BOOK REVIEW

The Comparable Body. Analogy and Metaphor in Ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greco-Roman Medicine. Edited by JOHN Z. WEE. Leiden, NL: Brill, 2017. pp. xix+437. Hardback, 138 € / 159 $. ISBN: 978-90-04-35676-4.

The volume under review stems from a symposium on "The Body in Ancient Medicine" held in Chicago in May 2014. The exchanges between the participants reoriented the focus of the volume towards the issue of the metaphorical and/or analogical understandings of the body in ancient medical traditions (1). Authors were invited to work closely on a case study in their area of expertise, "with interdisciplinarity serving to illuminate typologies of issues and strategies for encountering common problems" (1) – a challenge successfully met. Given the variety of topics addressed, I will give a brief summary of the volume's content before highlighting the shared issues that could be of interest to scholars of Greco-Roman antiquity.

The volume editor's Introduction dodges the perilous exercise of defining "metaphor" and opts for an informative summary of the contributions' contents, bringing out shared themes and problems.

Methodology comes to the fore in Chapter 1, "Analogy and Metaphor in Ancient Medicine and the Ancient Egyptian Conceptualisation of Heat in the Body", by R. Nyord. The author addresses the legitimacy of cognitive metaphor theory as a framework for the study of ancient Egyptian medicine; he then moves to the exploration of the metaphorical conceptualizations of "heat" as a pathogenic agent in Egyptian medical papyri, thus opening a window onto disease etiology, a dimension often left implicit by Egyptian texts.

In Chapter 2, "From Head to Toe: Listing the Body in Cuneiform Texts", Erica Couto Ferreira focuses on the head-to-toe ordering of the body parts in Mesopotamian cuneiform texts. Already found in the old Babylonian lexical lists known as UGU-MU, the *a capite ad calcem* ordering is shown to operate as a cognitive framework providing structure to mythical narratives, anatomical descriptions and healing rituals.

The following chapter, "The Stuff of Causation: Etiological Metaphor and Pathogenic Channeling in Babylonian Medicine", by J. C. Johnson, explores the metaphors and etiological models current in two Babylonian medical traditions: the *āšipūtu* (diagnostic medicine) and the *asûtu* (recipe-driven medicine). Johnson shows how those traditions' divergent etiological models are instantiated by different sets of metaphors; he discusses a difficult term for a form of fever (U_4.DA SÁ.SÁ, "struggling with fever") and its metaphorical underpinnings; finally, he scrutinizes the interaction between the etiological models, the understanding of fever and the textual ordering of medical compendia.

After Egypt and Mesopotamia, Chapters 4 and 5 focus on ancient Greece. L. Dean-Jones' contribution, "Aristotle's Heart and the Heartless Man", analyzes Aristotle's description of the anatomy of the heart in the *History of Animals* in connection with his mention of the theories of Polybus and Syennesis, two earlier physicians whose accounts of the vascular system famously (and puzzlingly) did not reference the cardiac muscle. Dean-Jones argues that Polybus and Syennesis actually understood the heart as a sort of "crossing" (or "knot") of the vessels under the breast, and that the correct appreciation of their theory helps us to make sense of a difficult passage in Aristotle's own description of it (*History of Animals*, III, 3, 513a27-b11).

In Chapter 5, "Earthquake and Epilepsy: The Body Geologic in the Hippocratic Treatise *On the Sacred Disease*", the editor of the book, J. Z. Wee, brings together under the label of "body geologic" two kinds of evidence: Greek and Latin texts (Aristotle and Seneca) explaining the origins of earthquakes by means of analogies with the physiological processes of the body; and treatises describing epilepsy in geologic terms. Here, the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease* attracts most of the attention, and Wee offers a fresh reading of the functions this text attributes to the bodily hollows.

Next, in Chapter 6, "The Lineage of 'Bloodlines': Synecdoche, Metonymy, Medicine, and More", P. T. Keyser argues that the metonymy "blood is life" and the metaphor "blood carries heredity" are not universal: rather, their presence within a given culture may underpin elitist, essentialist or racist discourses.

Chapter 7, "Eye Metaphors, Analogies and Similes within Mesopotamian Magico-Medical Texts", by S. V. Panyatov, once again addresses Mesopotamian medicine. Panyatov brings into focus the performative role of metaphors (or analogies, or similes), stating that they would help healers to relate to their patients, address their fears and make them visualize their condition, thus helping the healing process.

The communicative aspect of metaphors is also the subject of Chapter 8, "The Experience and Description of Pain in Aelius Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi*", by J. Dowie, who takes issue with the surprising absence of metaphors in Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Discourses* (2nd century CE). This six-book "memoir" relates in great detail Aristides' long-term illness, but refrains from vividly expressing pain through figurative language. As Dowie shows, Aristides describes his condition both from the internal point of view of the suffering patient and from the external perspective of the doctor. In his double position, Aristides appears to share in the skepticism aired by his contemporary Galen: doctors should not make much of the misleading – and often metaphorical – narratives of their patients' pain.

