

Book Reviews

Barbara Zipser, *John the Physician's Therapeutics: A Medical Handbook in Vernacular Greek*, Studies in Ancient Medicine, Vol. 37 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. x + 377, €125.00/\$185.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-90-04-17723-9.

It is not often that a Byzantinist can experience the joy of reviewing the publication of a new and hitherto almost completely unknown work. Barbara Zipser's book delivers exactly that: the edition of two versions of a late Byzantine medical work attributed to an otherwise obscure John the Physician. The task of editing this text, or rather texts, has been a complex and thorny one, and Zipser has managed to break down the problem in a lucid way in her Introduction (pp. 1–44). Contrary to common editorial practice, we are not facing a single text, whose original form a philologist can hope to reconstruct. Rather, it is the case of a working manual of fairly unsophisticated medicine, which has been preserved in a number of manuscripts, each preserving a basic form that is close enough to allow us to see it as part of the same text, but with sufficient variants and additions to make the incorporation of all the material in a single text impossible. To begin with, there are two main versions, one in a somewhat more elevated form of Medieval Greek (Zipser's \aleph , preserved in a single fifteenth-century manuscript), and another, a kind of commentary of the former, written in decidedly more vernacular Greek (ω , preserved in a number of manuscripts dating from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth). There are also excerpts and additional versions that sprang from the ω family of manuscripts. Zipser has edited the two main versions, providing a translation for \aleph as well as some basic commentary. The translation of \aleph will ensure that the text can be used by those historians of medicine who are not fluent in

Greek. It is a very important task, if only for the identification of myriads of plant names, substances, techniques and ailments in their often obscure and dialectical medieval Greek guise. I have found only one instance of disagreement with Zipser: \aleph 124 / ω 151 $\xi\epsilon\upsilon\gamma\eta\tau\alpha\iota/\xi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ should be translated as 'belch', not 'vomit' (see the entry in Liddell, Scott, Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon with a revised Supplement* [9th edition, Oxford 1996] 686).

The texts themselves offer very little material that would help to date them and establish the milieu in which they were produced. Zipser dates them tentatively to the thirteenth to fourteenth century (pp. 33–7), but it is near impossible to locate their place of origin. Perhaps dialectologists of Greek will be able to shed light on the matter in the future by examining the vernacular version ω more closely.

As Zipser makes clear the text(s) are intricately connected to the tenth-century medical author Theophanes Nonnos. However, while they follow quite closely Theophanes' suggested remedies, they are not direct copies of the earlier work. The challenge for those studying these texts in the future lies in establishing further sources, independent of Nonnos. For example, \aleph 212 (with material not included in ω) provides a recipe for pills against gout. Some of the ingredients have more or less direct analogies to those provided by Nonnos, but the source is clearly a different one. Moreover, the author of \aleph states that he received this recipe from a Markianos *stratelates*. The office of *stratelates* (originally the Greek translation of *magister militum*) was from the tenth century onwards a modest and at times honorific title. I have not been able to identify this particular person, but it is interesting that the *Prosography of the Byzantine Empire I, 641–867* (ed. J Martindale, CD ROM, Aldershot, 2001)

preserves thirty-nine people with this title (including one Markianos and one Maurianos), while the online *Prosopography of the Byzantine World* <<http://www.pbw.kcl.ac.uk/>> preserves four *stratelatai* from 1050–1200. It is important to note that the title was no longer in use in the Palaiologan period, the supposed time of the texts' production.

The texts themselves are fairly straightforward: humoral pathology is alluded to but not explained or explored in depth. It is, however, quite remarkable that the remedies very often suggest phlebotomy, a procedure that is absent from comparable texts, the so-called *Xenonika* (manuals connected to Byzantine hospitals; see D. Bennett, *Xenonika*, PhD thesis, University of London 2003), and the medical and agricultural 'best seller' of the later Greek world, Agapios Landos' *Geoponika* (Venice, 1680).

As the texts have now become available to scholars, I expect that, taking the lead from Zipser's editorial suggestions, future researchers will strive to publish more such practical texts. They will no doubt explore and map the connections between such texts and earlier (both ancient and medieval) medical authorities. The result will place our knowledge of Byzantine medical knowledge and practice on a much more secure footing. The pioneer work of Zipser will play an important role in this process.

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Alessandro Arcangeli and Vivian Nutton (eds), *Girolamo Mercuriale: Medicina e Cultura nell'Europa del Cinquecento* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2008), pp. vii + 356, €37.00, paperback, ISBN: 978-88-222-5740-6.

The present volume demonstrates that the past decade has been a fertile one for studies of Girolamo Mercuriale, and that, over and above the important recent additions to the bibliography on *De Arte Gymnastica*, scholars

in various fields have increasingly examined Mercuriale's works on subjects from paediatrics and gynaecology to epidemiology, dermatology and toxicology.

This volume, about which the editors rightly remark that it will provide an important foundation for future study, brings together twenty papers presented at the international symposium commemorating the four-hundredth anniversary of Mercuriale's death, held in Forlì in 2006. In spite of the disparate subjects and methodologies of the essays, Alessandro Arcangeli and Vivian Nutton have organised them such that the book opens with broad contextual studies and moves to a consideration of single treatises in the order of their publication. A core group examine *De Arte Gymnastica*, raising questions regarding Mercuriale's methods (Alessandro Arcangeli), revisiting the question of the forgeries of Pirro Ligorio, Mercuriale's collaborator (Ginette Vagenheim), and assessing the treatise's impact upon seventeenth-century Roman culture, preoccupied as it was with health and classical exempla of valour and virtue (Susan Russell). In a stimulating essay that also accompanies Nutton's 2008 English translation of *De Arte Gymnastica*, Jean-Michel Agasse considers, among other questions, Mercuriale's conception of the relationship of body and soul, and his post-Tridentine perspective on the *voluptas* of antiquity. Agasse argues that the massive architectural remains of the ancient baths, which suggested that Roman culture was excessively devoted to hedonistic bodily pleasures, did not square with the sixteenth-century perception of the Romans as virtuous. Compelled to justify the enormous expense on these structures, Mercuriale made the claim that they housed schools of philosophy. Mercuriale was no neutral player in the Renaissance quarrel of ancients and moderns, yet, as recent research has demonstrated, he was not wrong in identifying these structures as multifaceted spaces. Indeed the imperial baths included 'meeting halls, lecture rooms, libraries' among their other spaces for instruction, see Fikret Yegül, *Baths and*