

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.

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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.

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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.