

findings make for tedious reading, but also for conclusions about medieval diet and nutrition anchored, for once, in facts. And these essays leave a surprising impression: the medieval diet was more varied, more delicious, and healthier than has been supposed, with all but the poorest having access to fish and fowl, fruit, vegetables, and meat, most of the time, in most places.

Part I surveys the documentable food-stuffs of medieval England. Grain, including wheat, rye, barley, oats, beans and vetch, provided the bulk of calories as bread, ale and pottage. Vegetables and fruit were the next main constituent of the medieval diet; most people (including town dwellers) cultivated small (quarter acre) gardens of vegetables and fruit. These supplied not only the traditional leeks, onions and garlic, but also plums, walnuts, cherries, pears, apples and, in the warmer south, grapes, and even saffron. In addition to home-grown produce, the remains of figs, raisins and almonds in various sites suggest access to imported Mediterranean produce.

Both archaeological remains and documents confirm that beef and mutton were the most important meats in the medieval diet, though pork was popular, especially in the pre-Norman period. Fish—saltwater and freshwater—trapped in rivers, farmed in ponds, or fished in the sea, had an important place in the diet; cod, herring and eel bones being especially prevalent in digs. Everyone kept and ate chickens and, to a lesser extent, ducks and geese. Wild fowl, by contrast, was the prerogative of the upper classes. Indeed, the aristocrats seem to have eaten almost anything with wings, including seabirds and larks, though not birds of prey (or crows). Meat of the hunt—boar, hare and especially venison—was also mainly the food of the upper classes.

Part II covers medieval nutrition, which was more dependent on climate and season than is the modern, for cultural, medical, and agricultural reasons. Thus little meat was eaten in spring, because of Lent; in summer, when cows and chickens were producing well, the consumption of milk and eggs went up, and pork consumption, thought to be unhealthy in

summer, went down. Many special foods were reserved for religious celebrations, especially Christmas and Easter. Despite, or perhaps because of, these seasonal variations, medieval nutrition does not seem to have been as poor as the common canard would have it. At any rate, palaeopathology has not been able to document much vitamin deficiency or disease: medieval skeletons are no shorter than pre-twentieth century European skeletons, nor are they commonly iron-deficient, scorbutic or tuberculous.

It was a pleasure to examine such careful documentation of medieval life, and to find conclusions at odds with the fixed idea that life in the medieval period was poor, brutish and short. I recommend that a variety of scholars take the time to read and assimilate the conclusions of this volume. Perhaps then we can lay to rest, and even inter (for future research) the attractive but, apparently, wrong-headed idea of a premodern population hungry for the invention of industrial farming.

**Victoria Sweet,**

University of California, San Francisco

**Jean A Givens, Karen M Reeds, and Alain Touwaide** (eds), *Visualizing medieval medicine and natural history, 1200–1550*, AVISTA Studies in the History of Medieval Technology, Science and Art, vol. 5, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006, pp. xx, 278, illus., £55.00 (hardback 978-0-7546-5296-0).

The essays contained within this collection derive from sessions sponsored by AVISTA and the History of Science Society at the 2003 International Congress for Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, and by the International Congress of Medieval Art at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the College Art Association. The volume brings together research stemming from a current vibrant interest in the history of medical and scientific illustration. The editors introduce the collection as, “a conversation among scholars in fields at the intersection of the history of art, science, and medicine” (p. xvii),

and indeed it is rare to come across a collected volume which sustains such consistent quality and coherent discussion within such breadth of theme. This is in part because of two recurrent topics in the book, the representation of plants (whether in herbal or botanical compilations) in the chapters by Alain Touwaide, Jean Givens, Karen Reeds and Claudia Swan, and the contribution of Leonardo da Vinci, in a trio of essays by Monica Azzolini, Piers Britton and Karen Reeds. This sense of an ongoing conversation is enhanced by the recurrence of certain manuscripts, the reiteration of shared historical concerns throughout the book, and the successful evocation of continuities which extend from the medieval to the early modern period.

This is a beautiful, intriguing and thought-provoking collection of essays. Every one has been written elegantly and with clarity, an impressive feat given the complex nature of many of the manuscript transmissions discussed. The book is also generously illustrated (though it is a shame not to have colour illustrations at some pertinent points, references are given, wherever possible, to help the reader access colour reproductions). All the essays weave together their pictorial evidence carefully in order to reach some important new conclusions. I would highlight in particular the contributions of Alain Touwaide—who suggests possibilities for the exchange of learning between Byzantines and Latins during the thirteenth-century occupation of Constantinople—and Monica Azzolini—who counteracts the traditional image of Leonardo da Vinci as an isolated genius by situating him firmly in the context of a vibrant Milanese medical community.

If the first strength of this collection lies in the detail of each case study, the second is in its constant engagement with a set of theoretical and methodological problems critical to this interdisciplinary study of the scientific image. The tone is set by Peter Murray Jones's opening essay, which demands that we, "consider the relationship of image, word, and medicine afresh" (p. 1). Common themes and questions which span the book include the practical utility or function of these images; their

transmission, adaptation and creation in different contexts and for different audiences; the relationship between the textual and the visual, the image and reality. Above all the collection causes the reader to ask how these manuscripts and images would have been made and how they might have been read. In Karen Reeds's words: "For any given image, we always have to ask: utility to whom? Fidelity to what end?" (p. 236). Claudia Swan's final essay acts neatly as an epilogue, returning to the questions raised at the start by Peter Murray Jones, and in turn posing a fundamental question: why were these images produced at all?

The book will of course attract scholars of medieval and early modern medicine and natural history. In the broader questions raised by this collection, however, there lies significance for a much wider readership, for those interested in the history of the book as much as those concerned with the history of the image.

**Caroline Proctor,**  
University of Warwick

**Donatella Bartolini,** *Medici e comunità: esempi dalla terraferma veneta dei secoli XVI e XVII*, Miscellanea di Studi e Memorie, XXXVII, Venezia, Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Venezie, 2006, pp. xii, 279, €25.00 (paperback).

This is the most complete study to date of "the town physician" (*medico condotto*), the medical practitioner paid by the municipality to treat free of charge the citizens of the locality, who was a key figure in the provision of medical services of many Italian and European communities in the late medieval and early modern period.

Drawing on an impressive range of sources, the author reconstructs the development of the *medico condotto* in the north-eastern part of the Venetian state, an area which stretches from the lagoon (Mestre) to the Prealps (Belluno, Feltre) and therefore includes both mountain and lowland regions. The position