

## Book Reviews

PIERO CAMPORESI, *Bread of dreams: food and fantasy in early modern Europe*, transl. David Gentilcore, Oxford, Polity Press, 1989, 8vo, pp. 212, £19.50.

Bread, deliberately flavoured or adulterated by herbs and seeds of cannabis and poppy, mouldy or accidentally made from grain contaminated by a fungus from which LSD can be derived, consumed in conditions of chronic malnutrition and hunger, was responsible for individual mental aberration and collective delirium. This is one of the themes of Piero Camporesi's *Bread of dreams*. In this very startling work he argues that the reality of material existence was tempered for the poor of medieval Italy by the regular consumption of naturally-occurring drugs and by dreams, in hunger-induced hallucination, of bread in plenty at a future harvest never attained. Although Professor Camporesi says that destitution destroyed the spirit, infestation of worms decayed the flesh, and tramps and beggars were the metaphorical worms which threatened the granaries of the rich, one looks in vain in his work for an assessment of the part played by the phantasmagoria of sickness.

By his account, "the culinary recipe, the sorcerer's composition, the apothecary's prescription, the herbalist's unguent and the ointment seller's remedy" provided for all levels of society a pharmacopoeia promising health and protection, riches and longevity or oblivion and ecstasy. These themes are richly and vividly illustrated from contemporary literature, songs and poems. Roy Porter's preface to the book (without which interpretation would be very difficult), sets the work in the context of European research into medieval and early modern peasant society and explains that the author's intention is to shock the reader into an awareness of the "unbearable harshness of reality" so that the fears and aspirations of the population may be appreciated just as, by other means, a grassroots understanding of more recent peasant and artisan communities has been accomplished. If this is indeed Professor Camporesi's intention there is a danger that the strength of his imagery may hide his very important message and send the wrong signals about the effects of the drug content of natural substances.

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ALBERT DIETRICH (ed.), *Dioscorides triumphans: ein anonymer arabischer Kommentar (Ende 12. Jahrh. n. Chr.) zur Materia medica*, pt. 1, *Arabischer Text*, pp. 216, pt. 2, *Übersetzung und Kommentar*, pp. 752, *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philolog.-Hist. Klasse, Folge 3, nos. 172–3*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 8vo, illus., DM 360, (paperback).

Dietrich's careful study of a unknown Dioscorides commentator is a significant contribution to the history of pharmacy and medicine and it has importance in the study of linguistics and the history of science. The twelfth-century author possessed a highly unusual critical spirit and wrote for students who needed precise identifications of drugs. He reasserted Dioscorides' call for knowledge to be based on personal experience, but said that his text had numerous errors, some because of faulty knowledge of the text, but some because of a lesser knowledge of drugs in Dioscorides' time than his own. He even pointed out that there were different levels of knowledge between his own time, the twelfth century, and the periods of earlier commentators not so far separated from his own. The commentary is only on the first four books—the fifth book, he said, dealt in part with medicinal wines that were of no interest to him. He was concerned with nomenclature and identification. A full chapter (generally devoted to a single plant) would have the lemma or title in Arabic transliteration of Dioscorides' Greek, Arabic translation, and comments first by Ibn Juljul (died after AD 994), and secondly by 'Abdallāh b. Šāliḥ, whose observations were extensive and not restricted to botanical identifications. Both of these earlier commentators had employed texts of Dioscorides derived from the various recensions of Stephanos-Hunain; Dietrich observes that the full understanding of Dioscorides' transmissions cannot be known until modern texts of this tradition are established. The anonymous twelfth-century commentator took issue with his predecessors on many points,

thereby demonstrating a well-educated, informed, probing, and critical mind. He was familiar with various Berber dialects, as well as Celtic-Iberian nomenclatures and, through Ibn Juljul, Latin. He cited a number of unknown sources including one, simply, as “a Byzantine”. In his introduction he said that he had studied pharmacy in the city of Marrakesh where, through his teacher, he became familiar with ‘Abdallāh, who was critical of both Dioscorides and Ibn Juljul. The value in Dietrich’s outstanding scholarship lies in identifying the understanding of plant drugs and in discovering the detailed, critical, and empirical spirit of these various Arabic commentators, most especially ‘Abdallāh and the “Anonymous”. In his preface, the Anonymous explained the necessity for a knowledge derived from experience about drugs that must be known by their proper name in one’s mother tongue, in various other languages, and *how each relates to the other*.

For each chapter Dietrich gives the Arabic transliteration, the Greek term, and a German translation. He adds copious references to various editions of Dioscorides, including one in Arabic, and identifies most fragments, some (e.g., Juljul) from manuscript sources. The identification of the sources is well done and a tremendous hurdle considering that Ibn Juljul alone cites nine authorities, among them Galen, Hunain b. Ishāq, and Rhazes. In addition Dietrich identifies plants by modern, scientific citation, and he asks experts for their insight in the various vernacular dialects, such as Berber, that the anonymous author was precociously interested in learning. Dietrich’s scholarship is meticulous and thorough in respect to the Arabic transmission but less complete in respect to the broader picture of Dioscorides’ work. Dietrich’s introduction has a discussion of what is known of the author and his sources, the sources that the Anonymous, Ibn Juljul and ‘Abdallāh employed, an analysis of the commentary’s structure, linguistic analysis (especially of aetiologies and various dialects), a discussion of the errors and misunderstandings in the text—this is an important section—and a glossary of unusual Arabic words.

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TONY HUNT, *Popular medicine in thirteenth-century England*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1990, 8vo, pp. xi, 466, £39.50.

The main body of *Popular medicine in thirteenth-century England* consists of editions of recipes and antidotaries written mostly in Anglo-Norman, a language that Tony Hunt, Reader in French at St Andrews, rightly points out is slighted by medical historians. All chapters but the first print thirteenth-century texts, preceded by descriptions of the manuscripts that contain them. The editor prefaces his editions with an introduction that surveys the written recipe from earliest times through the fifteenth century. The editions are followed by glossaries giving modern identifications for plant names. Hunt’s texts are presented here for the first time, and he is to be congratulated for giving exposure to medicine in a neglected language.

Reservations about a work that fills an important gap in the field can only be regarded as minor. The first stated purpose of the book is to rescue Anglo-Norman *materia medica* from “oblivion”, and Hunt achieves this. But other objectives are unevenly realized. The editor’s definition of popular medicine as “non-theoretical medicine exclusively concerned with the therapeutic administration of naturally occurring *materia medica*” will strike some as eccentric. It is, for one thing, at war with the texts Hunt edits, which contain charms and prayers. More than once he adopts the positivist stance of former days by evaluating early writers according to the amount of magic, superstition, and the irrational he finds. By “popular”, Hunt seems to mean what others have meant by “practical”. In any case, a less limiting definition derived from Hunt’s own sources might have served his readers better.

The way Hunt explicates the thirteenth century is curious as well. Most of the editor’s introduction concerns periods before and, surprisingly, after, the time when his texts were written. Considerable attention is devoted to Oxford’s most famous medical doctor, John of Gaddesden, and to the medical and religious writer John of Mirfield, neither of whom could be