

Chiara Thumiger, P. N. Singer (ed.), *Mental Illness in Ancient Medicine: from Celsus to Paul of Aegina. Studies in Ancient Medicine*, 50. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018. Pp. xv, 479. ISBN 978-90-04-36272-7. €143,00.

The treatment of mental illness provides an important window into the cultural and social realities of the ancient world. By tracking its development, interaction with other aspects of medical thought, and religious and philosophical approaches, it is possible to see wider shifts in society as well as within medical learning and knowledge. One of the key ways of doing this is by looking at medical treatises and writings, how they interact with one another (use of similar sources/ academic disagreements etc.), and also studying at the specific terminology used to consider the illness in question. It is here where this volume is particularly strong. Thumiger and Singer have assembled here an excellent array of informed papers, that reflect the different ways of thinking about and studying mental illness in the ancient world. A number of the chapters here make great effort to engage with the original vocabulary used, and from that trace not just intellectual currents, but also real world applications of medical knowledge. The other great strength to this volume is in how disease is defined and understood; crucially as both a social and cultural construct. This allows for a number of persuasive conclusions to be reached, and some important questions to be asked.

The book is divided between three sections. The first engages in a broad perspective (35-106), with a chapter looking at melancholy (Kazantzidis, 35-78) and another investigating demonic influence in mental illness (Metzger, 79- 106). Kazantzidis provides an excellent dissection of *insania*, recognising the bifurcation found in the ancient writings between *tristia* (sadness/depression) and *hilares* (cheerfulness/hilarity). This division needs to be recognised immediately, as it requires different treatment (*'si imagines fallunt, ante Omnia videndum est, tristes an hilares sint'*, Celsus, 45). This chapter also exposes what can be gained by bringing together medical and philosophical learning (esp. 74-78). Metzger tackles an important issue head-on, the fear of demonic possession and its consequences for the mental health of its victims. Any reader of early Church writings will find a confusion between the possessed, and those who suffer mental illness. This is then an important discussion of a complex topic, and one that analyses the available evidence with care and precision. As Metzger reminds us: '[a]longside Christian demonology, there were at least two other schools of

thought, namely Neoplatonic demonology and pagan popular beliefs which held very different notions concerning the nature of superhuman beings, both referring to such beings as *daimones*' (81). The most important conclusion reached here is about the subconscious bias of modern interpreters, in how we view religion and medicine as 'closed systems' when instead we should accept the 'concept of ambiguity' (106).

The second part is more focussed, with nine separate chapters studying individual writers such as Athenaeus of Attalia, Rufus of Ephesus and Archigenes of Apamea, as well as individual themes (109-340). As with any volume of collected essays, it can be difficult to present a strong sense of unity, and these chapters do not always sit quite so well together. Nonetheless, in focussing on individual writers and important themes, the reader is introduced both to familiar and unfamiliar writings and writers, and this can only help provide a deeper level of understanding. The chapters by Thumiger and Gäbel are the strongest in this section. Thumiger's first chapter (245-268) looks to eating disorders, such as *boulimos*, *atrophia*, *polysarkia*, *phagedaina*, *stomachikon* and *hydrophobia*. These are disused by focussing on the writings of the Anonymous Parisinus, Aretaeus and Caelius Aurelianus (covering the first to the fifth century CE). In discussing the specific medical terms Thumiger provides a number of important observations. *Boulimos* differs from the modern use of the term, with a focus instead on an intense appetite, that can quite literally chill the blood (256). *Phagedaina* manifests itself with obscene hunger, consuming without chewing, and subsequently vomiting and weakness, but *polysarkia* stands in opposition to *atrophia*, in taking on simply too much for your body to deal with (256-7). It is also here that we see both mind and body working together to make the patient better: '*animi officii sive curis applicatio*' (Caelius, at 257). *Stomachikon* is difficult to define, but carries with it melancholic symptoms and *hydrophobia* is when 'the patient is tortured by thirst and a by dread of water' (263). Thumiger's second chapter (269-284) works best when read with the first, as together they ask similar questions of the thematically linked topics. In this chapter Thumiger places her research against the backdrop of Foucault's interpretation of ancient sexuality, and reaches a convincing conclusion, that 'the case of sexual disorders is in many respects symmetrical to that of eating disturbances' (314). Gäbel's chapter is a good example of what can be

achieved, and the questions that can be asked, by focussed source analysis, here of Aëtius of Amida (315-340). Gäbel is able to demonstrate, while working with complex source documents, that the compilers sought to link mental illness with cognitive function and the brain more generally, and in doing so set out a systematic methodology.

The final section takes a more philosophical approach, with three chapters that illuminate the interaction of medical aetiology and philosophical discourse (343-420). Of the three, Ahonen's exploration of the Stoic interpretation is the most persuasive, in particular when looking at Seneca and Cicero (349-357). Both are famous figures, but studied and analysed with focus and precision, and when read together allow for a more nuanced understanding both of mental health (*animi sanitas*, 356), and its importance to true wellbeing.

To close, this is an impressive collection of essays, reflecting a good level of historical analysis and a willingness to ask important questions of those sources still left to us. When read together, a much wider understanding of ancient approaches is possible, one that betrays the sophisticated and shifting pattern of intellectual and religious reflections upon illnesses of the mind. As with any edited collection there are some concerns over how well each section fits together, and the over-long introduction is not quite as useful as needed to fully establish a clear and focussed foundation and framework for the later studies. Nonetheless, this is an important volume, and one that offers much insight into a complex and multifaceted topic.

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