

and indeed it is rare to come across a collected volume which sustains such consistent quality and coherent discussion within such breadth of theme. This is in part because of two recurrent topics in the book, the representation of plants (whether in herbal or botanical compilations) in the chapters by Alain Touwaide, Jean Givens, Karen Reeds and Claudia Swan, and the contribution of Leonardo da Vinci, in a trio of essays by Monica Azzolini, Piers Britton and Karen Reeds. This sense of an ongoing conversation is enhanced by the recurrence of certain manuscripts, the reiteration of shared historical concerns throughout the book, and the successful evocation of continuities which extend from the medieval to the early modern period.

This is a beautiful, intriguing and thought-provoking collection of essays. Every one has been written elegantly and with clarity, an impressive feat given the complex nature of many of the manuscript transmissions discussed. The book is also generously illustrated (though it is a shame not to have colour illustrations at some pertinent points, references are given, wherever possible, to help the reader access colour reproductions). All the essays weave together their pictorial evidence carefully in order to reach some important new conclusions. I would highlight in particular the contributions of Alain Touwaide—who suggests possibilities for the exchange of learning between Byzantines and Latins during the thirteenth-century occupation of Constantinople—and Monica Azzolini—who counteracts the traditional image of Leonardo da Vinci as an isolated genius by situating him firmly in the context of a vibrant Milanese medical community.

If the first strength of this collection lies in the detail of each case study, the second is in its constant engagement with a set of theoretical and methodological problems critical to this interdisciplinary study of the scientific image. The tone is set by Peter Murray Jones's opening essay, which demands that we, "consider the relationship of image, word, and medicine afresh" (p. 1). Common themes and questions which span the book include the practical utility or function of these images; their

transmission, adaptation and creation in different contexts and for different audiences; the relationship between the textual and the visual, the image and reality. Above all the collection causes the reader to ask how these manuscripts and images would have been made and how they might have been read. In Karen Reeds's words: "For any given image, we always have to ask: utility to whom? Fidelity to what end?" (p. 236). Claudia Swan's final essay acts neatly as an epilogue, returning to the questions raised at the start by Peter Murray Jones, and in turn posing a fundamental question: why were these images produced at all?

The book will of course attract scholars of medieval and early modern medicine and natural history. In the broader questions raised by this collection, however, there lies significance for a much wider readership, for those interested in the history of the book as much as those concerned with the history of the image.

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Donatella Bartolini, *Medici e comunità: esempi dalla terraferma veneta dei secoli XVI e XVII*, Miscellanea di Studi e Memorie, XXXVII, Venezia, Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Venezie, 2006, pp. xii, 279, €25.00 (paperback).

This is the most complete study to date of "the town physician" (*medico condotto*), the medical practitioner paid by the municipality to treat free of charge the citizens of the locality, who was a key figure in the provision of medical services of many Italian and European communities in the late medieval and early modern period.

Drawing on an impressive range of sources, the author reconstructs the development of the *medico condotto* in the north-eastern part of the Venetian state, an area which stretches from the lagoon (Mestre) to the Prealps (Belluno, Feltre) and therefore includes both mountain and lowland regions. The position

of town physician appeared in the middle ages but, by the early modern period, it had disappeared from the major urban centres, superseded by the development of hospitals and confraternities (which often employed doctors “for the poor”), and, more generally, by the expansion of the medical profession. In contrast, the post became increasingly common in small and medium sized localities and, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, most communities in the area under consideration boasted one or more *condotte*.

The book highlights the power of initiative of local governments, which sent councillors to recruit physicians and surgeons in Venice and Padua, levied taxes to provide the community with essential services (the schoolteacher, the lawyer, the organist, as well as the *condotto*) and paid grants to the local young people wishing to undertake medical studies. Thus the common assumption that small, mountainous communities lagged far behind urban centres in their provision of medical services appears misconceived. Far from being isolated and economically marginal, these highlands were part of the trade routes between Venice and the empire; moreover they were socially stratified and actively engaged in timber and woollen-cloth production. Not only were these small communities willing to pay their doctors stipends equivalent to those offered by provincial towns, they also often chose the more expensive “foreign” candidate over a local man in order to boost the honour of the commune. Far from being simply determined by financial considerations, the selection of candidates was influenced by political motivations and by reasons of civic pride. Payment of the *medico condotto* was not standard but negotiated on an individual basis, and the fame of the candidate was often capable of securing him a good income. Indeed, another unexpected finding of this study is the appeal that the position of *condotto* exercised upon distinguished practitioners—court physicians for example, or those with prestigious jobs in the Venetian colonies. The possibility of having a private practice in parallel with public duties was another attraction of the post: nothing

prevented the community doctor from treating private patients for part of the day and in nearby villages. Hence the professional activities of *condotti* covered a rather wide geographical area. This shows that it can be misleading to take the number of resident practitioners as evidence of the availability of medical services in a given locality. Even the smallest communities appear much better equipped with licensed and learned practitioners than is often assumed. A community doctor, therefore, was not just employed to guarantee the stable presence of a practitioner in remote, unattractive locations. A *condotto* was above all a sort of sanitary official, who was expected to act informally as local Protophysician, checking the ingredients used by pharmacists and the quality of spring waters, authorizing other practitioners to practise locally, and performing autopsies if a death was suspicious. He acted as a legal expert in court and could proclaim the state of contagion.

At times the book is loosely structured and encumbered with excessive detail. A conclusive section, bringing together the various strands of the argument, would have been welcome. These are minor blemishes, however, in a study that provides a mine of material and new perspectives to advance our understanding of the complex figure of the town physician.

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Martin Stuber, Stefan Hächler and Luc Lienhard (eds), *Hallers Netz. Ein europäischer Gelehrtenbriefwechsel zur Zeit der Aufklärung*, Studia Halleriana, vol. 9, Basel, Schwabe 2005, pp. x, 592, illus., SFr 98.00, €68.50 (hardback 3-7965-1327-1).

Almost 400 illustrations make this 600-page study look like a catalogue. However, the pictures provide additional material, some as illustrations, depicting