

Book Reviews

While these essays are not exactly inspirational, they are all based on careful and extensive research and as a whole do an excellent job of defining this important aspect of urban history. The need for such a collection which identifies areas for further work is made clear in a useful bibliographical essay on urban pollution problems. While other social scientists have studied the urban environment in depth, historians have not yet contributed their share. This volume effectively illustrates what can be done.

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VIVIAN NUTTON (editor), *Galen: problems and prospects. A collection of papers submitted at the 1979 Cambridge conference*, London, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1982, 8vo, pp. iii, 281, £13.00 (£14.00 overseas).

This collection of multilingual papers falls into two parts, the first six being about Galen as a writer on medicine and philosophy, while the second six pursue his fortune through the Syriac, Hebrew, Arabic, and medieval Latin traditions to the sixteenth century. It was a shrewd idea to bring together authorities to discuss these topics, for which the organizers (Dr A. Z. Iskandar, Dr G. E. R. Lloyd, Dr V. Nutton) and the Wellcome Trust (whose enlightened and munificent patronage Galen would have appreciated) deserve our gratitude. The papers are faithful to the title of the conference: problems abound, and the prospects for future work are there at least by implication in most. The end-result is a useful work of reference on the present state of Galen studies, in which each paper deserves mention.

Jutta Kollesch with sharp authority examines (pp. 1–11: German) Galen as a figure of the strange intellectual milieu known as the “Second Sophistic”. She is against facile explanations of Galen’s ideal of philosophical medicine as the product of classicizing and competitive fashions. It is Galen’s differences which count, and for these the explanation is specific: the situation of medicine in his time and the need to come to terms with and exploit a legacy of scientific development. Her paper thus opens up a matter which directly or indirectly concerns all the contributions to the volume. Why does Galen matter? Because successive epochs were taken over by a system which, whether we call it scientific, rational, dogmatic, or philosophical, offered a sure method for processing any technical, professional, or pedagogical problem which the medical man was likely to encounter. Michael Frede, writing on Galen’s epistemology (pp. 65–86: English), examines the credentials of this technological juggernaut: was Galen “just” an eclectic, or did he have a carefully thought out position on the roles of reason and experience such as would make him a worthy object of philosophical attention? Frede thinks he does. But this is a dangerous antithesis to apply to Galen, whose intellectual opportunism evades any of the senses of eclecticism which Frede defines. This makes it peculiarly difficult, without prejudging the whole question, to treat Galen as a philosopher, the evidence for whose philosophy lies in his writings. Reason and experience figure again in Luis Garcia Ballester’s very professional examination of Galen’s medical practice (pp. 13–46: English) and in Mario Vegetti’s study of conflicting models of medicine (pp. 47–63: Italian). Garcia Ballester’s paper, which concentrates on diagnosis, avoids the objection referred to above, since he is concerned with Galen’s habitual attitudes and dispositions towards practical matters. He describes Galen’s practical resolution (a “negative legacy”) of the tension between his desire for a “scientific” nosology, and the contingencies of clinical experience. I find it easier to believe in the reality of this tension for Galen than in that of the somewhat similar tension which Vegetti suggests between Galen’s medical science, based on anatomico-physiological demonstration and an optimistic view of “Nature”, and his clinical medicine, where contingency and failure suggest a very different view. Finally in this section, Paul Moraux gives an authoritative survey of Galen’s writing on natural philosophy (pp. 87–116: French); while Fridolf Kudlien (pp. 117–130: English), examining Galen’s religious belief, takes up the difficult question of his attitude to the god Asclepius: Galen saw in Asclepius a reflection of that rational (once again!) medicine in which he himself devoutly believed, and disapproved of attempts to attribute supernatural miracle-working to the god.

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Most papers in the second group are concerned with technical questions. Rainer Degen gives an annotated conspectus (pp. 131–166: German) of Syriac translations of Galen known to have existed once, with valuable information on material at present known to be extant (much of it extracts in the *Syriac book of medicines*). Elinor Lieber (pp. 167–186: English) deals with Galen in the Hebrew tradition. Since European Jews preferred to read Galen in abridgements of selected works, a disproportionate amount of her paper is taken up by a not very clear discussion of the selection of his works read in Alexandria and the “sixteen books” referred to by the Arabs, and their relations. For the Arabic tradition, we have Gotthard Strohmaier and Penelope Johnstone. Strohmaier gives an admirably clear introduction to the past, present, and future roles of the Arabic tradition in establishing the Greek text of Galen (pp. 187–196: English). This unassuming paper contains some fresh insights and valuable information: Galen’s unique position in Arab culture, the newly discovered commentary on the Hippocratic *Airs, waters and places*, the probability that the commentary on the Hippocratic *Oath*, of which fragments were published by Rosenthal in 1956, really is by Galen. Penelope Johnstone’s paper (pp. 197–212: English) is on ‘the transformation of Galenic pharmacology’: the Arabs did not receive the Galenic legacy passively but culturally modified it. Pharmacology is always interesting in this respect because of its peculiar problems of language, identification, and geographical differences: contrast anatomy and physiology where, as her brief discussion of Ibn al-Nafis suggests, the scope for divergence from Galen was small. Once again, we are reminded of the overwhelming authority of Galen’s system of medicine. Finally, on the tradition in the Latin West, Gerhard Baader (pp. 213–228: German) discusses the medieval period and Andrew Wear (pp. 229–262: English) the Renaissance. Baader’s survey of a long and complex period is based on a comprehensive grasp of the manuscript material. This material reflects a sharp distinction in character and purpose between the Arabic to Latin and the Greek to Latin translations, the former for pedagogic uses and the latter with more general humanistic intentions. With Andrew Wear’s paper we return from the media to the message: he examines the importance of Galen’s ideas to the Renaissance under three topics prominent in recent research: anatomy, method, and astrology. This topical approach is justified in a final section in which all three are considered in the representative character of Sanctorius. The choice of Sanctorius, hero of positivist histories and yet (fairly) orthodox Galenist, indicates Wear’s sensitivity to the complexities of Galen in the Renaissance. Wear’s judgements are independent, and his discussion of method, though only loosely linked to the main theme, is perhaps the freshest and most provocative contribution to this volume.

The volume itself is well edited, its two indexes and bibliography contributing to its value as a work of reference. It is to be hoped that the Galen conference will now become a regular feast in the scholar’s calendar.

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CLAUDE ALEXANDRE THOMASSET (editor), *Placides et Timéo ou Li secrés as philosophes*, Paris and Geneva, Librairie Droz, 1980, 12mo, pp. cxii, 401, [no price stated], (paperback).

CLAUDE THOMASSET, *Une vision du monde à la fin du XIII^e siècle. Commentaire du dialogue de Placides et Timéo*, Geneva, Librairie Droz, 1982, 8vo, pp. 341, [no price stated], (paperback).

The dialogue *Placidius and Timaeus* or *The secrets of the philosophers* was written towards the end of the thirteenth century, and was still popular enough to be printed thirteen times before 1538. It is a good representative of the tradition of medieval scientific questions expounded by Brian Lawn in his book *The Salernitan questions* (1963). But the affiliations of this text are, as far as concerns its medicine, with the Arabic tradition as represented in Avicenna and, particularly, with the philosophical and scientific ideas of Albertus Magnus. The long section on gynaecology, which includes the oft-told tale of the girl who killed her lovers through poisons accumulated in her body, has little in common with the more practical *Trotula*