

## Book Reviews

reception, the introduction also provides an overview of the medical ideas used by the author regarding physiology and embryology.

The author of *On generation / Nature of the child* represents an exceptional case in the context of the Hippocratic Collection, as he also wrote other works that are today extant, namely the book *Diseases IV* and some parts of the gynaecological treatises—the ones identified by H Grensemann (*Knidische Medizin*, Berlin, 1975) as the so-called C-level. This information provides an unusual tool for the Hippocratic editor, who is in a position to argue in terms of the author's style. Giorgianni makes good use of this, as he has used for the first time the parallel passages in the gynaecological treatises to support a particular manuscript reading. Moreover, his codicological description of the five main Greek manuscripts transmitting the text is very accurate and will serve as a reference for future editors, as will the results of his study of the direct and indirect tradition.

Several of the changes in the text with regard to Joly's edition are simply the result of maintaining the readings of the manuscripts instead of trying to reconstruct a more coherent Hippocratic dialect. In this sense Giorgianni dissociates himself from the trend followed by most of the recent editors of Hippocratic texts, whose work on the manuscript tradition of different texts has undoubtedly contributed to an overview of the Ionic dialect used by the Hippocratic authors. We are far from being certain when dealing with this issue, but printing a text that lacks coherence regarding orthography and morphology does not seem to be a better solution. Other changes originate from a detailed assessment of the textual tradition and a careful reading of the Greek text (for instance at 148,6, 152,24 or 162,19) confronting it with parallels in other Hippocratic writings and showing to what extent the *Index Hippocraticus* is an indispensable reference tool for scholars working on Hippocratic texts. Other authors' conjectures find a place in the critical apparatus and many textual decisions are thoroughly justified in the commentary and confronted with the alternatives. Giorgianni is to be congratulated for his

accurate philological work. His book well deserves to be placed on our shelves beside Lonie's commentary.

**Pilar Pérez Cañizares,**  
University of Newcastle upon Tyne

**Lester K Little** (ed.), *Plague and the end of Antiquity: the pandemic of 541–750*, Cambridge University Press in association with the American Academy in Rome, 2007, pp. xvii, 360, £45.00, \$75.00 (hardback 978-0-521-84639-4).

Of all the pandemics to have affected Europe and the Middle East, that of 541–750 has attracted remarkably little attention. Compared with the Black Death in the 1340s, it has seemed remote from the purview of western European scholars, for several reasons. Western European sources are scanty, and suggest that recurrences of the plague after the initial outbreak were sporadic. By contrast, the plague was endemic in the Middle East for centuries, before it disappeared in almost as bewildering a manner as it had arrived. The most detailed accounts are either by Byzantine or Arab writers, few of whom have been translated into English.

This volume should help to change these perceptions. Lester Little has assembled an impressive cast, who survey the impact of this epidemic on the Near East, Byzantium and the Latin West. They raise questions about the nature of the sources, from prayers and hymns to archival and archaeological remains. Together with Little's introduction, they provide the reader with a broad overview of a major epidemic, and of its social and economic consequences. It is a pity that the conference paper by Larry Conrad could not be included, for his 1981 Princeton dissertation, and many subsequent papers, transformed historians' understanding of the Middle Eastern material on this pandemic.

But this volume is also significant because it includes two long papers, by Robert Sallares and Michael McCormick, on the impact of modern DNA studies on our understanding of the epidemiology of plague, and a third, by Jo Hays,

that seeks to interpret the consequence of these discoveries for historians. The value of these three papers transcends the title of the book, for what they say applies to all studies of pre-modern plague. They discuss biovars and mutations, the difficulties of DNA analysis, and the problems of comparing modern medical discoveries with data from the past. The important work on rat archaeology by Frédérique Audoin-Rouzeau is given its due, as also is that on climate change. It helps too that most scholars have accepted that this pandemic was caused by bubonic plague, i.e. *Yersinia pestis*, and that the debate over this identification has not been as fraught as that over the Black Death. But Sallares rightly looks at the Black Death, and attacks those who believe that that epidemic was caused by something other than *Yersinia pestis*.

Sallares and McCormick both accept Devignat's theory of three major biovars of plague, *antiqua*, *medievalis*, and *orientalis*, each corresponding to the three epidemics that began in the sixth century, the fourteenth century, and the late nineteenth century. They take the story down to 2004, but with subtle differences (cf. pp. 254 and 296), and they must be congratulated on explaining the complexities of modern molecular biology in so accessible a manner.

But the story has moved on since then, and may be followed in *Medical History's* Supplement No. 27 (2008). Despite Sallares' optimism, many research groups still find difficulty in replicating the results of Didier Raoult's group, and some of the findings on which Sallares relies for confirmation of Raoult's hypotheses have since been withdrawn. It is also becoming increasingly clear that the pattern of spread of plague in 541, and still more, in 1345–50, was very different from that of modern plague. All may still have been caused by *Yersinia pestis*, and have been spread by rats, but the substantial differences in their epidemiology need more attention than is given here. The puzzle is made still more complex by the announcement in *Emerging Infectious Disease*, 2007, **13**: 332–3, that the same group has isolated plague DNA from a site in sixth to seventh century Vienne. If their findings are correct, and the jury is still out, then this will settle the question of the pathogen.

