

Book Reviews

Scienze, credenze occulte, livelli di cultura [Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Florence, 26–30 June 1980], Florence, Leo S. Olschki for Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1982, 8vo, pp. vi, 562, illus., [no price stated], (paperback).

The general theme of this volume is rather difficult to discern. According to the title it attempts to link science, occult beliefs, and various levels of culture. It is divided into seven sections of unequal length containing a total of twenty-three papers (thirteen in Italian, seven in English, three in French), ranging over many aspects of early modern culture. While the main emphasis is on popular culture and texts written in the vernacular languages, several papers, including some of the better ones, deal with the more learned traditions. Much of the work reflects recent trends in social history, including several papers attempting to apply sociological methods to historical studies. Besides papers considering the confrontation and acculturation of various early modern cultures, there is also a good deal on demonology, alchemy, astrology, and other encounters with the occult.

Studies specifically on the history of medicine are contained in the first two sections: 'Scienze e uomini senza lettere: il paracelsismo' and 'Maestri medici e colportori'. The first is opened by Charles Webster's 'Paracelsus and demons: science as a synthesis of popular belief', which illustrates Paracelsus' use of low culture elements in his synthesis. Two papers by Marco Ferrari and Paolo Galluzzi treat the question of Paracelsian influence in Italy, an important topic which has previously been little discussed. Let us hope that their leads are taken up and that the subject is treated more systematically in future publications, for it is potentially fruitful and interesting.

In the second section, Daniela Pesciatini and Margaret Pelling consider medical practice in the rural communities around Pisa and in Norwich. These topics could have been usefully treated in a comparative fashion, but we have once again, it seems, two scholars working in isolation from one another. Readers of the volume have little way of knowing how lively the discussions at the meeting were, but the printed papers show little evidence of interaction between participants.

A number of valuable papers (by B. Capp, P. Zambelli, O. Niccoli, S. Caroti, and J. Céard) are concentrated on astrology and its social implications in one way or another. Included here is the contribution by the organizer of the *convegno*, Paola Zambelli, whose 'Fine del mondo o inizio della propaganda? Astrologia, filosofia della storia e propaganda politico-religiosa nel dibattito sulla congiunzione del 1524' is the longest and most detailed piece in the collection. It is an important monographic study based upon an extensive reading around the astrological predictions of 1524, and the author skilfully demonstrates the interaction of cultural, social, and political themes related to that issue. Two papers on demonology (by D. P. Walker and E. Labrousse) emphasize the confessional disputes surrounding the subject. Among the other aspects of popular culture covered are two papers on elementary education by Paul Grendler and Piero Lucchi, which are marked by a sound use of traditional sources, and both serve as useful guides to a complex subject. It is a bit unfortunate that they are buried in this volume, for they do not fit in very well with its general theme and can easily escape the attention of potential readers.

The collection as a whole furnishes a good cross-section of the recent methodologies used by scholars working in many different areas of early modern history, from the most local to the most global. Several papers are set occasional pieces, while others are summaries of work published in greater detail elsewhere, but a number are of more permanent scholarly value. For that reason, it belongs in research libraries. Some of the more provocative papers may also have a transient effect on graduate students in search of new ideas and approaches.

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