems to have been bilingual and to have written in both tongues.

This misconception should not be allowed to mar a commendable piece of editing which at last frees us from the duty to call the book 'Conpositiones'.

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London Feminist History Group, *The sexual dynamics of history: men's power, women's resistance*, London, Pluto Press, 1983, 8vo, pp. x, 226, £4.95 (paperback).

The title of this book, and the blurb on the cover, lead one to anticipate polemic rather than history. While the polemical intention, and the theoretical position of the contributors, are clearly set forth in the Preface and Introduction, the contributions themselves are, in fact, sober articles on various un- or under-explored aspects of women in history. The only one of which this cannot be said is Sheila Jeffreys' 'Sex reform and anti-feminism in the 1920s', which concentrates misleadingly on a few extremist anti-feminist writers, while supporting her thesis by selective quotation from other writers who were certainly not in sympathy with their views. Furthermore, Marie Stopes is almost ignored, although *Married love* was a bestseller during the 1920s and surely more widely read and influential than A. M. Ludovici's works, which are extensively cited in this paper.

While it is pleasing to see that no "party-line" of opinion has been imposed on the contributors to this work, it is somewhat odd to encounter the juxtaposition of Sheila Jeffreys' paper with that of Barbara Brookes on abortion: in the latter, Janet Chance, Stella Browne, and Dora Russell appear as heroines willing to identify themselves with an unpopular, even scandalous