

**Victoria Sweet**, *Rooted in the earth, rooted in the sky: Hildegard of Bingen and premodern medicine*, Studies in Medieval History and Culture, New York and London, Routledge, 2006, pp. xviii, 326, illus., £55.00, \$75.00 (hardback 0-415-97634-0; 978-0-415-97634-3).

Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), abbess, mystic, physician, poet, and composer, has been the subject of a renaissance of sorts over the past twenty-five years. Historians of medicine and religion, literary critics, musicians, and even new-age medical practitioners have revived the Rhineland abbess as a unique and formidable intellectual figure of the twelfth century. While previous historians of medicine have looked broadly at Hildegard's medical views or narrowly at her pharmacological knowledge of plants, Victoria Sweet provides a solid and fruitful monograph on the connections between humoral theory and practical knowledge in Hildegard's thought.

After an initial biographical chapter, which includes a definitive rejection of the theory that Hildegard's mystical visions were caused by migraines, Sweet turns to the impact of the abbess's probable training in horticulture (as monastic infirmarian) on her understanding of the body and humoral theory. Sweet argues that Hildegard's text *Causes and cures* (c. 1150) was a medical manual for a student infirmarian at her abbey, and as such can allow us to see how "concepts of premodern medicine were understood and used by a particular practitioner" (p. 7). Sweet argues that she is using an "anthropological" approach in this work, investigating the world of her informant, Hildegard the practitioner. This approach is in reality a form of historical analysis that pays close attention to intellectual traditions and wider, symbolic cultural meanings and contexts.

Sweet keenly identifies Hildegard's distinct interpretations of such classical medical concepts as the four elements (chapter 3) and the four humours (chapter 4). Most revealing is Sweet's study (chapter 5) of the

Hildegardian term *viriditas* ("greening," the fertile power of all living things) from the perspective of horticultural and humoral knowledge in medieval thought. Where other scholars search for the symbolic and spiritual meanings of the term, Sweet demands that we take seriously the concrete reality behind Hildegard's notion of *viriditas* as a form of juice or sap in plants, a liquid which provides both sustenance for the plant and possible pharmacological succour for the ill. While the abbess may have borrowed the term from the theological tradition, she applies it broadly to the idea of fecundity and health in the natural world.

The book argues well that Hildegard's views on the body and healing can best be understood by looking at the organic, natural imagery that underlies medieval medical thought. Sweet very nicely places Hildegard's unique vision and all of humoral theory in this context. But the author is less successful in the conclusion, where she attempts to place Hildegard's medical and horticultural ideas in the larger context of pre-Copernican geocentric views of the cosmos. Sweet argues that the crucial image uniting all pre-modern medical concepts is the fixed earth and the temporal changes (in the seasons, qualities, humours, and elements) that ensue as the moving firmament circles it. Hildegard was certainly concerned with the symbiosis of the macrocosm of the world—with its winds and seasonal changes—and the microcosm of the body, but her thought remains markedly anthropocentric rather than geocentric. It is revealing that the only Hildegardian evidence that Sweet supplies comes not from her medical writings but from her mystical and visionary treatises, which did not require strict adherence to natural philosophical or medical views. Most medical theory took into account fluctuations in the environment, but did not reduce health or illness to such shifting contextual factors. The author attempts to create a sense of coherence within a massive body of medical knowledge that resists any single theory, even within the work of a single author. The argument is intriguing and

provocative, and requires more elaboration than it receives in the concluding pages of the monograph.

None the less, the book's strength lies in its ability to identify a systematic natural philosophy that underlies Hildegard's medical material. Sweet does so by studying Hildegard's views of humours and *viriditas*, and by revealing the experiential and botanical underpinnings of Hildegard's life and thought. In all of this, Sweet hints at the relevance of Hildegard's medical ideas to the connections between gender, natural science, and medicine.

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**Andreas Vesalius**, *On the fabric of the human body. Book V: The organs of nutrition and generation*, transl. **William Frank Richardson** in collaboration with **John Burd Carman**, Novato, CA, Norman Publishing, 2007, pp. xix, 257, illus. \$275.00 (hardback 978-0-930405-88-5).

The penultimate volume of the Auckland translation of Vesalius' *Fabrica* deals with the organs of nutrition, the urinary system, and the male and female reproductive system. The final section is a detailed and highly informative guide to how Vesalius expected his readers to go and dissect these organs for themselves. This volume has all the qualities of its predecessors: the elegant printing and broad layout complement the fine reproductions of the illustrations, although some of them may not be quite as sharp as those in earlier volumes. The quality of the translation is high, although the non-anatomist may be baffled by what Herophilus meant by the "glandulous bystander" and the repetition of these words may cause confusion in the Greekless.

There is one unfortunate change. Will Richardson, who was the translator, died unexpectedly in 2004, although he had

completed the translation of the whole *Fabrica*, including the index, and also of the *Epitome* (which has also recently been republished in a new edition and French translation by Jacqueline Vons, Paris, 2008). He had also completed almost all his revision of this volume, but he did not have a chance to write a translator's introduction and, inevitably, one misses some of the comments that he would assuredly have made in the notes. As this volume shows, he was a careful and accurate translator, with a mission to translate some of Renaissance medicine into English. Only those who have attempted similar versions can appreciate the scale of his achievement, for the sheer size and technical language of the *Fabrica* imposed problems not always to be met with in Renaissance medical texts. Although I met him only four or five times, I can echo the warm words of his co-author about him as a person. We look forward to publication of the final volume, and to the completion of this *magnum opus* in every sense.

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**Rosemary Elliot**, *Women and smoking since 1890*, Routledge Studies in the Social History of Medicine, No. 29, London, Routledge, 2007, pp. xiii, 225, illus., £65.00 (hardback 978-0-415-34059-5).

In the hundred or so years that cigarette smoking has been associated with women in this country, the ultimate irony is that a product so long associated with female emancipation is now strongly linked with subjugation. At the end of the nineteenth century, cigarettes were the symbolic manifestation of the "new woman" who sought to cast off social convention in her pursuit of professional, emotional and intellectual advancement. By the end of the twentieth century, however, middle-class women were far from being the most