

## Book Reviews

who wants to *read* the medieval Latin of the translated texts which are being discussed is not often helped towards a printed edition: this is an understandable consequence of the manuscript focus of the book and (perhaps) the author's view of the poor quality of older editions. O'Boyle has produced a very clear account of the complex history and development of a text which was very important in the medieval university, and he describes its use in a remarkably vivid way. This is a major achievement. Suggesting as it does many thoughts and reflections, O'Boyle's book should do much to advance work in the future. Some examples: a large proportion of the *Art of medicine* contained Greco-Latin rather than Arabo-Latin translations, and the collection's later history suggests the need for more general discussion of the tensions between the routes. O'Boyle has deliberately concentrated on the formal and external characteristics of the collection and its commentaries, confining himself, as far as their contents are concerned, to brief comment on their general characteristics and (in the chapter on teaching) brief examples, mainly from the beginnings of commentaries. A path is opened up for those who want to *read* the western medieval glosses and commentaries more widely, and O'Boyle has provided the route with meticulous sign-posts. At the heart of O'Boyle's book is a very static view of what went on in medieval university medicine, essentially the communication from masters to pupils of a common gloss on a canonical collection of texts. This is salutary and at the same time it may stimulate debate.

On this and on more general views of medicine in Paris, readers will also want to compare other major work in the field, in particular Danielle Jacquart's *La Médecine médiévale dans le cadre parisien* (Paris, Fayard, 1998). While focusing mainly on later medieval Paris, Jacquart's book sometimes goes earlier, overlapping and sometimes contrasting with O'Boyle's. Examples in detail are Jacquart's discussion

of knowledge of Johannitus's *Isagoge* displayed in Paris as early as the 1120s (by Hugh of St Victor), and also different nuances in her use of early evidence of organized medical teaching. More significant are the different hues of the portraits presented in these two different books, in pigments supplied on the one hand more by study of the characteristics of manuscripts and on the other hand more by reading the contents of texts. Both portraits are of high interest.

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**Andrew Wear**, *Knowledge and practice in English medicine, 1550–1680*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 496, £45.00, \$74.95 (hardback 0-521-55226-5), £16.95, \$27.95 (paperback 0-521-55827-1).

What is the connection between eating fish and staying healthy? For a citizen of seventeenth-century England, fish can “produce ‘much grosse, slimie superfluous flegme’, which in turn could cause gout, bladder stone, leprosy, scurvy and other skin diseases”. For sea-fish, therefore, “‘that is best which swimmeth in a pure sea, and is tossed and hoysed with winds and surges: for by reason of continuall agitation, it becometh of a purer, and less slimie substance, and consequently of easier concoction . . . and of a purer iuyce.’ Similarly the best freshwater fish would be that ‘which is bred in pure, stonie or gravelly rivers, running swiftly’” (p. 203).

Much has been written *about* early modern English medicine; *Knowledge and practice*, on the other hand, is a rich serving of that medicine. After wading through close to 500 pages, in which more than a third of the text appears to be direct quotations in the vernacular (including contemporary English translations of Latin texts), we come away with a remarkable

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amount of information about what contemporaries felt they knew and what they did in actual practice. The first two-thirds of the book covers such topics as remedies, diseases, healthy living, surgery and the knowledge, prevention and cure of the plague. And through this Part I, Wear addresses the similarities, differences, continuities and changes reflected in the ideas and practices of learned physicians, empirics, lay people (to whom he pays considerable attention) and those dismissed as quacks and mountebanks.

Nor is the account merely descriptive; these views are also interpreted and analysed in the context of the political, institutional, and intellectual circumstances of later sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. But, unlike most recent works on the medicine of this period, these larger dimensions of the story are not the focus but simply the framework within which the knowledge claims and practices are to be understood.

Moreover, this provides a detailed background for Part II, which looks at the changes and continuities of the later seventeenth century in the face of the "new science" of mechanics and experimentation, accompanied by the decline of Galenism. As he has done before, Wear shows how these changes had some minor impact on practical medicine that was, in the main, more rhetorical than actual.

In the course of this transition, the "Helmontians" tried to bring about a more radical change, not only in the discourse of disease and treatment, but in actual practices. In place of the centuries-old tradition of an "image of the body as composed of a series of channels through which humours and morbid, putrid, ill matter travelled" (p. 407), and which had to be eradicated through bloodletting and purgation, they promoted more gentle, more purified chemical medicines aimed at the diseases themselves. However, by the end of the century this revolution had failed, mostly, Wear argues, because of patient

commitment to the ancient tradition, and resistance to such a radically new approach. The author's strict historical treatment of his subject would not have allowed him to speculate that traditional therapy might also have withstood change unless there had been a strikingly obvious improvement in the results, something that did occur at that time only in the application of Peruvian bark to intermittent fevers. But that was then a herbal not chemical remedy, to which the Helmontians had no special claim.

This is a remarkably detailed account of actual knowledge and practices. Some readers will find it a bit repetitive, and maybe sometimes telling them more about a subject than they want to know. But this was a risk that I believe Wear knowingly took in order to furnish us with a subtle and very rich account of what was actually going on, and I'm glad he did.

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**Saul Jarcho** (trans. and ed.), *The clinical consultations of Francesco Torti*, Malabar, FL, published on behalf of the New York Academy of Medicine by Krieger, 2000, pp. xxx, 911, illus., \$125.00 (hardback 1-57524-144-7).

Until his recent death, Saul Jarcho, although for many years a practising physician, was a dedicated student of medical history, particularly of matters Italian in the early modern period. His translations of the letters of Morgagni and other Italian doctors, remain invaluable scholarly tools. This translation of the consultation letters of Francesco Torti is assured of an equally warm and grateful reception.

Torti was born in Modena in 1658 and studied medicine in Bologna. He became a professor in his native city alongside Bernardino Ramazzini. The 303 cases