

## Book Reviews

The relationship of P to Aetius, however, is not satisfactorily resolved. There is no clear line on what to do with passages in P suspected of being interpolated from Aetius. Some are banished completely from both text and apparatus; others are relegated to an appendix; still others are included in the text but in smaller letters. It would perhaps have been best to print the whole of P's text, indicating with brackets and smaller print the passages rejected by the editors. As it is, there is still doubt as to the editors' views of the status of the various passages. Conversely, at 11.46–49, we ought to have been told whether the marginal note is in the same hand as that of the text, for this has a bearing on the authenticity of these lines and of the various scribal rearrangements (at 31.21, I would delete the penultimate word as an early gloss on the (superfluous) word that follows).

What do these philological changes mean, particularly for an English readership accustomed to the Baltimore, 1956, translation? For an overview of Soranus, the English translation is still useful—indeed, its rendering of ch. 2 is more accurate than the French—but for any work on details, the new Budé is essential, not least for its introductions and commentary. The remaining books are eagerly awaited.

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ACHIM KELLER, *Die Abortiva in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, with an Introduction by Rudolf Schmitz, *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Pharmazie*, Bd. 46, Stuttgart, Deutscher Apotheker Verlag, 1988, 8vo. pp. ix, 300, DM 58.00, (paperback).

In this thought-provoking study, Achim Keller has carefully and comprehensively assembled the evidence for the practice of abortion in the Roman empire. The book is divided into two parts—'Die Abtreibung in der Kaiserzeit' and 'Die Abortivdrogen'—with a full introduction and concluding summary.

The first part is a significant and welcome addition to the surprisingly limited literature on abortion in the classical world. Keller examines, develops, and challenges current views on the subject and offers some perceptive insights and stimulating new theories, as in his discussion of the seemingly conflicting evidence within the Hippocratic Corpus: on the one hand is a not inconsiderable list of abortifacients, on the other the celebrated passage in the *Oath* forbidding the administration of abortive substances. Keller suggests this is a matter of semantics and proposes a fresh and convincing explanation. Forbidden are "*phthoria*", given in the form of vaginal pessaries, which kill the foetus. Acceptable are "*ekbolia*", drugs which induce a miscarriage and pose less danger to the mother. The writer of the *Oath*, it is argued, was concerned for the mother's safety, not the life of the foetus.

The second part, a corpus of over 200 abortive drugs mentioned by classical authors, breaks new ground as the first systematic study of the drugs from a pharmaceutical rather than a botanical viewpoint. Though the author modestly describes this work as a basis for further study—for which it is admirably suited—he draws a number of important conclusions, not least that most of the drugs did contain active abortive substances. The majority were aromatics, particularly toxic to the foetus but comparatively safe for the mother. Keller also identifies some interesting connections which he relates to the way in which the womb and foetus were regarded. First is the overlap between abortifacients and purgatives, diuretics and emmenagogues. Because the uterus was classed with the other secreting organs the emptying of its contents was perceived as a like treatment. Less obvious is the overlap between abortive drugs and those used for the eradication of vermin, but Keller links this to the contemporary view of the human foetus as a parasitic animal within the body, whose "infestation" could be resolved by similar methods. The bibliography is not extensive. Major omissions are Enzo Nardi, *Procurato aborto nel mondo greco-romano* (Milan, 1971) and Marie-Thérèse Fontanille, *Avortement et contraception dans la médecine gréco-romaine* (Paris, 1977).

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