

## Book Reviews

“realistic” representation occurred and had meaning. None the less, in bringing all this material together and to the attention of medical historians, in offering a rigorous discussion of the opportunities and problems it represents, and careful analysis of many individual items, the authors have certainly done all those interested in health and disease in the classical world a considerable service.

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**Marie-Hélène Marganne,** *La Chirurgie dans l’Égypte gréco-romaine d’après les papyrus littéraires grecs*, Studies in Ancient Medicine, No. 17, Leiden, Brill, 1998, pp. xxxi, 192, Nlg 138.00, \$81.00 (90-04-11134-4).

Marie-Hélène Marganne, a leading authority on Greek medical papyri, has already shown us what a very rich vein those papyri are to follow, with a long succession of publications, including her previous book in the Brill Studies in Ancient Medicine series, *L’Ophtalmologie dans l’Égypte gréco-romaine d’après les papyrus littéraires grecs*. Embedded in the conclusions of the present work is Marganne’s succinct appraisal of the principal importance of the medical papyri: unlike medical texts, which have survived only as later copies, the papyri, though invariably fragmentary, are essentially first-hand documents which have survived as a random selection of chance finds. They therefore provide primary, invaluable, often unique evidence for ancient surgery, surgeons and the practice and teaching of surgery in Greco-Roman Egypt. Above all, they shed light on the fascinating subjects of praxis, surgical instruments and the day-to-day usage of medical texts. Their value is further enhanced because they mainly date

to a period of brilliance in the history of ancient surgery, Alexandrian and post-Alexandrian Egypt, from which no complete surgical text of importance has survived. It is just a pity that so few of the papyri have a known provenance (two from Fayoum, five unprovenanced), let alone a secure archaeological context.

Clearly written, stimulating and packed with information and references, the book is a real joy to read. Seven principal surgical papyri, which span a date range between 100 BC and the late third century AD, are the generous filling of a sandwich comprising an introductory essay and a short conclusion. The background to the papyri is provided in the sprightly introduction. This combines a fine review of the written sources which inform us about Greek and Roman surgery, with a brief summary of Greco-Roman Egypt and an introduction to the peculiarities, strengths and weaknesses of the Greek medical and surgical papyri as well as to the apparatus of their study. There are useful and appropriate illustrations to clarify the surgical procedures described in the papyri, but this reviewer would also have liked to have seen photographs of the papyri themselves.

The presentation of each of the seven papyri consists of a critical edition with (French) translation and commentary, and it is in the commentaries that the historian of ancient medicine finds the heart of the book. For, as well as analysing and commenting on the individual texts, Marganne has also used them as an opportunity to examine both specific and general issues of Greco-Roman surgery, so that the commentaries are, in fact, a series of valuable essays on aspects of ancient surgery. These range from discussions of plastic surgery (the earliest record of an operation for a specific congenital facial mutilation—*coloboma*) and the reduction of dislocated jaw and shoulder to critiques on the teaching of surgical practice and theory and a study of the use of surgical equipment and tools such as the trepan and

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bone chisel. Intriguing in the latter context is the mention of “instrumentists” (*organikoi*) (e.g. pp. 60ff, 158), whose activities as technicians were sometimes the subject of criticism by medical writers, since, on occasion, their quest to perfect surgical tools seems to have taken precedence over the best interest of the patient. Their inventiveness may, perhaps, be seen, too, in certain particularly ingenious surviving surgical instruments.

The content of the papyri is sufficiently interesting to render unnecessary any attempt to push their evidence too far. Thus Marganne is wisely and refreshingly cautious throughout, most notably in her avoidance of attributing the texts to named medical authors (e.g. pp. 65–6), a temptation that past editors have often found too great to resist. Nevertheless, in one case, the early third century AD *P. Monac.* 2.23 (pp. 96ff), there is no room for doubt, since the fragmentary text concludes with words declaring it to be the fourth book of the *Surgery* of Heliodorus (c. AD 60–140). Although preserving only twenty-six incomplete lines, the papyrus is of the utmost importance since it is the only directly transmitted text of Heliodorus that has survived, and it sheds light both on a unique surgical matter and on Heliodorus’ overall approach to surgery.

In fact, Marganne reveals that most of the papyri incorporate information that is either unique or is the earliest occurrence of a surgical matter. By underlining how incomplete is our evidence for Greco-Roman surgery the papyri therefore serve to encourage caution and humility in the interpretation of *all* evidence for the history of classical medicine. But above all Marganne skilfully demonstrates how immensely illuminating and instructive they are, and we look forward to more of the same!

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**R J Hankinson** (ed. and transl.), *Galen: On antecedent causes*, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 35, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. xv, 349, £50.00 (0-521-62250-6).

In 1937 Kurt Bardong published the first edition of Galen’s treatise *On antecedent causes* from a fourteenth-century Latin word-for-word (and extremely accurate) translation by Niccolò da Reggio. The timing of its appearance did not favour widespread consultation, and, for all its many interesting ideas, the tract has remained largely unknown. Twenty years ago, Jim Hankinson embarked on a re-edition for his Cambridge PhD thesis, including the first ever English translation and a detailed commentary, which now appears in print after yet further revisions and expansions.

The textual basis of this edition is in general sound and the translation clear. Reports of manuscript readings, when checked, are accurate, and Hankinson’s choice of readings and emendations is judicious (p. 118, 18 is a rare exception). Divergences from Bardong’s text are usually right, and are explained at length in the notes.

The treatise’s importance relates more to medical and philosophical theory than to practice. In it Galen lays out a theory of causation, more in the form of a polemic against Erasistratus and, at the end of the treatise, Herophilus than as a coherent exposition. This does not make for easy reading, although the introduction summarizes the general argument and locates it within ancient and modern discussions of causality. The non-philosopher may find parts hard going, e.g. p. 20, but perseverance brings many rewards. The commentary also discusses specific sections of the argument in detail, explaining the logical reasoning behind Galen’s not always clear presentation, and follows the same procedures as in Hankinson’s 1991 commentary on Galen’s