

Book Reviews

and social considerations determine the degree to which the precepts of learned medicine are accepted or followed, but the contents of those precepts do not admit of modification. Despite the rhetoric of demonstrating that patients were “not helpless or passive in the face of disease” (p. 257), this account permits them only the latitude to accept or reject a system constructed by others. Nevertheless, Montford has provided us with a thorough piece of research that carefully deploys the available evidence to paint a new picture of the medical practices to be found in the convents of the medieval friars.

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Vern L Bullough, *Universities, medicine and science in the medieval west*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, pp. xiii, 298, illus., £57.50 (hardback 0-86078-943-8).

Vern Bullough, long familiar to medical historians as a historian of sexual behaviour, first made his name as a medieval historian. This volume collects his papers on medieval medicine, both published and unpublished. They deal with the teaching of medicine in the newly created universities, the development of the medical profession, and ideas on sex and gender. There are also a few minor pieces, publishing small documents, and an introductory chapter taking the story from Antiquity to the first western universities and briefly commenting on recent scholarship. The collection is given coherence by the author’s insistence on the relevance of examples from medieval history to more modern debates.

But there are serious problems. Bullough’s studies of medieval medical teaching were, when they first appeared over forty years ago, pieces of solid scholarship that brought to an anglophone audience in an accessible form the basic material

from non-English sources. They quickly and deservedly became standard references. But time has moved on, and the new Chapter I hardly scratches the surface of the substantial work done since the 1960s. All his universities, Bologna, Paris, Montpellier, Oxford and Cambridge, have since been the subject of major studies in English that have extended our knowledge far beyond what is reported here. The papers on professionalization were also subsumed into the author’s own book on the creation of the medical profession in the Middle Ages.

For its time, all this was sound medieval scholarship, following in the footsteps of Charles Haskins and Hastings Rashdall, but it broke little new ground. By contrast, the most innovative paper in the collection, on the relationship between medieval universities and the creation of “achievement”, is also the most flawed, as even the author is forced to admit. It represents one of the early attempts by a medical historian to subject data to a computer analysis, and was a spin-off from another project dealing with Hanoverian Scotland. The minor papers at the end of the volume are just that, the typical fruit of a medievalist’s hunt through archives, interesting but requiring others to put them into the proper wider context.

Had this collection appeared thirty years ago (for only three of the papers were delivered or published after 1968), it would have been warmly welcomed. Alas, for all their merits, most of its contents have been superseded, either through the accession of new material or, more often, because the debate has moved on. A more detailed introduction, bringing each article up to date, would have enhanced their value, while at the same time placing them in the context of the time in which they were written.

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