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Paula S. De Vos. *Compound Remedies: Galenic Pharmacy from the Ancient Mediterranean to New Spain*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021. xvi, 385 pp., illus. \$50.00.

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Paula De Vos's fascinating story is that of the Mexico City pharmacy of apothecary Jacinto de Herrera y Campos, whose possessions had been sequestered and inventoried as part of a criminal investigation in 1755. De Vos uses the inventory (translated in an abridged form in Appendix 4) as a structuring tool to investigate five categories of pharmaceutical objects and attendant activities (simple drugs; pharmaceutical equipment; compound drugs; *materia medica* of the Nahuas; alchemical drugs), and their history through the eighteenth century. Indeed, De Vos's ambitious aim is to provide a *longue durée* study of Galenic pharmacy, from its origins in Graeco-Roman Antiquity to the Early Modern period, to show its resilience and adaptability, and its ability to defy overly simple dichotomies, such as those between "Orient" and "Occident," and "ancient" and "modern." De Vos invites us to challenge our assumptions regarding colonial histories of science, our expectation to learn about what was different, to see "the colonial as derivative, peripheral, 'exotic'—valuable only as a supplement to a story already known, and one original to Europe" (p. 13). De Vos's global history of the Galenic tradition successfully shows it to have always been "in transit" (p. 15), always changing, and Galen himself (the Greek-physician from Pergamum active at

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Rome in the second and early third century CE) a point of transit in the creation of the tradition, rather than its creator.

The work is divided into five chapters, each devoted to one of the five categories of pharmaceutical objects found in the Herrera pharmacy. Chapter 1 examines simples: pharmaceutical ingredients, of vegetable, animal, and mineral origin, to be consumed either on their own or as part of compound remedies. She shows how the mostly Mediterranean and Indo-Mediterranean basis of the Galenic pharmacy was expanded upon in two waves, first with the expansion of the Islamic Empires then with the expansion of the Spanish Empire. Chapter 2 focuses on the actions required to optimize the powers of these simples: “election” (the selection of the best simples) and “correction” (the manipulation of these simples) through trituration, lavation (washing), infusion, and decoction. Chapter 3 studies compound remedies (remedies made of several simples), the rationale given by pharmaceutical authors for compounding, and the various ways to organise them in pharmaceutical works—by the Early Modern period, they were classified by method, that is, by the way they were produced. In Chapter 4, De Vos turns to the *materia medica* of the Nahuas, the indigenous people of Mexico and neighbouring modern countries, and demonstrates that Galenic pharmacy only assimilated a small percentage of the substances (mostly plants) considered pharmacologically useful in Nahua pharmacy. Finally, Chapter Five studies the development of alchemical pharmacy, that is, the use of alchemical processes to produce remedies, and the ways in which a “chemico-Galenic compromise” (p. X), blending aspects of the alchemical and Galenic tradition, was found in the Early Modern period. De Vos concludes with some insights into the end of the Galenic tradition, noting nevertheless that Galenic pharmacy has not entirely disappeared and might indeed be making a resurgence. Galenic pharmacy is dead—long live Galenic pharmacy.

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This is a work of great erudition. De Vos draws upon a vast array of sources: inventories, prescriptions, and printed or manuscript books, ranging in date from the fifth century BCE (the treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus, but there are also mentions here and there of earlier important traditions) to the eighteenth century and beyond, and written in Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Spanish, with some mentions of works in Syriac and Hebrew. De Vos shows how the founder of the Galenic tradition, Galen, left ambiguities in his treatises that codified pharmaceutical knowledge. Arabic authors dealt with many of the ambiguities regarding the powers (*dunamis* in Greek) of simple drugs and the need for compounding medicines. These developments were then taken on board and further developed in Europe in the later Middle Ages; one of De Vos's contributions is the emphasis she puts on the works of the pseudonymous John Mesue, active in the late thirteenth century, in the development of the Galenic tradition. De Vos' extensive research is distilled into a dense and yet highly readable and enjoyable text, accompanied by numerous tables, which summarise findings and give statistics, and well-selected illustrations. I particularly admired De Vos' art of listing, giving snippets of inventories at well-chosen places in her writing. The historian of pharmacy often deals with lists, and it requires skills to convey this to readers, to give them a sense of the joy inherent in approaching those lists, appreciating the choices that went into their production, and to make them come to life through evocation of the smells and other sensations involved in the handling of pharmaceutical products.

As with all global and *longue durée* history, there is scope to critique De Vos' work from the vantage point of the reviewer's smaller field of knowledge (Graeco-Roman pharmacy, in my case). I shall not indulge in this unfair exercise. One slight criticism I have of De Vos' work, however, is that, however much we learn about the contents of Herrera's pharmacy, I could not quite picture how it would have worked within its community. There is relatively little here about social history. Certainly, DeVos incorporates insights from recent

historiography on artisans, since apothecaries can be classified as such, but references to those who frequented the pharmacy, the consumers of medicines, remain relatively few. Perhaps De Vos's sources do not allow to answer questions about these customers, although at times she seems to indicate that they do (see for instance on p. 144: "There also appears to be no correlation between the cost and type of medicines used for rich versus poor patients"). Or perhaps we cannot expect a single work to be everything. This is a sophisticated, erudite book that challenges our assumptions. It will enthral newcomers to the field of pharmaceutical history and offer experts much on which to reflect.