Book Reviews

Annie Attia and **Giles Buisson** (eds), with the collaboration of **Markham J. Geller,** *Advances in Mesopotamian Medicine from Hammurabi to Hippocrates: Proceedings of the International Conference 'Oeil malade et mauvais oeil', Collège de France, Paris, 23rd June 2006*, Cuneiform Monographs, Vol. 37 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. iv + 161, €83.00/$123.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-90-04-17876-2.

The medicine of ancient Mesopotamia (Assyria and Babylonia: roughly modern Iraq, very roughly 2000–200 BC) may be very old, but its study is still in its infancy. Many thousands of therapeutic procedures, diagnostic omens, lists of ingredients and learned commentaries are attested on clay tablets written in the Akkadian and Sumerian languages using the cuneiform script. The first were discovered and deciphered in the mid- to late nineteenth century, while throughout the twentieth century, archaeological investigations continued to reveal many more, often in primary use contexts. However, the complexities of the script and fragmentary state of the manuscripts, combined with the deeply unfamiliar nature of much of the material and the scarcity of Assyriologists to study it, has meant that it is only in the past decade or so that the subject has started to move beyond the impressionistic and descriptive.

The seven papers collected together in this small volume (150 pages plus front matter and indices) do not, despite the book's title, specifically address advances in Mesopotamian medicine, either in the sense of developments in Antiquity, or, in general, as changing historiographies. Rather, they present a snapshot of a field in flux, in which synthetic, descriptive, presentist approaches co-exist with more interpretative, anthropological and source-critical methodologies.

Mark Geller's wide-ranging and thoughtful Introduction (pp. 1–12) surveys the current state of the field in relation to the study of ancient Greek and Egyptian medicine. He often contextualises and draws out the significance of the various chapters better than the authors themselves. Of a similarly high standard is Nils Heeßel's pioneering and fascinating study of 'The Babylonian Physician Rabâ-ša-Marduk' (pp. 13–28). From epistolary, administrative and scholarly sources he pieces together the career of a royal healer from the city of Nippur who was posted to the Hittite court in Anatolia in the thirteenth century BC, seemingly as part of a diplomatic exchange. Heeßel also shows that a medical manuscript of his was later looted from Babylonia for an Assyrian royal collection.

In a close philological study, Marten Stol (pp. 29–48) examines the Akkadian verb *salā'u* 'to be ill', equating it with the verb *salāhu* 'to sprinkle' (The ' [aleph] is a sort of glottal stop). As Geller notes (p. 9), *salā'u* seems to have a much narrower semantic range than its commoner synonym *marāṣu*. A direct comparison of the two verbs would be a helpful next step. Next, Martin Worthington presents 'Some Notes on Medical Information outside the Medical Corpora' (pp. 47–78) culled especially from letters and literary works. The extracts he presents – on location, availability and affordability, practitioners' non-medical activities, divination – offer tantalising glimpses into the practicalities of Mesopotamian healing. However, the chapter's thematic rather than chronological, geographical or generic organisation perhaps presents an overly homogeneous picture.

In 'Cuneiform Tablets on Eye Diseases' (pp. 79–104) Jeanette Fincke catalogues the known Assyrian and Babylonian manuscripts of a standard collection of treatments for various ocular problems, and presents editions of two short related works. Despite Geller's

advice that 'there is little point in... attempting to identify Akkadian words with modern medical terminology' (p. 12), Fincke routinely equates ancient symptom descriptions with Latinate, bio-medical terms. Similarly, Barbara Böck's 'On Medical Technology in Ancient Mesopotamia' (pp. 105–128) groups (translated) snippets of ancient instructions on preparing medical treatments under headings such as 'maceration' and 'decoction' as if the latter were ahistorical phenomena.

In the final chapter, Paul Demont debates 'L'Ancienneté de la Médicine Hippocratique: Un Essai de Bilan' (pp. 129–149). This has relevance insofar as possible Babylonian influence on some strands of the Hippocratic corpus have recently been debated, as Geller explains (p. 6), but the author himself does not address Mesopotamian medicine at all.

In short, this work is a mixed bag. But it demonstrates that Assyriology is finally becoming increasingly receptive to, and willing to engage with, the mainstream of medical history.

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[Galen], *Galien, Tome III: Le médecin: introduction*, **Caroline Petit** (ed. and trans.), Collection des Universités de France (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2009), pp. cxl + 232, €69.00, paperback, ISBN: 978-2-251-00555-3.

Le médecin: introduction is Volume 3 in the Budé series of Galen's works, the fifth volume to be published. It is not by Galen, although nothing on the book's cover or title-page distinguishes it from Galen's genuine works; one must read the Introduction to learn the editor's view on its authenticity. Like the *Definitiones medicae*, *Le médecin* (its usual title in Latin is *Introductio sive medicus*) is a pseudepigraphic work of ancient date, probably produced by a contemporary or rough contemporary of Galen, that circulated widely in the mediaeval period because of its convenient didactic form. All manuscripts name Galen as the author, but the text was ruled inauthentic by the editors of the first printed edition of Galen's complete Greek works, the Aldine edition of 1525 (Petit, pp. cxix-cxx), and published among the pseudo-Galenic works. Petit concurs with this verdict and discusses its stylistic and doctrinal basis (pp. xxxvi-xli). Among doctrinal arguments, the treatise is noteworthy for its neutral treatment of the Methodist sect, which Galen virtually never mentions without contempt.

That the treatise appears to be nearly contemporary with Galen but does not cite him invites the hypothesis that it is a forgery, perhaps the same forgery Galen refers to in a story from *On my own books* – he witnessed an argument between a man who had bought a book called *Iatros* ('The Doctor') falsely ascribed to him, and another, familiar with Galen's work, who denounced it as a fake after hearing the opening sentences. Petit, cautious here as throughout, reviews the arguments and notes that no evidence can prove or disprove the identity of the *Introductio sive medicus* with the treatise in the story (pp. xlv–xlix). Similarly, while many references to Egypt (including a brief mention of the practice of female circumcision) suggest an Egyptian provenance, these references are mostly literary in nature, cite information attested elsewhere in Greek sources, and are far from conclusive proof (pp. l-li).

Because of the treatise's antiquity and influence on the history of medicine, a modern critical edition has long been desirable. No edition has been published since that of Kühn in 1821, which essentially reprinted the seventeenth-century text of René Chartier. Petit considers over forty manuscripts dating from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, and an ancient Latin translation of Chapters 16–20. No Syriac or Arabic translation survives or is attested. Two substantial late (Byzantine or Arabo-Byzantine) insertions are identified,