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## **Asklepios, Medicine, and the Politics of Healing in Fifth-Century Greece: Between Craft and Cult**

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and health. Finally, in “Eastward Journeys,” she discusses transcendental meditation and its movement from counter-cultural encounter to medical exploration, Western involvement with Chinese acupuncture and qigong, and the Dalai Lama’s role in supporting the investigation of the effects of traditional meditation with the tools of modern neuroscience.

Much of what Harrington has to say in her discussion of the first four narrative templates is based on the work of other scholars, but she amplifies their work with her own research and consistently fresh readings of the primary and secondary literature. Her writing is lucid and confident, and her interpretations and reinterpretations are impressively synthetic and often strikingly original. Her work in “Healing Ties” and “Eastward Journeys” is even better, because here she adds much from her own investigations, some of them based on long interviews with key players and some on movingly described participant observation experiences.

I would quibble with a number of points. Where, for example, is the discussion of the long tradition of emotions and disease discourse in Western medicine, a discourse that goes back at least to Galen and is centrally present until it is temporarily displaced in the nineteenth century by monofocal enthusiasm for pathoanatomy and bacteriology? Where, too, are the biopsychosocial approaches that have been so prominent in recent decades? Also, it is not always easy to tell where Harrington is locating her narratives—in popular culture, in certain subfields of medicine, in both, in first one and then the other, and so on. Harrington is aware of most of these questions and boundary issues and writes about some of them persuasively. Her account, for example, of the medicalization of transcendental meditation is one of the best things in the book. But other issues sometimes get lost in the architecture and sweep of her book.

Nevertheless, overall I find *The Healer Within* to be an extraordinarily impressive book. It is gracefully written, and many of its insights are nothing short of brilliant. Harrington also has the remarkable ability to balance penetrating insight with even-handed and sometimes subtly ironic detachment. I have finally found a book I can use as the centerpiece of a history seminar my medical students have wanted me to teach on mind, body, and medicine.

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Bronwen L. Wickkiser. *Asklepios, Medicine, and the Politics of Healing in Fifth-Century Greece: Between Craft and Cult*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. xiii + 178 pp. Ill. \$55.00 (978-0-8018-8978-3).

For some years, scholars of Greek medicine have been steadily eroding the opposition between rational and irrational that was once a given of their field. Fueled by similar intellectual forces—anthropology and cultural studies—ancient historians

have shown that religion is so integrated into the ancient polis that it designates nothing so much as political life itself. In this polished monograph, Bronwen L. Wickkiser capitalizes on shifts in both fields to reconsider the rise of the cult of Asclepius in the later fifth century and, particularly, its arrival in Athens in 420/419 BCE. In the first half of the book, she defends the claim that Asclepius owes his popularity to expectations generated—but not fulfilled—by the growing authority and confidence of fifth-century physicians. In the last three chapters, she argues that the importation of the cult to Athens from Epidaurus, far from being a private matter (as has long been believed), was overseen by the polis as a way of consolidating power in the Peloponnese in the uncertain months following the Peace of Nicias in 421.

The Edelsteins' monumental two-volume work on Asclepius, first published in 1945,<sup>1</sup> remains the point of departure for investigations of the cult, and Wickkiser's study is no exception. She positions her work as a challenge to the contrast drawn by Ludwig Edelstein and others between the "irrational" cult and "rational" medicine, arguing that the two types of healing enjoyed a symbiotic relationship: those with conditions that physicians declined to treat would have become patients of the god, while the physicians gained in prestige by affiliating themselves with a divine patron. The claim that Asclepius was the physician of last resort is not new,<sup>2</sup> though Wickkiser expresses it with greater confidence than others have and accumulates circumstantial evidence (observing, e.g., that many of the illnesses recorded from Epidaurus were chronic and thus presumably resistant to treatment). Secure evidence, nevertheless, is hard to come by, and the sources who report going to Asclepius only after trying physicians are nearly all too late to explain the growth of the cult in the late fifth and fourth centuries. It is possible to question further whether Asclepius's success can be explained only through his assimilation to his human counterparts. Wickkiser argues—as Edelstein himself did—that the cures at Epidaurus conform to expectations created by contemporary medicine. Many cases, however, such as one in which a girl's head is cut off to drain her body of excess fluid, suggest a logic of healing, together with a concept of disease, that does not simply exaggerate ideas and practices familiar from the medical texts but stands alongside them. And no doubt it would be valuable as well to approach the healing event in the cult on its own terms. Wickkiser, in fact, classifies some of the cult's techniques as "supernatural" (p. 49). But without a fuller exploration of Asclepian difference, the label risks reinstating the divide that the book seeks to avoid.

The book's incorporation of the growing body of material evidence for the cult more convincingly extends the Edelsteins' work (which is largely restricted to textual sources). The implications of a broader perspective are greatest in the

1. Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1945; repr. 1998).

2. It has also met with skepticism in recent years: see, e.g., Florian Steger, *Asklepiosmedizin. Medizinischer Alltag in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004), esp. pp. 104–5.

final three chapters. Building on studies of the Athenian landscape as an imperial “text,” Wickkiser freshly appraises our best evidence for the importation of the cult—namely, the Telemachus monument—in order to embed the event in both the space of the city and the local dynamics of power. While her reconstruction of these dynamics and the importation itself is necessarily speculative and probably too tidy, it is a promising attempt to look beyond the plague that ravaged the city in the early 420s in order to understand why a young healing god found his way to the slopes of the Acropolis at the historical moment at which he did.

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Marc Epprecht. *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS*. New African Histories Series. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008. xiii + 231 pp. \$39.95 (978-1-86914-157-8).

This book contains an argument that is critical to medical historians and medical practitioners with an interest in HIV/AIDS in Africa. Put simply, Marc Epprecht insists that same-sex practices and homoerotic behaviors have long been practiced in Africa and that defining the continent as heterosexual has not only distorted the histories of its sexualities but has created erroneous assumptions on which the cure and treatment of sexually transmitted illnesses are based. I found myself wishing that Epprecht had published this argument in a short article in a medical journal, because the power of the insight gets a little diluted in this book.

Epprecht’s earlier work on same-sex desire in southern Africa<sup>1</sup> was an archive-driven book, and given the number of court cases in southern Rhodesia that came out of male homoerotic desire, Epprecht made his case with great clarity. He’s no less clear here, but a continent-wide history that seeks to identify similar sexual behaviors over a wider cultural and geographic range rambles at times. Moreover, Epprecht is torn between being a historian and being an advocate, so the historiography is introduced by his own struggles to present the histories and not to appropriate the work of LBGTI activists in Africa. His first chapter has the revealing title “A Puzzling Blindspot, a Troubling Silence, a Strange Consensus,” which tells us we are in for a complexified text. We get the obligatory chapter on the errors of African ethnographers who saw only straight African behaviors; when they saw other sexualities, they pathologized them and, worse still, explained them in structural functionalist terms: Africans’ disgust at homosexual acts was said to be about Africans’ understanding of sexuality being for procreation. There is also a very engaging chapter on the construction of Shaka Zulu’s sexuality by genera-

1. Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004).