Pietro Andrea Mattioli, Siena 1501-Trento 1578: La vita, le opere: con l'identificazione delle piante (review)

Karen Reeds

Bulletin of the History of Medicine, Volume 76, Number 1, Spring 2002, pp. 132-134 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/bhm.2002.0040

Alcalá (Ana I. Martín Ferreira, *El humanismo médico en la Universidad de Alcalá [siglo XVI],* 1995) and Salamanca (M. Jesús Pérez Ibáñez, *El humanismo médico en la Universidad de Salamanca [siglo XVI],* 1998).

In chapter 1 the author examines the concept of medical humanism, which he applies so loosely that the distinction between "humanist" and "humanized" physicians is almost entirely watered down. Valladolid's medical humanism is dealt with through the written works of five physicians bound in one way or another to the local medical faculty, who are considered by Blanco Pérez as the main figures of the movement: Bernardino Montaña de Monserrate (ca. 1480–1558), Alfonso de Santa Cruz (d. ca. 1576/7), Luis Mercado (1525–1611), Lázaro de Soto (ca. 1540–1626), and Ildefonso López Pinciano (1556/7–ca. 1627). In chapter 2, sketches of these physicians' biographies are provided and the canons of their medical works, including a list of editions, are set.

Blanco Pérez, who has specified from the very beginning of his volume his strict concern with linguistic analysis rather than with a historico-medical study of these works (p. 14), deals with the several literary genres to which they belong (chap. 3), examines the quoted authoritative sources on which these physicians base their arguments (chap. 4), and develops his linguistic analysis (chap. 5). While in dealing with the literary genres his attention is focused on the commentaries by de Soto and López Pinciano, on the dialogues by de Santa Cruz and Montaña de Monserrate, and on Mercado's wide and diverse written production, his linguistic analysis copes with the issue of the language (Latin or Castilian) in which they are written as well as with their major phonetic, morphological, lexical, syntactical, and stylistic characteristics. Although, quite obviously, linguistic analysis can by no means be exhaustive, its results are often greatly expressive.

In sum, Blanco Pérez's volume is a valuable instrument with which to approach the history of medical humanism in Renaissance Spain. A fuller knowledge of medicine in the Spanish kingdoms during early modern times will be achieved by applying its conclusions to the results of the new research to be undertaken by medical historians on this complex but exciting topic.

Jon Arrizabalaga
Institución Milà i Fontanals, CSIC
Barcelona

Sara Ferri, ed. *Pietro Andrea Mattioli, Siena 1501–Trento 1578: La vita, le opere: con l'identificazione delle piante.* Perugia, Italy: Quattroemme, 1997. 405 pp. Ill. L 70,000.00; € 36.15 (paperbound, 88-85962-27-0).

"If the mind could be pictured as well as the body, then a single image would serve for both Dioscorides and Mattioli." This verse, attached to a portrait of Pietro Andrea Mattioli published in 1563, neatly summed up his reputation in his

own day. Between 1544 and Mattioli's death in 1578, his Italian and Latin translations of Dioscorides' *De materia medica* became the standard form in which his contemporaries encountered the classic first-century text on medicinal substances.

The act of translation into the vernacular (as Sara Ferri observes in her introduction to these collected essays) underscored the difficulty and importance of correctly identifying the plants named by Dioscorides and other classical authorities. Mattioli's ever-expanding commentaries and medical letters recorded his ferocious debates over the appearance, names, properties, and uses of medicinal plants. For the deluxe Prague edition of 1563, he supervised the production of Giorgio Liberale and Wolfgang Meyerpeck's exuberant woodcut illustrations, which succeeded in being both naturalistic and decorative and undoubtedly increased the appeal and utility of the book (see Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi's essay). The commentaries and illustrations had a very wide and long-lasting influence. Translations into French, Czech, and German followed quickly; versions of the work and its illustrations continued to appear into the eighteenth century. Alicja Zemanek's essay describes a 1613 Polish herbal by Szymon Syreniusz that was deeply influenced by Mattioli's work; a copy of that herbal was still being used by Russian pharmacists early in the nineteenth century. And in 1965, the American naturalist-essayist Joseph Wood Krutch reproduced a sampling of the woodcuts and texts in his *Herbal*.

