

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

The information given below is in no way intended to be exhaustive, but attempts to provide some background information to put the physicians and authors into historical context.

AELIUS ARISTIDES (117-c.189)

A Sophist, educated at Pergamum and Athens. Widely traveled in Egypt and Asia Minor, arriving at Rome in 156. Excelled at giving set speeches for various occasions, but a long series of illnesses (real or imaginary) ended his hope of a great public career and caused him to spend most of his time as a patient at the Asclepieum of Pergamum. During his illnesses he occupied himself with writing and lecturing and left a great number of books.

ALBUCASIS (c.936-1013)

Born a Spaniard near Cordoba, he was the greatest surgeon of Islam and physician to the Spanish caliphs. His chief work, *Al tasrif (The method)*, was an encyclopaedia of medicine and surgery in 30 sections. During the Renaissance and later it was translated into Latin for use in the early European Medical Schools. His book, *On surgery*, was the first independent surgical treatise, mentioning 200 surgical instruments and emphasising the value of cautery.

ARISTOTLE (384-322 BC)

The greatest natural scientist in antiquity, whose observations were unprecedented in their detail and accuracy, much of which were admired by people like Darwin. After studying with Plato in his Academy in Athens, Aristotle went north, and eventually ended up in Macedon at the court of Philip II in Pella, where he became tutor to Philip's son, Alexander the Great. Thereafter he returned to Athens where he established a school, the Lyceum; his followers are referred to as the Peripatetics, a name taken from the colonnade or *peripatos* of the school, where they used to walk and philosophise. Apart from works on nature, life and the mind, his extant works also include major philosophical works on logic and metaphysics, ethics and politics, and a literary work, the *Poetics*, which was the basis of Western literary theory.

ARRIAN/LUCIUS FLAVIUS ARRIANUS (c.86-160)

Born in Bithynia, he spent most of his life in Greece; elected to senatorial rank by the emperor Hadrian. One of the most distinguished writers of his day, also celebrated as philosopher; today principally known as historian. His most famous work deals with the time of Alexander the Great, in seven books from his accession to his death. His priority was excellence of style, not factual accuracy, and the tone throughout is eulogistic.

ASKLEPIOS or ASCLEPIUS (Greek) / AESCULAPIUS (Latin)

Hero and god of healing, taught by the centaur Chiron; had two sons, the physicians Machaon and Podalirius. Ancient authors fit him into two different genealogies, in both of which Apollo figures as father. Unlike other heroes, Asclepius was soon emancipated from a local grave and developed a god-like stature; during the 5th century already the sanctuaries at Cos and Epidaurus were famous: in Cos a school of physicians developed calling themselves the descendants of Asclepius or the Asclepiadae; to the 4th century belongs an oath sworn to Apollo, Asclepius, and his daughters Hygieia and Panacea. Other sanctuaries were at Tricca, Sicyon and Athens, Pergamum, and in the 3rd century even in Rome. The success of Asclepius was due to his appeal to the individual, in contrast to Apollo who showed a lofty indifference to the affairs of man (cf. the personal attachment of Aelius Aristides [q.v.] to Pergamene Asclepius). In iconography Asclepius is usually portrayed as a mature, bearded man, like Olympian Zeus, but with a milder facial expression. His attributes are the staff and a snake coiled around the staff.

ASCLEPIADES OF PRUSIAS (1st century BC)

Best known for his theory that the body is made out of fragile corpuscles moving through ducts distributed through the body, and when their movement is hindered, disease results. His theory formed the basis of the Methodism of Themison and Thessalus, but was fiercely attacked by Galen for denying the role of teleological activity in nature. However, he achieved considerable fame in his lifetime.

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AVENZOAR (c.1091-1162)

Born in Spain, he was of Arabic origin, an excellent physician and eminent philosopher. Opposed to mysticism and astrology, he was a very practical physician, believing that medicine should be based on experience, not speculation. His chief medical work, *Altersiv* (or *Theisir*), remained popular for centuries, and a Latin copy was printed in Venice in 1490. He disapproved of Avicenna's *Canon*.

AVERROES (1126-1198)

Born in Cordoba, Spain, he was better known for contributions in the field of philosophy, law and statesmanship than medicine, but he nevertheless produced medical works of standing, based to a large extent on the teachings of Aristotle, and on theory rather than clinical experience. His religious views aroused the animosity of Muslims and Christians, and he died an exile in Morocco.

AVICENNA (c.980-1037)

Probably the greatest of the Islamic physicians, he ranks among the great geniuses of all time, achieving eminence in medicine, philosophy, science, statesmanship and poetry. A Persian by birth, his 100 odd books are overshadowed by his great *Canon (al Qanun)*, one of the most famous medical textbooks ever written, and translated into Latin in Europe during the Renaissance.

