

Book Reviews

Hippocrates and Galen, the translations made from Greek to those from Arabic, and using the more recent translations in preference to older ones: for example, the translation of the *Royal book* of 'Ali ibn al-'Abbas made by Stephen of Antioch (*Liber regalis*) rather than the older version of Constantine the African (*Pantegni*). But, beyond this, he adds his personal stamp. He provides what is probably the most detailed and critical history of writings on surgery up to his time, and frequently refers to his own experience and the examples of his teachers. He transforms the language of his authorities into a fluent and clear Latin, and adds tags from literature and philosophy (including the well-known saying of Bernard of Chartres that the moderns are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants, and the statement that he is a greater friend to truth than to Socrates or Plato: on this subject one may add the study of L Tarán, 'Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas, from Plato and Aristotle to Cervantes', *Antike und Abendland*, 1984, 30: 93–124). One can only regret that his interest in illustration was not as refined as that of his Arabic predecessor, Abu'l-Qasis al-Zahrawi.

With Guy, surgery had achieved the status of a scholastic science which depended as much on works of theoretical medicine and Aristotelian natural science as on actual practice in the operation theatre. All students of medieval medicine will find a vast store of information in these volumes, and be grateful to the meticulousness equally of Guy de Chauliac and of his editor.

Charles Burnett,
Warburg Institute, London

M A D'Aronco and M L Cameron, *The Old English illustrated pharmacopoeia: British Library Cotton Vitellius C III*, Early

English Manuscripts in Facsimile, vol. 27, Copenhagen, Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1998, pp. 119, including 8 colour plates, 87 black and white illustrations, half Morocco ed. Dkr 9,460.00 (87-423-0529-2); paperback ed. Dkr 8,140.00 (87-423-0527-6). Orders to: Rosenkilde & Bagger Ltd, 3 Kron-Prinsens-Gade, DK-1114 Copenhagen K, Denmark.

Medical texts in the vernacular appeared in Anglo-Saxon England earlier than elsewhere in Europe. The *Old English pharmacopoeia*, a corpus of texts including translations of pseudo-Apuleius, *Herbarius*, pseudo-Dioscurides, *Liber medicinae ex herbis feminis*, and the *Medicina de quadrupedibus*, appears in three eleventh-century manuscripts and a later twelfth-century copy. These four, together with the tenth-century *Bald's Leechbook*, are the only extant medical compendia in Old English.

The present facsimile of the single illustrated copy of the pharmacopoeia (London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius C. iii) makes a welcome companion to that of *Bald's Leechbook*, published in the same series in 1955. In an introductory preface, Professor D'Aronco gives a detailed account of the manuscript and its illustrations. Her discussion of the latter focuses on the artist's indebtedness to classical models, and is generously illustrated with plates from Latin herbals. Together with Professor Cameron, she suggests new identifications of the plants in the herbal, while he re-evaluates their medicinal value. Cameron argues that many of them could well have proved efficacious, because they are prescribed for similar ailments in modern herbals.

The introduction concludes that the herbal was copied for practical purposes. This view is attractive, but it is difficult to see the present handsome manuscript as one intended for daily use. Its large format and cycle of more than 200 illustrations make a striking contrast with two other copies, British Library, Harley MSS 585 and 6258B, small undecorated volumes that

Book Reviews

could easily have been used by a leech. Vitellius is akin to the famous Bury St Edmunds herbal, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 130, a volume known to have been stored in a cupboard or chest (“de armario”).

The care with which Vitellius was produced is seen in the scribe’s anticipation of pictures. He wrote “a shorthand visual sign” for the artist in the spaces he left for them. The two signs employed seem to me to be the Runic letter wynn (used by the Anglo-Saxons for w) and the letter l with a stroke through it (see, for example, fol. 56r). Perhaps they were meant to indicate Old English “wyr̥t” and “leac”, both meaning “herb”.

The manuscript was occasionally consulted. Chapter numbers were soon supplied to the table of contents and at the head of each column of text to facilitate reference to the appropriate remedy for the illnesses listed in the contents. Recipes were added on endleaves in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. However, later medieval additions of Latin plant names need not attest a reader’s medical concerns. When, in the early thirteenth century, the well-known “tremulous hand” of a Worcester monk glossed the copy in Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 76, it was evidently from linguistic interest.

The origin and provenance of Vitellius are unknown. D’Aronco’s brief account of its history ignores the suggestion that it was the volume recorded as “Herbarius anglice depictus” in the fourteenth-century library catalogue of Christ Church, Canterbury. Such an institution was its likely home. However useful the text, the manuscript itself suggests a book stored in a monastic library, or perhaps the infirmary, for reference only when necessary.

Pamela Robinson,
Institute of English Studies,
University of London

William Birken, *Puritanism and medicine: the transatlantic medical family of Dr. Edmund Wilson the elder (1583–1633), Dr. Edmund Wilson the younger (1617–1657), and Dr. Thomas Sheafe (1603–1657)*, Studies in English medical history, no. 1, Willow Bark Press, 1998, pp. vi, 106 £5.00, \$7.00 (prices include p&p. Orders to: William Birken, 302 Davie Road, Carrboro, NC 27510, USA).

It should be noted at the outset that this publication is little longer than a journal article and has a Spartan bibliography. The publishing format, composition on what appears to be a typewriter, and billing as the first in a series of studies in English medical history, combined with various hints within the paper that indicate that its author is at odds with other scholars’ opinions, all point to serious disaffection with the traditional venues for academic contribution. Were it not for the author’s past record of scholarly publishing (see, for example, *Medical History*, 1995; **39**: 197–218 and *Journal of British Studies*, 1983; **23**: 47–62), one might suppose this piece to be the work of a disenfranchised amateur or perhaps a crank.

Here is “the story of the Wilson family” (p. 83), complete with a tedious tangle of genealogical information and spiced up with undocumented connections between unsung family members and their better known contemporaries; details of bequests could usefully have been relegated to an appendix. The family produced the three Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians named in the subtitle—“no other seventeenth-century English family could make such a claim” (p. 98)—yet, despite their prominence, historians have generally overlooked them. This is undoubtedly because, as the author notes, they made no great contributions to medical science. Nor, it would seem, did they leave much written record by which their individual medical scholarship and practice might be assessed. However,