About half of the twenty-one essays in this volume are, in effect, commentaries on the Dioscorides commentaries, as they explore Mattioli's observations of plants, animals, minerals, marine life, and distillation. Mauro Giorgio Marotti's preliminary list of identifications of the plants illustrated in the Venice 1568 edition and Marco Franzini's identifications of the minerals make this volume an indispensable reference work for Renaissance natural history and medicine.

Especially interesting are the studies by Vera Credaro, Franco Pedrotti, and Gino Tomasi of Mattioli's fifteen years as a humanist-physician in Trent. His projects leading up to the 1544 publication of his Italian Dioscorides included a report to a baroness on the healing properties of the hot springs at Bormio, a long poem for his patron Cardinal Bernardo Clesio about the medicinal plants of Trent, and a map of the Val di Sol and Val di Non. The photographs with Pedrotti's essay show the kind of alpine terrain that Mattioli had to traverse in order to prepare these botanical and geographical works.

Even before the Dioscorides editions and commentaries became bestsellers, Mattioli's medical abilities were recognized by his appointment in 1542 as *Protomedicus* to the city of Gorizia, a post that allowed him to botanize extensively in Istria and Slovenia (discussed by Fabrizio Martini and Livio Paldini). Between 1555 and 1566, he served the Hapsburg court in Prague. In Maria Ludovica Lenzi's edition of Mattioli's letters to Ferdinand I in February 1563, we get a fascinating glimpse of Mattioli at work, successfully dosing Archduke Ferdinand with manna, senna, and rhubarb for an acute melancholic illness.

Mattioli strongly identified himself with Siena, even though he spent almost his whole life far from his hometown. It is fitting that these invaluable, closely documented studies of Mattioli were organized at the University of Siena by

Professor Ferri, and that the volume and its splendid color illustrations were underwritten by a grant from the Banca Monte di Paschi di Siena. I hope very much that equally handsome volumes will follow: the contributors make it clear that there is much more worth saying about Mattioli.

Karen Reeds
National Coalition of Independent Scholars/
Princeton Research Forum

Barbara Howard Traister. *The Notorious Astrological Physician of London: Works and Days of Simon Forman.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. xviii + 250 pp. Ill. $30.00; £19.00 (0-226-81140-9).

The early modern London medical man Simon Forman is best known for being popularly believed to have supplied the poison used to murder Sir Thomas Overbury in the Tower of London. His sexual proclivities and occult activities have also generated much ink over the centuries. With Barbara Howard Traister's book, both the strange, enigmatic figure of Simon Forman and his copious writings finally have the biography they deserve.

Traister has chosen to piece together the life and character of Forman through a fine and complete reading of his extensive manuscripts. Forman's interests were broad: as Traister notes in her introduction, his fragmented and frequently incomplete writings covered medicine, astrology, alchemy, the theater, genealogy, giants, creation, and gardening. He also wrote one of the first autobiographies—fictional, rather than factual. In chapter 1 Traister paints a portrait of Forman as a social climber devoted to fashioning his image at every turn. In 1602 he constructed a horoscope "which combined the fact, fiction, and wish fulfillment that shaped his vision of himself and his potential" (p. 14).

Medical historians will find the book particularly intriguing in that Forman's almost daily descriptions of patient diagnosis and treatment form the earliest surviving chronological case records of an English medical practitioner. In chapter 2, Traister discusses Forman's thirty years of medical writings and practices in fascinating detail (for example, he treated Robert Burton for melancholy five times in 1597). He also had a particular interest in gynecology, delegating most of the hands-on care to local midwives. Case notes survive from the years 1596–1601, and chapter 3 continues with a detailed look at Forman's daily medical practice—the number of patients he saw, their symptoms and diagnoses, and his fees. He carefully recorded the name, place of residence, and astrological figure of each patient, partly in an attempt to avoid trickery surrounding urine samples. Forman was consulted for nonmedical problems as well as medical, ranging from questions about prospects concerning love, marriage, and money, to the safety of traveling by sea, and the best location for a new business. Women were particu-