La science médicale occidentale entre deux renaissances (XIIe s.-XVe s.) (review)

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Danielle Jacquart. *La science médicale occidentale entre deux renaissances (XIIe s.–XVe s.).* Collected Studies Series. Aldershot, U.K.: Variorum, 1997. xx + 314 pp. $98.95.

The first renaissance of Danielle Jacquart's title refers to the twelfth-century School of Salerno and the impact of Greek medical treatises through new translations from Greek or Arabic versions. The second refers to the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century, when the diversity of approaches to medicine "verged on chaos" (p. x). Between the two lay the growth of scholastic medicine in response to the newly acquired tools of logic and dialectic.

To medieval physicians, like their colleagues in theology, law, and the liberal arts, the etymology—real or invented—of words helped explain the objects and concepts they labeled. Throughout these essays, Jacquart shows the value of close study of medical vocabularies. *Humor* and *complexio* seem so fundamental a part of later medieval medicine that it is enlightening to see how early translations found other terms to express these concepts. The side-by-side comparisons of Arabic medical texts with their Greek, Latin, and Byzantine originals and their Western Latin translations lets us see just how terms changed from one language to another. (Jacquart discusses, among others, Johannitius, Constantine the African, al-Magusi, Rhazes, Avicenna, Simon of Genoa, Girolamo Ramusio, and Gerard of Cremona.)

The medical implications of the transformed terminology never get lost in Jacquart's analysis. At the end of the thirteenth century, for example, Simon of Genoa showed a remarkable awareness of differences of sounds and orthographic renderings of them in Greek, Latin, and Arabic in his huge vocabulary known as *Synonyma* or *Clavis sanationis,* but he can hardly be blamed for not realizing that two controversial terms for madness—*frenesis* and *karabitus*—both came from a single Greek root, *phrenitis*; because the two terms seemed to signify maladies with different seats in the body (the diaphragm, *phrene,* and the brain), in practice they would require different treatments. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, Jacquart argues, the "anarchical" confusion of technical terminology allowed physicians to pick whatever in the ancient authorities seemed most useful in treating patients—plague and pleurisy are used as examples—without worrying about the scholastic method.

In their explanation of arcane details in the service of larger arguments, in their clarity of style in both French and English, and in their sympathy to medieval points of view, these seventeen essays (originally published between 1980 and 1994) are models of exposition. They cover an extraordinary range: from Galen to Rhazes to Italian court physicians to Vesalius, from madness to vivisection to female anatomy to astrology. Every historian of medieval medicine and science should be grateful to Jacquart for writing them, and to Variorum for reprinting them.

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