CATO, MARCUS PORCIUS (234-149 BC) (‘Cato the Censor’)

Born of peasant ancestry in Tusculum; became a dominant figure in political and cultural life in Rome in the early 2nd century BC. Consul in 195, and as censor thereafter he passed sumptuary laws and tried to reverse the decline of traditional morality after the Second Punic War. Very hostile to all things Greek, especially Greek doctors and medicine. His treatise *On agriculture* contains advice to a young man who wants to enhance his public reputation by successful agriculture, and includes many medical recipes and prescriptions.

CELSUS, AULUS CORNELIUS (fl. in Rome c.14-37)

Lived during the reign of Tiberius; wrote an encyclopaedia in Latin on rhetoric, philosophy, law, the military and medicine, of which only the *De medicina* survived (containing *i.a.* discussions of dietetics, pathology, therapeutics, drug-lore and skeletal anatomy). Theory and practice of medicine exemplifies the Roman pragmatic approach, with a strong tradition of family medicine. Uncertain whether he was a doctor himself, but his knowledge of medical practice, especially of surgery, is remarkable.

**COLUMELLA, LUCIUS IUNIUS MODERATUS
(fl. AD 50)**

Born in Spain, author of the most systematic extant Roman agricultural manual in 12 books, treating *i.a.* the layout of the villa, the organisation of the slave workforce, arable cultivation, viticulture, animal husbandry, horticulture, wine and oil processing and food conservation.

CURTIUS RUFUS, QUINTUS (1st/2nd century AD)

Historian, wrote 10 books on Alexander the Great; the work is very rhetorical, contains many speeches and moralising comments and arbitrary attributions of motive. Switches from source to source, and sometimes blends them into a senseless farrago, yet preserves valuable information on e.g. Macedonian customs.

DIO CASSIUS (c.164-after 229)

Greek senator and author of an 80 book *History of Rome* from the foundation of the city to 229 (large sections lost). Born in Bithynia, had a distinguished senatorial career, reaching the consulship in 204 and again in 229 with the emperor Alexander Severus as colleague. The *History of Rome* is dominated by the change from the Republic to the Monarchy, often interpolating features of Dio's own time into earlier history; his overriding concern is with the respects in which emperors measured up to or fell short of senators' expectations.

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DIOCLES (4th century BC)

Placed by some ancient writers second in fame only to Hippocrates; perhaps a contemporary of Aristotle. Wrote influential works on anatomy, physiology, medical semiotics, prognostics and dietetics, but his writings survive only in quotations in other medical authors. Also famous for his practice — a type of bandage for the head was named after him, as well an instrument for removing arrow-heads.

DIODORUS SICULUS (1st century BC)

Born in Agyrium, Sicily. The author of the *Bibliothèque*, a universal history from mythological times to 60 BC. Only 15 of the original 40 books survive, the rest is preserved in fragments. The most extensively preserved history by a Greek historian from antiquity. He probably visited Egypt and also spent some time in Rome where he had access to Latin sources as well.

DIOSCORIDES (fl. in Rome c.41-68)

Wrote a compendium of all the *materia medica* then known from Greek medicine and other sources. Traveled widely; may have learned his medicine by practical experience while in the legions. His work describes some 700 plants and their practical use, and contains information on the medicinal uses of herbs, minerals and animal products.

ERASISTRATUS OF CEOS (fl. in Alexandria c.260 BC)

Younger contemporary of Herophilus (q.v.), and the only scientist other than the latter who was believed to have conducted systematic dissections of human cadavers; perhaps even vivisected convicted criminals. Great physiologist; came close to discovering circulation; gave the first accurate description of the heart valves. Recognized that every organ had arteries, veins and nerves.

EUSEBIUS (260-339)

Prolific writer, biblical scholar, founder of the Christian genre of Church history, the most important contemporary source for the reign of Constantine I. Bishop of Caesarea from c.313 until his death. He played a significant role in ecclesiastical politics in the eastern empire. Refuted pagan philosophy,

and saw the Roman Empire as the necessary background for the establishment of Christianity. Eusebius's integrity as historian has often been challenged, but his aim was not so much objectivity as persuasion.

GALEN OF PERGAMUM (129-c.200)

Studied medicine at Pergamum, Smyrna, Corinth and Alexandria. Served as gladiatorial doctor at Pergamum before going to Rome, where he stayed from 162-166 when he was driven out by the hostility of competitors or fear of the plague. Summoned by Marcus Aurelius in 169, he became the physician to the heir-apparent, Commodus. Prolific writer who had the ability of synthesis. His work forms the greatest corpus of material we possess of classical medicine. Very productive as anatomist and physiologist, but dissected animals only. Based his pathology on the theory of the four humours. He was highly regarded in his lifetime both as philosopher and doctor, and had an enormous influence in later times.