But at the same time this also destroys the crucial postulate of Devignat, and subsequent plague researchers, since the type of DNA found is *orientalis*, not *antiqua*. In other words, the same biovar, in the view of the French team, is responsible for all three pandemics. While the distinguishing features noted by Devignat are indeed important, their significance in determining the pattern of plague is doubtful (see Ann Carmichael, 'Universal and particular: the language of plague, 1348–1550', *Med. Hist.*, Supplement No. 27), especially as the capacity of *Yersinia pestis* to mutate is far greater than was supposed even twenty years ago (see N C Stenseth, *et al.*, *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA*, 2006, **103**: 13110–5). McCormick, who accepts both Devignat's three, relatively stable, biovars and the easy mutations of the bacillus, may be accused of wanting to have his cake and eat it. Others, like Peregrine Horden, in the *Cambridge companion to the age of Justinian*, take a much more nuanced line.

Does this matter to historians? Hays, in a courageous and innovative paper, suggests that it does. Certainly one can agree that epidemics have wider effects on society, but does it matter to know the behaviour of the modern pathogen? Here one may begin to have doubts, for the behaviour of modern plague differs in many respects from that recorded for the fourteenth, let alone the sixth, century. Hays himself notes that many historians' speculations depend on *Yersinia pestis* being the agent, and on its immutability, which thus allow us to work back from present observations: remove one postulate, and the speculations collapse. Recent work on plague DNA, while supporting the first hypothesis, seems to me to have destroyed the second. This is not to deny the possible value of the exercise, but only to warn of the dangers involved in using data of different types.

This volume, despite some obvious and acknowledged gaps, breaks new ground. It forces historians to revise their view of this neglected pandemic, and makes a largely successful bridge between molecular scientists and historians. No one interested in the history of epidemic diseases can afford to neglect what Sallares and McCormick have to say, even if, in

the fast changing world of molecular biology, some of their statements are already outdated. This is a volume of conference proceedings that goes far beyond the normal boundaries of that genre, and fully justifies its editor's claims. Medieval plague will not be the same again.

**Vivian Nutton,**

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the  
History of Medicine at UCL

**Katherine Park, *Secrets of women: gender, generation, and the origins of human dissection*, New York, Zone Books, 2006, pp. 419, illus., £23.95, \$36.95 (hardback 978-1-890951-67-2).**

In the past two decades anatomy has been the object of an impressive number of essays, books and exhibitions. Cultural historians, art historians, medical historians, as well as general historians of the late medieval and early modern period focused their research on the emergence of human dissection, particularly in the context of western European universities. They generally agree on the chronology, the protagonists, as well as on the (limited) didactic purpose and the ritual character of public anatomy. The human body—usually the cadaver of an executed criminal—was opened, dismembered and displayed by a professor of anatomy under the eyes of an often large audience, gathered in anatomy theatres or in spaces especially re-adapted to host this solemn celebration of academic cultural distinction. In this consensual narrative, the actors—the cadaver, the anatomist, the public—are all male. In *Secrets of women*, Katherine Park casts a new light on the origin of human dissection and provides a challenging and refreshing new perspective on the history of anatomy, as well as, more generally, on the history of the body. Displacing the attention on women's bodies and moving from the public and formalized practice of dissection on male subjects to more private occasions in which women's bodies were opened (sometimes even by women) during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Park makes a case for the female body

to be “the paradigmatic object of dissection” (p. 81), the pre-eminent object of inquiry inside the body.

Park's argument is developed on a few case studies, nine corpses of women that were opened between 1308 and 1543: two early-fourteenth-century holy women (a visionary abbess, Chiara da Montefalco, and Margherita di Città di Castello) (Chapter 1), four fifteenth-century patrician mothers and wives (Chapter 3), two early sixteenth-century prophetesses (Chapter 4), and the anonymous body of a woman condemned and executed in 1541, leaning on the dissecting table at the centre of the title-page of Andreas Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) (Chapter 5). The exiguous information available on each case—a few pages in a process of canonization, a few notes in a *Ricordanza*, a passage in a hagiographical text or the often elusive visual or textual reference in an anatomical treatise—is thoroughly analysed and skilfully exploited, following all the threads the sources offered for the reconstitution of the cultural conditions in which the opening of the body took place. With the notable exception of the woman on Vesalius' title-page, they are all bodies that have been opened, manipulated, dismembered and observed for purposes alien to anatomical dissection, such as embalming, autopsy, foetal excision, the inspection and recognition of bodily signs of sanctity. Park's book focuses, in fact, on the opening of the body as a whole, providing a broader context for the historical appreciation of the rise of anatomical dissection. In the book, the emergence of this practise is—as it were—diluted within the cultural framework of notions, beliefs and values shaped by the general understanding of the human body in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, generated, according to Park, by concerns related, primarily, to religion, family and kinship, and, surprisingly, much less by medical issues.

This leads the author, in her comprehensive effort of contextualization, to take into account a number of questions—stemming more or less directly out her sources—concerning, for instance, the history of medieval religious practices, the specific visual culture that shaped