

Book Reviews

was sane when he was committed to an Austrian asylum, and he died from wounds inflicted there. Benedek argues that Semmelweis was suffering from progressive syphilitic paralysis and that he was insane when committed. Syphilis was, of course, an occupational hazard for nineteenth-century obstetricians; a high percentage of patients in maternity clinics were syphilitic and no one knew how to avoid infection. Yet Benedek's view does not explain all the facts. First, none of the recently published official documents relating to Semmelweis's disease mention that he had syphilis. This is hard to explain if, as Benedek argues, all of his colleagues understood the nature of his illness. Second, as both Benedek and Silló-Seidl point out, Semmelweis's illness and death were almost totally ignored by the medical establishments of Vienna and especially Budapest. Benedek claims that this was an effort to save the reputation of Semmelweis's family and of the University of Pest. But this is doubtful, especially given that the disease was fairly common among obstetricians.

Benedek's view is plausible but, from the available facts, Silló-Seidl's interpretation probably cannot be refuted. All Silló-Seidl's circumstantial evidence leads one to suspect that Semmelweis's relatives and colleagues were glad to put him away, whether or not they had good cause.

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FRANÇOIS LASSERRE and PHILLIPPE MUDRY (editors), *Formes de pensée dans la collection hippocratique*, Geneva, Librairie Droz, 1983, 8vo, pp. 541, [no price stated] (paperback).

Hippocratic studies are apparently flourishing. The latest volume of the proceedings of the fourth Colloque Hippocratique (Lausanne, 21–26 September 1981) contains forty-four papers, by authors from Dakar to Newcastle and from Kentucky to Romania. The decision of the organizers to restrict the theme has produced a more coherent volume, yet one that still reveals a refreshing variety of approaches to the investigation of methods of thinking in the Hippocratic writers. Three main lines of attack can be seen, the confrontation of Hippocratic writers with pre-Socratic philosophers, astronomers, historians, and even poets; philological investigation of the precise meaning of certain key terms, especially when looked at from the point of view of their linguistic development; and, finally, the use of parallels from anthropology and folk medicine. It is the last which is potentially the most fruitful, as well as the most dangerous, and not all who have essayed this enterprise are equally convincing in their conclusions. But where the anthropology and the philology are set in a firm historical context, then the results can be impressive, and Lonie's speculations on the impact of literacy on early Greek medicine are the most challenging of the whole volume. Here, a non-specialist can see the wood as well as the trees.

Yet some doubts still remain about the function of such congresses and the aim of these published papers, and it is a mark of the honesty of the organizers that the final paper is a substantial critique of many of the "formes de pensée" of the Colloque Hippocratique itself. Future conference planners should take note, if such international meetings are not to turn into introverted discussions over inessential details or the repetitive restatement of long-maintained positions. This volume is a valuable contribution to Hippocratic studies, yet it bears also the signs of an impending crisis.

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HARTMUT FÄHNDRICH (editor and translator), *Treatise to Salah ad-Din on the revival of the art of medicine by Ibn Jumay*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1983, 8vo, pp. viii, 49 + facsimile, DM. 75.00 (paperback).

In 1943, Dr Max Meyerhof, an eminent historian of Arabic medicine and a practising ophthalmologist, purchased in Cairo an old and nearly complete Arabic manuscript containing an unknown treatise composed by Ibn Jumay. Meyerhof had hoped to publish the Arabic text of the whole manuscript with a translation and commentary, but the untimely death of his collaborator Dr Paul Kraus, lecturer in Semitic languages at Cairo University, prevented the completion of the project. Meyerhof published an English translation of a section of the second chapter (*Bull. Hist. Med.*, 1945, 18: 169–178), in which he tells us that the manuscript, no mention of which has been found in printed catalogues and lists, was