AULUS GELLIUS (c.123-c.165)

Studied literature; visited Athens, later functioned as a judge in private cases in Rome. Wrote *Attic Nights* during long winter nights in Athens — a collection of various tidbits of law, grammar, history, philosophy and literary criticism. Probably published under Marcus Aurelius.

HERODOTUS (5th century BC)

Born in Halicarnassus, west coast of modern Turkey. Greek historian, writer of the earliest historical narrative that we possess, starting with the fall of the Lydian kingdom in 545 BC and carrying on to the Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens 431-404 BC, but the main emphasis is on the war "between the Greeks and non-Greeks", i.e. the Persian Wars of the early 5th century BC. Traveled widely; his works are a rich source of information on a myriad topics, often expressing wonder at human achievement.

HEROPHILUS OF CHALCEDON (c.330-260 BC)

Alexandrian physician; he and Erasistratus were the only ancient physicians to perform systematic scientific dissections of human cadavers, and probably also vivisectionary experiments on convicted criminals. Among his anatomical achievements were the discovery of the nerves, different layers of the eye, a

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description of the human liver and the discovery of the ovaries (but without determining their true function). His treatise *On pulses* became the foundation of most ancient pulse theories.

JOSEPHUS, FLAVIUS (AD 37/8-?)

A Greek historian, but also a Jewish priest of aristocratic descent and a political leader in pre-70 Jerusalem. In the Jewish War in the late seventies he played an ambiguous role, and was after the war given Roman citizenship, a house to live in Rome, and a pension. Much of the seven books of the *Jewish War*, treating the Jewish history from the Maccabean revolt to AD 66, was written between 75-79. The *Jewish Antiquities*, written when he was already in Rome, is more pro-Roman in order to favourably impress Roman leaders; it treats the history of the Jews from the Creation to just before the outbreak of the revolt.

MAIMONIDES (1135-1208)

Born a Jew, he fled from Spain because of religious persecution and settled in Cairo where he became physician to Saladin, the Saracin leader. The sun of Islamic culture was already setting when he made his momentous contributions in the fields of medicine and philosophy (in Arabic) and Jewish theology. Opposed to all magic and astrology, his medical works reflected a basic search for scientific knowledge, and were later widely admired in Hebrew and Latin translations.

PLINY THE ELDER/GAIUS PLINIUS SECUNDUS (23-79)

Procurator in various parts of the Empire; his last post was admiral of the fleet at Misenum; he died from fumes when sailing for a closer look of the eruption of Vesuvius (q.v.). His *Natural History* was dedicated to the emperor Titus in 77. It is a goldmine for a great variety of matters, such as the history of sculpture, art, folklore and medicine. Uncritical of his sources, and a great appetite for the extraordinary and for antiquarian *minutiae*.

PLINY THE YOUNGER/GAIUS PLINIUS CAECILIUS SECUNDUS (c.61-c.112)

Brought up by his uncle, Pliny the Elder; practiced with distinction in the civil courts of his day. Became consul in 100 and held various imperial administrative appointments thereafter. Published 10 books of letters, among which two letters giving the first ever scientific description of a volcanic eruption, that of Vesuvius in which his uncle died.

PLUTARCH (c.46-127)

Philosopher and biographer; studied in Athens, a priest of Delphi for last 30 years. Visited Egypt and Italy, lectured in Rome. Great interest in ethics. Wrote *i.a.* the *Moralia*, a collection of treatises on popular moral philosophy, and the still popular *Parallel lives*, in which his first goal was not continuous political history, but to exemplify individual virtue (or vice) in the career of great men. Contains many anecdotes which make Plutarch's work a mine of information on many topics.

PROCOPIUS (6th century AD)

A Greek historian; obtained a post on the staff of the emperor Justinian's general Belisarius in 527, and often performed difficult and dangerous missions for his commander for whom he had a great admiration. Together with Belisarius he eventually incurred the wrath of the emperor's influential wife Theodora. Principal work is the *History of the wars of Justinian* in 8 books, much of which is based on eyewitness experiences. His claim to truthful reporting is somewhat vitiated by his *Secret history* which is a virulent, uncritical and often scurrilous attack on the whole policy of Justinian and on the character of Justinian and his wife.

