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Historia Antigua de la Medicina renders a scholarly account of ancient medicine. Its field of interest is not only restricted to Western medical traditions but also takes into consideration significant medical traditions developed by the Middle East, Far East, and Meso-American civilizations. The authors, supported by primary sources and relevant historical records, explain and illustrate the medical theories and practices of each tradition within the cultural worldviews from which they sprang.

The first two chapters introduce the reader into the history of medicine as a discipline. In the first one, some basic notions and problems which are fundamental to understanding the history of medicine are provided. The authors address the question “what does it mean to say that something really happened?” and in doing so they introduce some basic notions, such as “history”, “historiography”, “sociology of historiography”, “historical evidence” and “Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor”. After briefly showing the theoretical fundamentals of their discipline, the authors historically describe the ways in which historians of ancient Greece, medieval Europe, and the West Indies made historiography. The second chapter focuses on paleopathology as a current auxiliary science at the service of medical historians. The analysis of human remains allows the historian of medicine to describe and study past pathologies, comparing them to current ones and also determining epidemiological data of past communities, such as population pathologies. The authors offer a chronological account of the incorporation of paleopathology into the history of medicine, explain their procedures and methodology, and provide some examples, such as the first paleopathological studies on the Egyptian mummies carried out by Marc Armand Ruffer.

The third chapter discusses the Babylonian hepatoscopy and its

surgeons; the Egyptian physiological ideas, diseases, treatments, and medics; the pre-Hippocrates Greek medicine presented in the Homeric texts in which the Demeter Hymn, the cult to Asclepius, and the Eleusinian Mysteries are treated; the Indian ayurvedic diagnosis and treatments; and finally the Chinese yin-yang ideas, acupuncture, moxibustion and pharmacopea. In all these traditions, natural and supernatural forces are directly responsible for the occurrence of human diseases, and thus, magical concepts and treatments become indispensable for the restoration of health.

The fourth chapter is devoted to Greco-Roman medicine, i.e., the Alexandrine and Hellenistic medical schools prevalent at the times of the Roman Empire. The corpuses of Hippocrates and Galen are examined, highlighting their medical theories and therapies. Even if medicine is not totally detached from religion, as the cult to Asclepius shows, it becomes a *tekné* whose aim is the detection of the concrete natural agents which cause an unbalance of humors. Therefore, the authors reconstruct the humoral theory by describing the bases that allowed its prolonged existence and use until the appearance of the microbial theory in the 19th century. Besides these two outstanding figures of Western medicine, other medical schools and ideas are depicted: the Empirical School at Alexandria, founded by the disciples of Herophilus and Erasistratus, mostly concerned with experience and observation over speculation, and the Methodist School in Rome, based on the ideas of Asclepiades of Bithynia, who claimed that a disease was the result of a disorder in the pattern of the movement of the atoms.

The fifth chapter addresses medieval medicine. The authors explore the Bizantine tradition and other Western medical traditions which emerged in the period of time between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance. The Arab medical tradition is reviewed through the study of prestigious scholars such as Rhazes, Avicenna, and Averroes. The authors delve into the influence that Hermes and the Hermetic writings exerted in the development of medicine throughout this long period of time; first, on the Arabs, and through them, on the European world. Besides the Hermetic philosophy, the authors focus their attention on the teachings of institutions – mostly universities – and other pedagogical aspects of medieval medicine.

The final chapter examines the nahoas pre-Hispanic medicine, the hegemonic Meso-American culture which prevailed in the central high plains of Mexico at the time of Hernán Cortés' arrival. This is one of the millenary medical traditions with an origin in Meso-America, entirely free from the influence of Western or Eastern medical traditions. Diseases – for the *tícitl* or nahoas medic – appear when the equilibrium between heat and cold in the body was broken. For example, the heart was the solar organ par excellence, so its nature was to be hot, and its coldness could only mean death. Any alteration in the natural temperature of the heart would not only be the cause of cardiac diseases, but also of mental illnesses since the nahoas believed that the *teyolía* – the state of mind which defines the identity of human beings – resided in the heart. In order to cure illnesses the nahoas relied upon the effectiveness of medicinal plants. In the case of heart diseases, they used to concoct an infusion of *yolloxóchitl* (i.e., a kind of magnolia, curiously in the form of a heart) for its tonic-cardiac effects. However, nahoas' therapeutics is not only restricted to herbalist wisdom: these medics also performed very delicate surgeries in which magical elements were included. The unbalance within the human body could emerge from diverse factors. Not only hot-natured gods, or cold-natured underworld entities could provoke diseases, but these could also manifest themselves through the powers of sorcerers or *tlacatecótl* (i.e. owl-men) who were able to induce any kind of diseases (the efficacy of their spells depending on the *tonalli* or vital force of the victims).

Historia Antigua de la Medicina is not only a chronological approach to the emergence of different medical theories and practices in various cultures throughout many centuries, but also an immersion into their philosophical and magical contexts that provides a better understanding of the ancient development of medicine. The neophyte reader of ancient medical knowledge and practice would find it useful and interesting. Nevertheless, it might disappoint the reader interested in a critical account of historiographical issues that attempts to problematize the past, current, and possible future intellectual status and ideological purposes of the history of medicine as a discipline as well as the reader expecting a revision of the well-known ancient historical

issues. *Historia Antigua de la Medicina* cannot be pondered as a collection of historiographical essays like *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Medicine*. It is rather more accurately described as a science divulgation single-volume which exposes a broad panorama of ancient medicine in a learned, systematic, and readable style. Unfortunately, as all general works, *Historia Antigua de la Medicina* offers only overviews of most of its topics. However, it does justice to the Meso-American medicine, a subject practically ignored by general histories of medicine such as Roy Porter's *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity*, or Erwin H. Ackerknecht's *A Short History of Medicine*. Therefore, the final section of *Historia Antigua de la Medicina* devoted to nahoa medicine is paramount to considering this book a unique and worthy history of ancient medicine.