

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

## Book Reviews

brave but stupid, those living in hot countries intelligent but cowardly, etc.

The categorization of the same signs in medical theory and practice is investigated in chapter 4: they are used to construct psycho-physical types and observed, especially in the Hippocratic *Epidemics*, in connection with the predisposition to certain illnesses. Sassi makes much of the fact that the famous passage describing the *facies hippocratica* of the critically ill patient shows no concern with diagnosis, but it is precisely the Hippocratic author's point that certain signs are typical whatever the illness, and it would be difficult to sustain that the Hippocratic physician was not interested in providing a diagnosis. Medicine was also one of the contexts for the use of astrology, the topic of chapter 5; the need for prognosis creates a certain intrinsic affinity between the two disciplines, and the arguments used by some Hippocratic authors in defence of their art are echoed in Ptolemy's writings.

Maria Michela Sassi would have been better served if her book had been translated earlier, but even now it is good to have her ground-breaking study made available, in an excellent translation, to those without Italian. It will be greatly appreciated by anyone interested in ancient science or Greek culture in general.

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**Hildegard of Bingen, *On natural philosophy and medicine: selections from Cause et cure***, translated with introduction, notes and interpretive essay by Margret Berger, Library of Medieval Women series, Cambridge, D S Brewer, 1999, pp. xvii, 166, £12.95, \$19.95 (paperback 0-85991-551-4).

Margret Berger gives us here a translation of substantial portions of the *Cause et cure* ('On causes and cures [perhaps better

translated, treatment or care]') by the twelfth-century abbess, visionary, theologian, dramatist and poet, artist and musician, Hildegard of Bingen. The translation is based on the single manuscript (thirteenth-century, now in Copenhagen) and an inadequate 1903 edition; it is accompanied by a brief introduction concerning Hildegard and the medical background, and an afterword or "interpretive essay" that comments rather perfunctorily section by section and concludes with questions about the work's "originality and authenticity". It is difficult to say for whom this volume will be useful. It appears in a series, 'The Library of Medieval Women', edited by Jane Chance, that has made available in English for teaching purposes some interesting texts; and the format of a concluding "interpretive essay", which unfortunately serves this particular text badly, is a requirement of the series. If there are serious questions about authenticity (which questions I think Berger exaggerates), it seems odd to introduce the text with an essay on Hildegard. If there are questions about originality (here again I think Berger exaggerates), we need far more careful comparison of Hildegard with her predecessors and contemporaries (especially Constantine the African) than Berger gives us. Moreover Berger's own prose is often convoluted and impenetrable (for example, on p. xi where she refers to Paul Zumthor's idea of *mouvance*, which she does not however subsequently utilize, and on p. 19, where she refers unclearly to "lexical items . . . maximally different in meaning").

Although the translation is not particularly felicitous, the text itself is wonderful. It is hard to think Hildegard had completed and polished it, but the early books echo characteristically Hildegardian positions on micro- and macrocosm, male and female, fertility and fragmentation, found in the *Book of life's merits*. The *Cause et cure* is unified by a vision of the universe and of history in which disease results from Adam's fall, but the human being, given