

**Lehmhaus, Lennart and Martelli, Matteo, eds.**

*Collecting Recipes. Byzantine and Jewish Pharmacology in Dialogue* (Science, Technology and Medicine in Ancient Cultures, Volume 4). Berlin: De Gruyter 2017. Pp. viii + 334. Hard cover € 77,99 / \$ 114,99, E-book € 99,95 / \$ 114,99. ISBN 978-1-5015-1077-9.

In his masterpiece *Biblich-talmudische Medizin. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Heilkunde und der Kultur überhaupt* (Berlin 1911; repr. 1992),<sup>1</sup> Julius Preuss dedicated only a short chapter of eight pages to remedies (15. *Die Heilmittel*; cf. the volume under review, p. 13). The collection of studies under review here shows that more than a century later the ancient and medieval tradition of Jewish pharmacology still remains a relatively unexplored area. What is needed is the kind of groundwork done by scholars who study the nature, authorship and sources of relevant treatises and passages (both technical and non-technical) and interpret them with close attention to their original context. Many of the texts in question need to be made accessible, or better accessible, first. In addition, there are issues of translation, in particular the problem of identifying the exact ingredients intended by the authors of recipes (cf. Aaron Amit, p. 255). This painstaking work may also lead to a fuller appreciation of the lines of tradition involved. These lines intersect and they do so across cultures: recipes and ingredients were transferred from one culture to the other.<sup>2</sup> In fact, pharmacology has always been a major locus of cultural exchange, given the urgency universally felt and shared when it comes to finding remedies for ailments and diseases. This cross-cultural perspective motivates the present collection of studies, which has sprung from a workshop devoted to the interaction between the Jewish and the Byzantine medical traditions, that is to say, Talmudic literature on the one hand, and the great and early encyclopedias such as those by Oribasius (4th century CE), Aetius of Amida (6th century CE) and Paul of Aegina (7th century CE), on the other. The resulting collection first offers three studies devoted to the background in Near-Eastern medicine and in Galen (Part 1), Mark Geller and Franziska Desch on Babylonian pharmacology and Caroline Petit on Galen's recipes, which, she argues, instantiate "rational" medicine less consistently than might have been expected from its author.

1 English edition: J. Preuss, *Biblical and Talmudic Medicine*. Translated and Edited by Fred Rosner (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1978).

2 Cf. also V. Nutton, "Ancient Mediterranean Pharmacology and Cultural Transfer," *European Review* 16 (2008): 211-17, who concludes that the traffic was mainly one-way: from East to West and from South to North. This is certainly the case in the Graeco-Roman period. Some of the contributors to the present volume point to instances of, e.g., influence from the Byzantine tradition to the Babylonian Talmud (e.g., Totelin).

This is followed by ten case-studies concerned with the Byzantine and Jewish traditions. Of these, some are not, or not predominantly, focused on cross-cultural interaction, or the dialogue of the collection's subtitle (e.g. Gowling on Aëtius' discriminating use of Galen, or Lherminier on Paul of Aegina and Galen). Given the terra incognita character of much of our evidence, however, one tends to consider this pardonable.

Lennart Lehmhaus focuses on the Palestinian Talmud, whereas Aaron Amit discusses the Babylonian Talmud. Both comment on the methodological issues involved in studying the "pharmacology" in huge collections of material in which recipes for drugs and treatments for diseases are scattered among numerous and varied contexts, both technical and popular. Given these constraints and special features, Lehmhaus notes that there are no distinct parallels with either ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian or Graeco-Roman literature (Dioscorides, Galen, Pliny the Elder), only some overlap between substances used, modes of applications and underlying (i.e., sympathetic) principles. But the Talmudic "pharmacology" lacks any interest in the qualities or powers of healing substances that are so typical of the Greek approach. Lehmhaus stresses the importance of the religious, halakhic context, which goes some way towards explaining a preference for foodstuffs considered to be wholesome, given that the application of actual medicines or of other therapeutic devices was often interdicted on Shabbat or certain holidays.

The other editor, Matteo Martelli, focuses on the evidence associated with the biblical scribe Ezra, under whose name a whole array of prophecies and apocalypses were composed (in Hebrew and Aramaic, of which the Apocalypse of Ezra was translated into Greek) from the first century CE onwards. Ezra was also credited with the invention of a powerful and multi-purpose medicine, simply referred to as "Ezra's antidote," which was apparently taken seriously by the sixth-century Byzantine compiler Aetius of Amida (XIII, 60-140, presented by Martelli in two appendices). Apart from Aetius, however, we are dealing with many texts that have so far remained unedited and indeed uncatalogued. Martelli expertly charts this tradition (involving Syriac evidence also) and shows how the medical role assumed by the prophet follows from the cosmology and astronomy ascribed to him, with alchemy acting as a kind of bridge (alchemy being, like pharmacology, concerned with the manipulation of natural substances).

Within the limited compass of this review I cannot do full justice to each and every contribution. Let me additionally single out for mention Totelin's study entitled "The Third Way," which starts from the attitude taken by Byzantine authors toward Galen's pharmacology. Galen had left huge compilations of recipes, but relatively little of this material was concerned with gynecological

ailments. Galen speaks of his successful treatment of women, e.g., in his *Prognosis*, but he is critical of certain uses made by upper-class women of cosmetics, traditionally a part of gynecology. In fact, his relation to women, starting with his alarming mother, was ambivalent. Yet he values the experience and expertise of midwives, who traditionally saw to the therapy of women's ailments. Since Galen remained the revered fountainhead of medicine for the Byzantines, they used what they could, but the Galenic material needed to be supplemented. They could turn to the gynecological writings of the first-century CE Methodist author Soranus (that consequently have survived). Another response is represented by the pseudo-Galenic treatise *Euporista*. In addition there was the treatise "concerning the womb's afflictions" under the name of a woman called Metrodora (probably a pseudonym). Through Metrodora and other sources we know about another popular handbook circulating under the name of the famous Egyptian queen Cleopatra (I already mentioned the role of cosmetics). Totelin explores the relation (including borrowings and overlap) between pseudo-Galen, Metrodora and Cleopatra, which he describes as constituting a third, more popular (that is to say, non-theoretical) way alongside the real Galen and Soranus, showing how it impacted both Byzantine and Jewish authors of medieval times.

One may feel that this collection is lacking in coherence. But this would be a rather facile judgement to pass, given the *status quaestionis*, i.e., the problems still presented by this underused material, which makes it often necessary to concentrate on individual texts before jumping to general conclusions about the traditions in which they functioned. The editors have succeeded in bringing together an excellent team of experts who remove many untenable ideas while exposing others as superficial. In so doing, they have produced a useful and stimulating tool for further work. The editors have included a helpful introduction to the field covered by the ensuing studies and provided their volume with ample indexes and bibliographical information. There is simply an awful lot to learn here about ancient and early medieval pharmacology.

*Teun Tieleman*

Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

*t.l.tieleman@uu.nl*