In Chapter 9, "Concepts of the Female Body in Mesopotamian Gynecological Texts", U. Steinert offers a compelling review of the literature on metaphors in culture and sciences, then moves to a thorough exploration of the imagery used to conceptualize female genitalia and the physiology of reproduction in a variety of cuneiform sources. Throughout the chapter, Steinert demonstrates how metaphors operate at different levels of the Sumerian and Akkadian languages, from script to lexicon, but also shape artifacts (such as stamp seals) and mythical narratives. Steinert concludes with a balanced assessment of the universal and the culturally-situated aspects of the metaphorical models she analyzes.

With the last two chapters, we move back to Ancient Greece. B. Holmes, in Chapter 10, "Pure Life: The Limits of the Vegetal Analogy in the Hippocratics and Galen", analyzes plant analogies in the context of the embryological expositions in the Hippocratic treatise *On The Nature of the Child* and in Galen's writings, where they are often used as an observable equivalent to the inaccessible processes within the body. Holmes explores the multifarious heuristic and argumentative functions those analogies play within the texts, and raises the question as to whether they imply an ontological commitment: do fetuses live a vegetal form of life? Holmes paints a nuanced picture. The analogical stance of the Hippocratic *De natura pueri* might also leave room for the appreciation of vegetal life as embodying a minimal degree of agency, somehow similar to that of the later stages of the fetal life. Conversely, Galen considers plants as embodying life in its purest and most essential form (that of the nutritive faculty), which is also that of the early stages of embryonic development; he however also insists that embryonic life just resembles ("is managed as") the vegetal one, and has to recognize that, for all its purity, vegetal life poses some puzzles of its own.

Chapter 11, "Animal, Vegetable, Metaphor: Plotinus's Liver and the Roots of Biological Identity", by C.A. Roby, explores metonymic and metaphoric cognitive operations in Plotinus' discussions of the bodily identity and of the soul/body dichotomy, in dialogue with Galen's theses and with his use of botanical analogies. Roby starts with a useful survey of the literature on the cognitive procedures implied in metaphorical and metonymic comprehension. She then analyzes the different ways in which Plotinus constructs his complex view of the unity of the individual soul (via a series of metonymies), and about its relationship to the soul of the All and to the body (mainly thanks to metaphors). The vegetal world is one important source of such metaphors, which brings Roby to a discussion of the ontological status of vegetal life in Plotinus: this nicely dovetails with Holmes' analyses in the preceding chapter.

The volume is introduced by a list of abbreviations, transliteration notes and a helpful periodization of ancient Mesopotamia; it is closed by an *Index Locorum* and a General Index.

As the above summaries suggest, *The Comparable Body* successfully covers a wide network of issues, and reading through it requires considerable effort. Many readers (this reviewer included) have to familiarize themselves with the close discussion of materials from cultural areas that might lay outside their areas of expertise; some chapters might have benefitted from being shorter and more focused. Be that as it may, this book is a rewarding one. Scholars interested in metaphor and analogy in the context of ancient sciences will find a wealth of data, along with perceptive discussions of the main areas of debate. These include: the legitimacy of introducing the metaphoric/literal divide, external to the second-order concepts used by most ancient writers to evaluate their procedures (Chapter 1); the question of the ontological commitments implicit in metaphorical statements and in the use of analogies (Chapters 1 and 10); the problem of distinguishing between the grammaticalization of lexical elements and active cognitive metaphors (Chapter 3); the pragmatics of metaphors in the doctor-patient relationship (Chapters 7 and 8); the cognitive operation of metaphorical models across different levels of the written text and across cultural forms (Chapters 3, 9); the cognitive processes involved in understanding metaphors and metonyms (Chapter 11).

Moreover, many contributions analyze how ancient interpreters – the authors of compendia and commentaries – dealt with the issue of interpreting (what we consider as) metaphors: this opens up an interesting perspective on how the ancient literate milieus have dealt with the very same phenomena analyzed in this

book. Lastly, the question of the universality as opposed to the culturally situated nature of bodily metaphors not only receives sustained theoretical attention (see mainly Chapters 1, 3 and 9), but is also substantiated by the wealth of examples showing both the cross-cultural recurrence and the local variations of some metaphorical patterns, such as those recruiting botanical phenomena (Chapters 7, 8, 10, 11), landscape features (Chapters 3, 5, 9) or social interactions (Chapters 3, 7, 11).

In conclusion, *The Comparable Body* is an important book, which maps a burgeoning area of research, offers insightful theoretical comments and fulfills the goal of letting in-depth case-studies bring into focus related issues which would have gone unnoticed otherwise.

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