PYTHAGORAS (mid-6th century BC)

One of the most mysterious and influential figures in Greek intellectual history — became the epitome of the “divine man”, at the same time sage, a seer, a teacher and benefactor of the human race. Founded the Pythagorean society with secret doctrines and passwords, and beliefs in the transmigration of the soul and special dietary restrictions. The scientific tradition ascribes to him various discoveries, *i.a.* the famous geometric theorem which bears his name, and the musical consonances 2:1, 3:2 and 4:3 representing the length

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of the strings corresponding to the octave and the basic harmonies of the fifth and fourth.

RHAZES (c.841-926)

The first of the great physicians to emerge from the Golden Age of Islam; he was a Persian who wrote in Arabic. A person of advanced learning, he wrote 237 major works, excelling not only in medicine, but also in theology and the natural sciences. Influenced by Hippocrates and Galen, he was an excellent clinician, and probably the first to clearly differentiate between epidemic pox and measles.

RUFUS OF EPHESUS (c.110-c.180)

Physician; studied at Alexandria, practiced at Ephesus, a famous medical centre in the 2nd century AD. From his numerous writings only the treatise on anatomical nomenclature survived. Good anatomist, described the optic chiasma, and wrote a book on the pulse.

SCRIPTORES HISTORIAE AUGUSTAE (3rd/4th century)

A title given to the writer(s) of a collection of biographies of Roman emperors and usurpers from AD 117-284 (Hadrian to Carinus) with a lacuna for the years 244-259. Modeled on Suetonius's *Lives of the twelve Caesars* (q.v.); it purports to be written by six different authors who lived in the time of Diocletian and Constantine I, but was according to more recent theories written by a single person during the last decade of the 4th century AD. The *Historia Augusta* has never enjoyed great authority among scholars, although it is our only source for the history of the emperors of the late 2nd and the 3rd century.

SORANUS OF EPHESUS (c.98-c.138 AD)

Physician under Trajan and Hadrian; studied in Alexandria and practised at Rome. Among his 20 odd works, his *Gynecology* contains valuable information on gynaecology and obstetrics in the Roman Empire; remained influential in the Latin West until the Middle Ages. His image of the ideal midwife became famous: literate, sober, discreet, free from superstition, acquainted with both theory and practice. He shared the views of the Methodists, but in his

classification of diseases gave more space for individual variations between patients.

SUETONIUS/GAIUS SUETONIUS TRANQUILLUS (c.70-c.130)

Latin biographer of the *Lives of the twelve Caesars* (from Julius Caesar to Domitian); held important posts in the imperial civil service under Trajan and Hadrian, which enabled him to have access to the imperial archives. For unknown reasons dismissed from his office in 120 together with Septicius Clarus to whom the imperial biographies were dedicated. The biographies are arranged thematically rather than chronologically, and are interspersed with anecdotes. Not being an historian, his interest was not in presenting a moralistic or didactic account, but rather in material illustrating personal performance and personality. Not critical of his sources.

TACITUS, PUBLIUS (?) CORNELIUS (c.56-c.118)

Most famous of the Latin historians; had an uninterrupted career under Vespasian, Titus and Domitian up to the consulship and obtained the proconsulship of Asia in 112-3. Published *i.a.* the *Agricola* (a biography of his father-in-law, governor of Britain), the *Germania* (on the public and private life of the Germans), the *Histories* (covering the period 69-96 AD, but the last books are lost) and the *Annals* (covering the period AD 14-69). Did not write according to the norms of modern historiography — his aim was to provide a narrative that will hold the reader's attention; his interest is in the psychological motives behind actions rather than in geographical and chronological detail. Throughout his works a nostalgia for the lost freedom of the republic is evident.

THUCYDIDES (late 5th century BC)

Most famous of the Greek historians. Author of the (incomplete) history of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta (431-404 BC) in 8 books. He caught the plague but recovered (hence his graphic description of the symptoms of the plague, still discussed today); was a general in the Peloponnesian War, was defeated by the Spartan general Brasidas in 424 and exiled thereafter; returned 20 years later after the war was over, and died within a few years. Like other ancient historians he aimed at exactness, but admits that in the speeches which he inserted to reveal the working of men's minds, exact-

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ness was beyond the powers of his memory and thus he had to trust to his historical imagination.

VARRO, MARCUS TERENTIUS (116-27BC)

His oeuvre comprises about 620 books, making him one of Rome's greatest scholars. His writings included nearly every branch of enquiry. Only two of his works survived, the *De lingua Latina* (25 books on etymology, morphology, syntax etc.), and the *De re rustica* on farming, dealing with cattle- and sheepbreeding, other farm animals etc.

VITRUVIUS POLLIO (late 1st century BC)

Roman architect and military engineer, in which capacity he served under Julius Caesar. His fame rests on his treatise *De architectura* in 10 books, which discusses general matters such as town planning, building materials, water supply, geometry, astronomy, the Greek orders of architecture (the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian), etc.

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