

doi:10.1017/mdh.2019.58

John Z. Wee (ed.), *The Comparable Body: Analogy and Metaphor in Ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Greco-Roman Medicine* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 418, €138.00, hardback, ISBN: 9789004356764.

This volume arises from a conference held in Chicago in 2014, in which selected papers explored the notion of metaphor across a variety of themes in ancient medicine in Eastern and Greco-Roman texts. They were reworked to elaborate the book in its achieved state, offering a fascinating exploration of little-known or famous texts from the angle of (broadly understood) analogy, metonymy and metaphor.

The book comprises eleven papers and an introduction, to which it is difficult to do justice within the limited space of a review. Wee's introduction convincingly presents the selection of papers as the result of a collective exploration of notions of metaphor and metonymy, and as rooted in theory yet freely interrogating the sources. The papers thus address in turn sources from ancient Egypt and the Near East (Nyord, Couto-Ferreira, Johnson, Panayotov, Steinert) and from the Greek world from Hippocrates to Plotinus (Dean-Jones, Wee, Keyser, Downie, Holmes, Roby); a variety of texts, from incantations to philosophical accounts of nature and the works of the sophist Aelius Aristides, are considered. This *poikilotes* is the main attraction of the volume, which at times delves into theory, at times sticks to close reading of the texts, and often describes features that may have seemed well-known already (such as the analogy of living bodies with plants) but get stimulatingly revisited.

I will take some examples (in areas I happen to feel a bit more familiar with) to illustrate this point rather than dedicate one sentence to each paper – since the introduction does offer a good summary of every contribution (pp. 2–11). Some papers echo one another and studies beyond this volume in a rather exciting way. Wee offers an inventive (albeit rooted in sound philology) reading of the Hippocratic *Sacred Disease* in dialogue with other ancient texts on apparently unrelated themes (earthquakes, other natural phenomena) from the Aristotelian corpus and Seneca. In her paper, Downie convincingly analyses Aelius Aristides' terminology for pain in the *Sacred Tales* as evidencing his double status as patient and observer of his own condition. Starting from the seminal Hippocratic abortion scene in *On the Nature of Child/On the Seed*, Holmes leads an enquiry into Galen's more complex (and at times ambivalent) understanding of plant life as a model/analogy to understand the development of the embryo – emphasising an apparent evolution of the Pergamene's thought up until the later work *On My Own Opinions*. In a study which to an extent complements and prolongs the latter, Roby explores the profound polysemy of vegetal/vegetative life in Plotinus' thought through the various dimensions of metonymy as applied to notions of body and soul. All those papers, it seems to me, explore the dimensions of medical and philosophical discourse aiming to explain the hidden, the concealed, via a range of strategies relating to analogy. Other papers, in turn, focus more squarely on the medical and the magical, addressing the ways the body and its parts are represented, described and understood in a variety of metaphors. The eye, the womb are some of the favoured body parts in the studies on ancient near eastern texts. Here metaphor, metonymy and the like open a window onto ancient societies and beliefs. In a way, the conclusion to Ulrike Steinert's paper on the female body in Mesopotamian texts (at the crossroads of natural life and the cosmos and of everyday material culture) could be extended to the entire volume as a programme for further research: 'The study of body metaphors (· · ·) will prove crucial in elucidating the concepts of physiology of the

human body that dominated ancient medical theory and practice, as metaphors that both the practitioners and their patients “lived by” (p. 342).

In sum, this book will delight, and give food for thought to many a student of ancient medical texts. Bringing together texts from different cultural areas of the ancient world to explore this suggestive topic demonstrates how fruitful comparative approaches can be. Broadening the discussion to a wide spectrum of ancient texts regardless of language and origin allowed the contributors to deliver inspired comments on some of the most dynamic features of ancient medical (or indeed technical) language: metaphor, metonymy and comparison in its various guises. Stepping sideways from earlier analyses (many of them purely linguistic, like F. Skoda’s *Médecine ancienne et métaphore*, Paris: Peeters-Selaf, 1987), the book will provide students with important insights into the poetics of ancient medicine. It usually does so in a clear, accessible language, and is supplemented by useful indices.

Caroline Petit

University of Warwick, UK

doi:10.1017/mdh.2019.59

Matthew L. Newsom Kerr, *Contagion, Isolation and Biopolitics in Victorian London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. xvii + 370, £63.99, eBook, ISBN: 9783319657684.

This book by Matthew Newsom Kerr is the latest contribution to the discussion of how medicine doubled as the means of both public service and governance in nineteenth-century Britain. The framework of this book is founded upon Michael Foucault’s body of work concerning liberalism, governmentality and biopolitics. The author argues that biopolitical imperatives went hand in hand with liberalism in Victorian London. He explains it with reference to how the civic authorities controlled various diseases, such as plague and smallpox, through various medical policies and institutions. He raises an interesting point that the ‘liberal systems of security’ (p. 8) were based on the fear of diseases. With the aid of doctors and health administrators, the state transformed the fear of mortality into a principal justification of the governance of citizens. In this story, hospitals and clinics were sites of biopower and complex negotiations between the civil society and sick individuals. In order to establish a healthy, sanitised, orderly and disciplined society, the liberal state took recourse to legitimising quarantine, isolation, segregation, seclusion and confinement, thus becoming a ‘surveillance state’. Public health and political modernity arguably informed the development of one another. The history of this co-constitution underpins the discussion in this book.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The introductory chapter, ‘Isolation, Liberalism, Biopower’, begins with the story of a patient who suffered from headache and depression. His ailment was diagnosed as scarlet fever and he was asked to consent to being ‘removed to the fever hospital’. He was then dressed in hospital clothes, put into an ambulance on a stretcher and taken to a large scarlet fever ward in an isolation hospital that did not allow visitors. The patient became so restless that he would scrub himself to get rid of his rashes and expedite his recovery. He saw his ‘healthy’ family only after he was deemed fully recovered and allowed to cross the iron gates. Through this tale of sickness and hospital admission, Newsom Kerr presents his analysis of how isolation and detention increasingly became a part of London’s urban life in the nineteenth century. This was not a singular incident but rather part of the practice of regulating contagion