mathematics there is, is simple and elegant and introduced not for its own sake but to clarify a situation which words would leave obscure. The illustrations are prolific and excellent, a matter for little surprise when one considers the price of the volume.

The neurophysiology of this troublesome tissue is described with the care and detail to be expected from someone who has contributed to our knowledge with Rodieck's distinction, and is remarkably up to date. It is perhaps this exhaustive treatment that tends to make reading the book sometimes exhausting. The neuroanatomy is described adequately: something of a bonus is contained in the appendix which includes an original translation of Ramon y Cajal's classic by Deborah Maguire and the author.

It is when one comes to problems not overtly related to vision that one misses the touch that would gild the lily. Retinal vasculature is considered *en passant*, but raises, of course, important problems even in the absence of pathology. The sections on human colour vision and photometry entail repetitions, the absence of which would have shortened, homogenized, and, therefore, improved the book. The index is so-so: I had to look up what was meant by "placei", bemoaning how much Latin I had forgotten. Not to worry; it stands for placebo. I dislike chapter references in the author index: pages would be more useful by far.

Minor grumbles of this sort should not discourage potential readers. I hope that the next edition is already in preparation: it deserves many more.

R. A. Weale

Ancient Ophthalmological Agents (Acta historica scientiarum naturalium et medicinalium, Vol. 31). By H. NIELSEN. 1974. Pp. 117, 21 figs, refs. Odense University Press, Denmark (40 Dan. Kr)

The word "collyria", literally meaning little lozenge-shaped loaves, was used to signify eye-ointments, which from early classical times were usually dispensed in this form. Nowadays the term is still used in North Europe (although recently abandoned by the British National Formulary) to mean eye-lotions, and in France or Italy to cover any form of medication for the eye.

Collyria were not restricted to the eye, for Hippocrates recommended the insertion of collyria against disorders of the womb, and Celsus preferred skittle-shaped collyria as treatment for fistulae; but the eye has always been a favoured receptacle for a wide miscellany of nostra. Thus Galen suggested a collyrium for removing hairs from around the eyes which resembled fish-scales and was made from hedgehogs' gall, and with others even more fanciful, the classical pharmacopoeia has generally defied any rational assessment.

Happily over 250 have been disinterred, usually made of soap-stone, and bearing the mirror-wise designation of the ingredients, which were scattered around the Roman empire; and a particularly large cache was recently found near Rheims, the capital of "Belgica Secunda", which formed the supply-base for the Roman army of occupation. From these it is evident that such collyria were extensively used. Most of the ingredients seem wildly irrelevant, some even date from the Ebers Papyrus, but the frequent use of Cadmia (containing zinc and acetate) and of alum shows the need for astringents, that of copper reflected the prevalence of trachoma, and that of opium the need for analgesia.

This impressive monograph leads us agreeably through the pharmaceutical jungle, and is a model of diligence and scholarship.

P. D. Trevor-Roper

Ophthalmology, By K. WYBAR. 2nd ed., 1974. Pp. 347, 76 figs, 8 pl. Ballière Tindall, London (£2.50)

The scope of this book is greater than the main audience strictly requires, so that junior trainee ophthalmologists may start with it, and their seniors revise from it. The eighteen chapters are well set out, with headings and subheadings which make reading and understanding much easier for the student.