

Book Reviews

SPENCER L. ROGERS, *Primitive surgery. Skills before science*. Springfield, Illinois, Charles C Thomas, 1985, 8vo, pp.x, 128, \$19.75.

The author, an anthropologist, reviews surgical practice from neolithic times, through the classical period to recent aboriginal peoples. Surgical practice in Egypt, Greece, Rome, and India is briefly described. Special attention is paid to North and South America, with a detailed account of trephining in Peru. He takes "surgery" to include a wide variety of procedures, and he uses material from relatively recent anthropological literature to describe these procedures as carried out by peoples in underdeveloped areas. Operations may always have been carried out to restore health, but there were also many techniques with little relevance to the health of the individual, and concerned more with ritual, judicial punishment or cosmesis. Many of the "prescientific" surgical methods have continued into modern times in aboriginals, mainly as "decorative or symbolic body mutilation, demon-expelling devices or punishment for the transgression of tribal mores". From this Rogers surmises, in a field where there is often little evidence, that these were the techniques used in the earliest times, and that "neolithic man as a patient probably approached the treatment of his illnesses in somewhat the same way that we do today".

The medical information is given in a rather naïve way, and Rogers notes, without comment, a report that bone grafts between animals and men are usually successful. The interest of this monograph lies in its review of the anthropological literature, for which a large bibliography is given.

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ELISABETH FINCKH, *Foundations of Tibetan medicine*, vol. 2, London, Robinson Books (distribution: Shaftesbury, Element Books), 1985, 8vo, pp. 131, illus., £18.00.

"My intention in writing this book is to make sure that Tibetan medicine . . . is carefully studied . . . so that it can be preserved." The author has carried out her intention magnificently. She rightly says: "It would be dangerous to adopt uncritically detached fragments of the basically meaningful system of Tibetan medicine or to pose, too soon, the question of its applicability." Here, the principles of the system, diagnosis, therapy, and constitutional types are set out, with Tibetan and English terminology. The pulse lore is compared in outline with the Chinese method. The last chapter, dealing with the Tibetan medical classic *rGyud bzi*, compares its structure with that of the three Ayurvedic classics, the Caraka *Samhita*, the Suśruta *Samhita*, and Vagbhata's *Astangahrdayasamhita*.

Two important chapters (Book I, chapters 4 and 5) of the Tibetan classic are reproduced from the blockprint, transliterated and translated into English. Though volume I of the *Foundations* was published in 1978, the present volume can be read independently. Those who read German may like to know that volume 2 is also available in the original German translation, *Grundlagen tibetischer Heilkunde*, Uelzen, Medizinisch Literarische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1985. No reason has been given for deviations from the accepted interpretation of words like *thang*, usually "decoction", as "syrup", for which there exists the Tibetan word *ldge gu*; or of *lo mar*, usually "one-year-old butter", as "one-year-old oil". There are useful references to each chapter, interpreting the Tibetan way of seeing things. The author, a naturopath who has worked with Tibetan doctors in India, is able to explain these in Western terms from her experience. To anyone who wants a well-informed factual presentation, the book is warmly recommended.

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