

Book Reviews

All three books, two written in the United States and one in France, demonstrate that valid cures can be obtained by means quite different from Western medicine in its present state, that anatomy and disease entities do not have to be the be-all and end-all of medical investigation, and that a system of functions and relationships between energies also seems to work. However, two of the writers have a Chinese background and the third was trained in Macao. Unless one's thinking is based on the Chinese way of seeing the world, the philosophy of yin and yang, and the Tao which will turn each thing into its opposite in due course, one can hardly hope to practise this type of medicine successfully.

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FREDERICK SARGENT II, *Hippocratic heritage. A history of ideas about weather and human health*, New York and Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1982, 8vo, pp. xlii, 581, illus., \$65.00 (\$25.00 paperback).

Published posthumously, this first historical survey of human biometeorology was written by a leading human ecologist and principal founder of the International Society of Biometeorology. Frederick Sargent traces the evolution of the Hippocratic idea that weather is one of the determinants of health from its ancient origins to the present day. The narrative is built around lengthy sketches of the life and ideas of key figures, and with the unsurprising exception of Paracelsus, these accounts are reliable as far as they go. True to the Baconian spirit that Sargent commends in biometeorological work itself, the book reproduces large amounts of recorded observations and historical material with limited analysis.

The author's main historical concern is with the time lag between the early-modern appearance of measurement and graphic techniques, and their belated application in systematic medical-meteorological investigations. He shows that, despite the enthusiastic inductivism of the medical topographers, it was not until the late nineteenth century that quantitative methods prevailed over impressionistic observations, and that the graphic analyses essential for the discovery of biometeorological correlations were applied. The explanations offered for this delay are the intrinsic difficulty of biological study, lack of experimentation, and the unreliability of contemporary data. It is suggested that the germ theory of disease also retarded progress in the mid-nineteenth century by deflecting interest away from the weather and human constitution, but that biometeorology re-emerged all the stronger for this clarification when the environment again attracted attention in the human sciences around the turn of the century.

The book is more successful on twentieth-century developments, when the author literally comes into his own. A sensitive intellectual biography of Sargent's teacher and collaborator, William F. Petersen ("the American Hippocrates"), forms one-fifth of the volume. The epilogue contains an intriguing content analysis of recent research, revealing a marked divergence between continental and Anglo-American biometeorology. Continental scientists continue to pursue the meteorological causes of disease, an interest exemplified by the provision of medical-meteorological forecasts to doctors and hospitals by the German weather service. Anglo-American work, on the other hand, is now largely restricted to the physiology of human survival in extreme weather conditions. Sargent observes that the rich Hippocratic tradition of Britain and America depicted in his book might conceivably have led to an outcome more like the continental one. It will take a different sort of history – institutional and comparative – to explain why it did not.

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PETER GARNSEY, C. R. WHITTAKER (editors), *Trade and famine in classical antiquity*, Cambridge Philological Society, Supplementary Volume 8, Cambridge, 1983, 8vo, pp. 127, £12.50 (paperback). (Obtainable from Dr C. Austin, Trinity Hall, Cambridge CB2 1TJ.)

In the last few years, historians of the ancient world have begun at last to investigate the difficult areas of ancient food supplies and deficiencies. This collection of essays, derived as it is

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from short conference papers, should be seen as a preliminary presentation of results. Two clear conclusions emerge: the complexities of the ancient trade in staple foodstuffs, particularly grain, and the success achieved by the classical conquest cities, Athens and Rome, and to some extent Carthage and Alexandria, in securing a generally adequate food supply for the citizen inhabitants of the capital city. Such subsistence crises as there were were few and short term. Their armies too seem to have been well fed, with arrangements for their provisioning. But on the smaller towns, on the fate of the provincials, this collection of essays is largely silent. The evidence of the local chronicle of Edessa (S. Turkey) for the fourth and fifth centuries, or the story of a famine at Myra in Lycia in the sixth, suggests that the generally optimistic tone of writers at the centre may have to be considerably modified for the Roman empire as a whole, and Galen's famous description of peasants having to resort to eating roots may not have been wide of the mark. On the relationship between malnutrition, famine, and disease, little is said, and that contradictory (pp. 16, 64). This useful volume signposts a way ahead, but much travelling is still needed before a satisfactory destination is reached.

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JOHN A. PITHIS, *Die Schriften ΠΕΡΙ ΣΦΥΓΜΩΝ des Philaretos*, Husum, Matthiesen Verlag, 1983, 8vo, pp. 263. [no price stated] (paperback).

The physicians of the Western Middle Ages and of the renaissance derived their theory of the pulse from an obscure Greek called Philaretos, whose little book was, from the eleventh century on, included in the Latin compendium called the *Articella*. Dr Pithis now publishes for the first time the original Greek text, as well as a version of the Latin translation based on Auxerre 240, a German translation, and a full and detailed commentary. Thanks to Dr Pithis, the proper study of this important text can now be said to have begun at last. One can now see how this Byzantine author, who worked between the early ninth and the late eleventh century, adapted a basis of Galenic ideas, largely mediated through the pseudo-Galenic tract "On pulses, for Antonius", and produced an excellent elementary guide to the pulse. The Latin translator omitted the brief preface, with even a joke(?), l. 25f., and from l. 242 on, has a different ending. The interpretation of Galenic medicine was thus no static repetition, even in the Middle Ages, and was capable of adaptation to the needs of teaching and practice. Even in Latin, the very early Salernitan MS., Wellcome 801A, shows some differences from the Auxerre MS. used as the illustration of the Latin tradition. Dr Pithis' valuable study throws a great deal of much-needed light into an important corner of Galenism.

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K. THEODORE HOPPEN (compiler), *The papers of the Dublin Philosophical Society 1683–1708* (text on microfiche, introduction and index in printed booklet), Dublin, Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1983, £14.00. (Obtainable from Trade and Postal Sales, Stationery Office, Waterloo Road, Dublin 4.)

This product of seventeen years' work will throw much light on social and intellectual development in Ireland in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The compiler has presented in coherent form the complete surviving papers of the Dublin Philosophical Society. The introduction with an index was printed in *Analecta Hibernica*, while the text and illustrations, with necessary annotations, have been produced as twenty microfiches.

The Dublin Philosophical Society provided a forum for discussion to many Irish medical men prior to the foundation of professional societies, but their contributions often dealt with other disciplines while lay members commented on medical matters.

The compiler is to be congratulated on this important work and given sympathy for the long delay between completion and publication.

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