

in laying out a new approach to studying a seriously neglected period of late medieval medicine.

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Andrea Carlino, *Books of the body: anatomical ritual and Renaissance learning*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C Tedeschi, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. xiv, 266, illus., £20.50 (0-226-09287-9).

This English translation of the original Italian version, entitled *La fabbrica del corpo* (1994), is substantially the same text, except that it now appears with an epilogue, bibliography and index. Carlino's enterprise is a bold one. When university dissections of human cadavers began in the fourteenth century, he asks, why wasn't anatomy freed from the authority of Galen? Why was dissection used chiefly for the purpose of verifying the authoritative texts of anatomy until Vesalius showed how it could be used to acquire knowledge about the human body? In framing the issue in these terms, Carlino prescind from the traditional story of sixteenth-century anatomy and instead seeks to isolate the obstacles that prevented anatomy from advancing by means of dissection.

Chapter one deals with visual representations of dissection in early printed books. In the course of his commentary on a number of well-known illustrations, Carlino argues that university dissections were originally carried out with the primary intention of visually affirming the anatomy of antiquity. Illustrations of these formal public events depict theory (as represented by the master reading from the classical authorities) separated from practice (as represented by the dissector who cut open the body). From the early sixteenth century,

however, these images were increasingly supplemented by depictions of less formal private dissections in which students took on the role of dissectors. An even more fundamental break with tradition was reached in the frontispiece to Vesalius' *De fabrica* when the teacher stepped down from his lectern to carry out the dissection himself. This change in iconography, suggests Carlino, corresponds to an epistemological revolution in anatomical teaching. What perplexes him is why public dissections continued in their traditional form for several decades after the Vesalian revolution.

Carlino's answer forms the subject of his second chapter. Drawing upon his extensive archival research into the *Studium Urbis* in Rome during the sixteenth century, the author highlights the chief characteristics of public dissection that helped to legitimate this potentially abhorrent practice. He points out that the activities of anatomists were closely controlled by a hierarchy of authorities, and were ultimately sanctioned by the Pope himself. Public dissections took place during Carnival, when transgressive acts were tolerated in ritualized form. Candidates for dissection were selected from among those at the margins of society, invariably foreigners who were already sentenced to death, but who were treated to all the religious comforts of a Christian burial. These conventions, argues Carlino, served to protect dissection from accusations of desecration, and helped to vouch for its morality and legality.

Chapter three is devoted to the tradition of dissection in European medicine. Here Carlino discerns two prevailing—though opposing—attitudes towards anatomy. On the one hand, human dissection was encouraged by the belief that knowledge of the hidden causes of pathological states required knowledge of the natural functions of the internal organs of the body. This sort of knowledge, it was claimed, was acquired through direct observation of the organs. Yet this attitude was opposed not only by

Book Reviews

those who found human dissection repulsive on religious and anthropological grounds, but also by those who claimed that knowledge of the internal parts revealed nothing about their pathological disorders and provided no guarantee of successful therapy. But if the arguments against dissection were so strong, asks Carlino, what encouraged university medical men to resume the practice in the fourteenth century? Three factors explain the matter: the circulation of authoritative texts which argued that theoretical medicine should be grounded in anatomy; the institutionalization of medical teaching which helped to legitimize dissection; and the use of autopsy which gave medical men a familiarity with handling cadavers.

But the public dissections which resulted were primarily didactic events that served to verify the anatomical knowledge of antiquity. How did dissection eventually become a tool for acquiring knowledge about the human body? Carlino finds the answer in the fact that masters came down from their lecterns and assumed the duties of dissectors, thus uniting theoretical learning with practical ability, while their students were permitted to open the bodies to see for themselves. This took place at a time when more bodies were becoming available, making possible more public and private dissections. The heroic figure in this story is Vesalius, who finally asserted the priority of observation over authority. Once this methodological principle was accepted, claims Carlino, the “epistemological norm that had constricted anatomy for over a millennium” was broken (p. 213).

Some readers may find Carlino’s non-linear approach and his long sentences difficult going at times. Moreover, though he makes many insightful observations on the cultural context of sixteenth-century anatomy, he is primarily interested in epistemological issues of authority and observation, theory and practice, and teaching and research. In the epilogue Carlino could have responded to more of

the research that has been done in this area since 1994. How, I wonder, would he reply to the claims made by Andrew Cunningham for the religious dimension to Vesalius’ work (*The anatomical Renaissance*, Aldershot, 1997)? How would he react to Andrew Cunningham and Tamara Hug’s reading of the frontispiece of *De fabrica* (*Focus on the frontispiece of the Fabrica of Vesalius, 1543*, Cambridge, 1994)? And what would he say to Roger French’s functionalist explanation of the same material (*Dissection and vivisection in the European Renaissance*, Aldershot, 1999)? But even without this, Carlino’s book still gives impressive evidence of the current vitality of research into sixteenth-century anatomy; and this translation now makes Carlino’s contribution to the debate all the more accessible.

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Mirko D Grmek (ed.), *Western medical thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, coordinated by Bernardino Fantini, translated by Antony Shugaar, Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 478, £30.95 (0-674-40355-X).

Though in many ways a French (if not Paris) dominated enterprise, this collection was originally published in Italian in 1993 (as *Storia del pensiero medico occidentale I: Antichità e medioevo*, Rome, Laterza). It was then quickly translated into French, and also German, and now finally appears in English. Despite the interval, however, there seems to have been little revision (I could find only one item in the bibliography later than 1994), just translation; and that has not been carried out with quite the degree of care required for such a work. For, while the rendition into English is