

Book Reviews

Roger French, *Ancients and moderns in the medical sciences: from Hippocrates to Harvey*, Variorum Collected Studies series, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, pp. 304, illus., £52.50 (hardback 0-86078-834-2).

Luis García-Ballester, *Medicine in a multicultural society: Christian, Jewish and Muslim practitioners in the Spanish kingdoms, 1222–1610*, Variorum Collected Studies series: CS702, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001, pp. 390, £62.50 (hardback 0-86078-845-8).

There is more than one way to Heaven, so it is believed, and more than one way to the study of medieval medicine. These two volumes in the Variorum Collected Studies series show the very different preferences of two friends and collaborators in approaching similar material. Both collections are valuable as they bring together essays scattered across a wide range of books and journals, and anyone interested in the development of medicine and medical ideas down to Harvey will benefit greatly from reading them.

Both are distinguished by a fine attention to detail. The strength of Roger French, who died suddenly in May, lay always in his very careful reading and exposition of texts, exemplified here by his work on Gentile, Zerbi, Alfred of Shareshill, and Berengario. Few could match his awareness of the different styles within medical writing, and not least within one of his favourite authors, William Harvey. He emphasized over and over again that the way in which traditional material was transmitted will have often modified the way in which that message was received. Galenic anatomy, as a series of essays shows, appeared differently at different stages of history, depending on the way in which the Galenic text was presented—as a summary, as an abbreviated translation, or as a series of

comments appended to diagrams. French's stress on the weight of the learned tradition as it existed in the fifteenth and sixteenth century is salutary, not least because it focuses attention on the variety of strategies needed to effect change. Anatomy, as he was fond of reminding us, is a peculiar practice, and its usefulness for medicine far from self-evident, even with the backing of the authority of Galen. Breaking faith with the remedies of Avicenna or Pliny to return to Dioscorides required courage as well as learning in the face of opposition that was far from foolish in its counterattack.

French's concentration on a few treatises and his preference for an approach that illuminates the history of ideas are complemented by this first selection from the prolific writings of the late Luis García-Ballester. (A second volume concentrating on Galen and Galenism will follow soon.) They are concerned with the social, medical, and ideological context in which medicine came to be practised in late-Medieval Spain. Here Christians, Muslims and Jews quarrelled, or collaborated, over the proper way to interpret Galen or to treat patients. This was a multicultural society, and García-Ballester, aided by colleagues from other disciplines, tries to tease out the different strands that made up its medicine. One can only applaud the sensitivity with which are analysed the different claims of Jews, Muslims, and Christians (and various combinations of *conversos*) to possess medical knowledge. At the same time, there is always a firm grasp of the institutional structures that constrain intellectual debate—universities, licensing authorities, and even the Inquisition—and which give the medicine of medieval Spain a very different profile from that of France or England. Nor does García-Ballester lose sight of the medical consequences of the actions or the theories of his subjects. Whether to treat by drugs or diet was a

Book Reviews

dilemma with potentially fatal consequences if the wrong choice were made.

Both volumes together show how much has been achieved in the study of medieval medicine during the last thirty years, to which both scholars contributed greatly. It is no longer enough to edit or present a text, as if its meaning required little further elucidation or as if its significance as an index of medical progress (or the reverse) could be easily determined. The ideas themselves are framed and discussed within a particular intellectual context by doctors trained in a long tradition of philosophical and logic enquiry. This is true not only of Italy and Paris, but also of Spain, the riches of whose archives and libraries are now visible at last. Above all, there is a renewed emphasis on the individual medical practitioner, less as a heroic figure than as one faced with the realities of patients and their illnesses. The range of skills required to work intensively with medieval or renaissance texts is considerable, as both authors show, yet the rewards in reconstructing the medical ideas and practices of so distant a period are no less great.

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Maria Michela Sassi, *The science of man in ancient Greece*, trans. Paul Tucker, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2001, pp. xxx, 224, illus., £21.50, \$34.00 (hardback 0-226-73530-3).

It needs to be stressed, in order to do justice to the author, that the present volume is the rather belated English translation of a book published in Italian in 1988 (or rather, an updated version thereof). It was therefore an early landmark study, taking an approach that was new and adventurous at the time, even though by

now it has come to appear excessively familiar.

To use an anachronistic term, the subject matter of Maria Michela Sassi's book is ancient Greek anthropology. The strong interest in human nature inherent in Greek culture and an awareness of differences, in particular those in gender, social class and ethnic group, led to the establishing of rules for the assessment of signs as humans became the object of conjecture and classification. The standard human type—the free Greek male—was defined by those who were different.

In chapter 1, Sassi asserts that we can reconstruct the “strategies of exclusion” used against women and marginal figures such as boys, slaves, and occasionally craftsmen, peasants or philosophers, as well as barbarians. Much of the discussion here revolves around the ways in which light or dark skin colour appears (in literature as well as in art) as a marker in the distinction between, for example, male and female or different ethnic groups.

Chapter 2 discusses ancient physiognomics and its aim of inferring a person's character from his or her physical features, in particular the attempt to draw conclusions from perceived similarities with animals. (Thus a man resembling a lion would be courageous.) Chapter 3 examines the way in which ethnography interpreted ethnic diversity: Sassi claims that, while the physiological study of women was dominated by male prejudice, the exclusion of barbarians was not as universal and absolute as that of women. Diversity was explained by a reduction to elements and their respective qualities (hot, cold, dry and wet). In ancient ethno-geography Greece was perceived as the centre with a perfect balance of qualities, while all barbarians suffered from the excess or lack of one or the other quality. As in animals, these qualities are reflected not only in the individual's character, but also in the characteristics of entire ethnic groups. Thus the inhabitants of northern Europe are