

BOOK REVIEW

Ancient Medicine. By VIVIAN NUTTON. *Sciences of Antiquity*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013. Second Edition. Pp. x + 488. Hardcover, £90.00/\$150.00. ISBN 978-0-415-52094-2. Paper, £28.99/\$46.95. ISBN 978-0-415-52095-9.

Ancient Medicine is a remarkably comprehensive work, which comes as near to being a complete and sufficient guide to medicine in classical antiquity as a single book can be. It is divided into twenty chapters of about 13–20 pages each: an easily digestible format for any reader alarmed at its significant overall size. Nutton opens with contextualizing chapters on sources and on the epidemiological situation in antiquity, but his overall structure is, sensibly, chronological. It begins with “Before Hippocrates” and moves forwards through the period in which the Hippocratic corpus texts were written, the Hellenistic era and into the Roman empire, from Cato and Pliny to late antiquity. This is the second edition, published only nine years after the 2004 original, and Nutton has taken the opportunity to include much recent material, bringing it up-to-date in a rapidly evolving field.

The Hippocratic texts and Galen feature prominently, an inevitability given that they constitute the overwhelming majority of extant medical texts and, via Galen’s appropriation of Hippocrates within his own theoretical and ethical framework, the dominant voice of western medicine as it emerged from its classical beginnings: a contingent historical process that Nutton discusses in some detail. It forms part of his determination to reveal less familiar aspects of ancient medicine. Two chapters explore the relationship of medicine to religion, one argues for the validity and usefulness of the “Methodist” school of thought—a *bête noire* of Galen’s—and still others draw deliberate and explicit attention to pharmacology, alternatives to the humoral theory of Galenic Hippocraticism, and an extensive survey of medical practitioners as a group, considering their legal and social status, income, education, and attitudes to an immense variety of practices, from surgery to astrology. Nutton devotes energy and evidence to illuminating these largely invisible “ordinary” doctors or midwives or groom-veterinarians, known only from brief literary allusions, tombstones or legal definitions. He also gives space of their own to those writers and thinkers of medicine

who were giants in their own day but seem shrunken next to Galen's self-memorializing shadow. Scribonius Largus, for instance, the Roman pharmacologist, gets over three pages to himself; the chapter "From Plato to Praxagoras" discusses not only Plato, Aristotle, Praxagoras of Cos and Diocles of Carystus, but also Diphilus of Siphnus and the Athenians Mnesiethus and Dieuches.

In fact, almost every possible name, example and locale seem to have worked their way into the text, as Nutton raids the accumulated knowledge of twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship, primarily from a textual standpoint, but also including archaeological, papyrological and epigraphic evidence. In many ways this is a useful approach. It goes a long way to demonstrating the variety and amount of our evidence on ancient medicine, and helps to establish that much of what can be said applies only to particular times, places, or even individuals. The compression of information involved, however, might on occasion be too much to be really useful to the general reader, as Nutton does not always have the space to explain the story behind his large cast of walk-ons. The *Sciences in Antiquity* series is aimed at the non-specialist reader and even the non-classicist, but Nutton often assumes a degree of familiarity with the terms and world of the latter, even as he eschews Greek, Latin or most scientific terms. A typical example of this is found on page 161: "Neither can much be concluded from the famous liver of Piacenza, which suggests that a certain degree of anatomical skill accompanied the art of the Etruscan *haruspices*, without, however, proving that this was more than high-class butchery." Etruscans, *haruspices*, and the Piacenza liver are all left as an exercise in research for the general reader. Undergraduates, too, are liable to confuse his illustrative paraphrases of primary texts with authorial authority (this was a frequent problem when I used the first edition for teaching purposes): the ideal audience for this work might be as a graduate level entry into the field.

The most illuminating chapters, therefore, are often those on a relatively restricted topic such as Galenic medicine or the Hippocratic corpus and its evolution. In particular, his chapter conclusions also offer clear analyses that gain some distance from the thickets of particulars and hence a broader scope: the reader will come away with a clear sense of the major issues and stories in ancient medicine, and how Nutton—largely in accordance with the contemporary mainstream of medical scholarship, which he has helped to shape—interprets them.

In summary, the second edition of *Ancient Medicine* is an excellent guide to the medicine of classical antiquity, for the repeat traveler as well as the new arrival, but the reader should also pack a map, a glossary, and a good memory for names.

References and additions appear as endnotes—always irritating for the researcher, but possibly a boon for those chiefly interested in the text itself, and there is a comprehensive bibliography.

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