

## BOOK REVIEW

*Roman Domestic Medical Practice in Central Italy: From the Middle Republic to the Early Empire*. By JANE DRAYCOTT. London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019. Pp. xiv + 202. Hardback, \$140.00. ISBN: 978-1-4724-3396-1.

With this book, Jane Draycott offers, as the title makes clear, a concise, but very welcome analysis on Roman domestic medicine. Scholars of ancient medicine are used to a very generous bibliography regarding medical practices and theories, especially from Hippocrates and Galen, but Draycott's monograph focuses on non-professional medicine, on the medical practices and knowledge which people would have at the time under study.

The study is divided into four chapters, dealing with different types of domestic medical practices and concepts. After the introduction (1–21), where Draycott states the main goals (10–13), and the structure of the book (16–17), highlighting the use of many kinds of sources, namely archaeological and bioarchaeological evidence, the first chapter (“Health in the Roman Republic and Principate,” 22–47) attempts to give a definition of health in the ancient world, based not only on Roman authors (Cato or Varro, for example), but also on Greek physicians, notably Hippocrates. The second chapter (“The Roman House and Garden,” 48–93) deals with the importance of the location of a Roman house for good health, taking as sources especially Roman technical prose writers; particular emphasis is given to the garden and its salutary meaning. The third chapter (“The Roman Household,” 94–130) offers an insight on the different members of the household and their roles in protecting their own and others' health, and on the relation between the household and its domestic gods. The last chapter (“The Transmission of Medical Knowledge,” 131–153) deals with the transmission of medical information through literature, namely that of encyclopedists like Celsus or Pliny the Elder, and potentially also through libraries, oral transmission and personal knowledge acquired throughout one's life.

Draycott's study is of particular importance since it deals with ancient medicine and medical practices and theories not in the way we might be used to, since scholarship tends (understandably) to focus on the analysis of professional

theories and ideas, taken from the writings of official medical writers, such as Hippocrates and Galen. Draycott directs her attention to writers (both prose and verse) whom readers would not necessarily associate with medicine or medical practices. Names like Cato, Varro, Vitruvius, Columella, Seneca and Pliny the Younger and their works appear throughout the book as conveyers of health and domestic medical knowledge, particularly relating to the concepts of “regimen” and “healthcare” (as explored in the first chapter).

Another key feature of this book is the significance attached to archaeological and bioarchaeological data, which, as Draycott notes, are of the greatest importance for a comprehensive analysis of people’s health. Due to its nature, literature may not provide a rigorously objective portrait of certain aspects of life, since it “is heavily biased in favour of the Roman elite, whether imperial, senatorial or equestrian” (38), but archaeology can give a deeper insight into specific questions, such as nutrition and the importance of the garden for a Roman or Italian citizen (as explored, for instance, in pages 68–74).

I could not find any faults, with the exception of a typo on page 65 regarding the birth date of Vergil, which will certainly be corrected in a second edition (which the book certainly deserves). The bibliography (159–180) is up to date, and a general index (181–185) closes the book, covering names and places especially thoroughly.

To sum up, this is a very well-written book with a captivating style, whose approach to domestic medicine will surely open up new paths in this field of studies. Due to its theme, short length, and accessible style, a non-academic public will also find here an enjoyable and stimulating read.

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