



## Paula De Vos, *Compound Remedies: Galenic Pharmacy from the Ancient Mediterranean to New Spain*

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021. Pp. 404. ISBN 978-0-8229-4649-6 \$50.00 (hardback).

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In *Compound Remedies*, the inventory lists of an eighteenth-century apothecary's shop in Mexico City, New Spain, provide historian of science and medicine Paula De Vos with a lens through which to view the global and long-lasting tradition of Galenic pharmacy. The shop, owned by Jacinto de Herrera y Campos, contained hundreds of simples, dozens of compound medicines and alchemical remedies, and equipment and medical books. Although the inventory lists form the core material basis of her study, the book is not centred on the local specificities of pharmaceutical practice in New Spain, as readers of colonial histories of science and medicine might expect. Instead, the lists inspire her to depart on an ambitious and broad genealogical project that emphasizes the stability, robustness and flexibility that allowed Galenic pharmacy to persist across time and maintain its continuity while incorporating new materials and interacting with traditions in vastly different localities and time periods.

This approach builds on De Vos's critique of recent historiographical tendencies that, in their attempts to put the multi-centredness of early modern knowledge production and circulation as well as the contributions of indigenous knowledge traditions front and centre, inadvertently reinforce binaries between 'centres' and 'peripheries' of knowledge production. De Vos explicitly makes this her mission: rather than asking what makes Herrera's pharmacy *different* from apothecary's shops in Europe, she refocuses the lens to understand the materials as part of a tradition that has never been purely 'Western' and has always been 'in transit'.

The book also makes a sustained effort to provide a synthetic treatment of the key concepts, authors, texts, materials and practices that characterize the Galenic pharmaceutical tradition. Over five chapters, De Vos puts Galenic pharmacy's core categories and material practices into focus and traces their development 'through shifting political bounds and shaped by evolving contexts' (p. 14), revealing a 'global history of the transmission of materials, knowledge, and techniques over centuries' (p. 4) that stretches from the Mediterranean to the Near and Middle East all the way across the Atlantic to colonial Mexico. This approach also acknowledges the lack of attention that historians of early modern pharmacy have paid to medieval authors of the Islamic world, such as Ibn Sina, often known as Avicenna, or Ibn Masawaih, known as Mesue, and the significance of their works for the tradition's theoretical and practical development. De Vos's own engagement with these contributions and their significance constitutes an important step in remedying this situation, and she calls for further study in this still inadequately understood area.

The first three chapters define central concepts such as 'simples' and their relation to *dunamis* – their medicinal power – and describe the procedures of 'selection' and 'correction' of simples as well as the common equipment used. Finally, she delves into the intricacies of 'polypharmacy', the mixture of various simples into compound medicines. These chapters also trace the development of these concepts from Galen's works to the

contributions of the medieval Islamic practitioners and the Latin translation centres in Toledo and Salerno. Chapter 4 confronts the early modern Galenic tradition with the world of Nahua materia medica and examines bioprospecting projects in the context of the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Chapter 5 examines the interactions of Galenic pharmacy with the tradition of alchemical pharmacy in the late seventeenth century and the emergence of the ‘chemico-Galenic’ compromise.

De Vos’s clear and methodical presentation of each topic is supported by tables and other illustrative materials. Additionally, several valuable supplements make this book a solid reference for research and teaching: four maps illustrate the wide geographical and temporal reach of her project, and six appendixes (two of them available online) will be a welcome source for researchers, teachers and students alike.

With its incisive and timely contributions to debates surrounding the global turn and focus on material and artisanal practice, as well as its erudite and patient presentation of source material, De Vos’s book will be of great interest to readers of histories of pharmacy and medicine.

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## **Peter H. Hoffenberg, *A Science of Our Own: Exhibitions and the Rise of Australian Public Science***

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*A Science of Our Own* chronicles the importance of exhibitions to the emergence of Australian public science in the second half of the nineteenth century. In his conclusion Hoffenberg asks, ‘Why not consider the exhibition experience as part of the many networks and localities connecting nineteenth-century groups, interests, regions, and other historical or contextual factors?’ (p. 133). Throughout this book, he argues that we should do exactly that.

The book builds upon a similarly titled article from 2011 (“‘A Science of our Own?’ Nineteenth-Century Exhibitions, Australians and the History of Science’, in Brett Bennett and Joseph Hodge (eds.), *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks across the British Empire, 1800–1970*, pp. 110–39). The article is reflected in the introduction and first chapter and contains the central argument that exhibitions were not only an important platform for displaying science, but also a way to ‘address fundamental colonial dilemmas’ (p. 38).

The first chapter introduces the perspective at the forefront of this book: that of the Australian settlers and their struggle to establish an independent identity, in relation both to the British Empire and to Indigenous Australians. It also emphasizes the fluidity of the concepts of imperial, British, national, colonial and Australian and the different ways in which the Australian colonies identified themselves. In Chapter 2, we meet some of the scientists who helped shape Australian exhibits and learn about the ways