

Book Reviews

Various cases of treatment recorded by Yagel demonstrate his synthesis of medicine with astrology and Judaism. The contemporary view of demonology in relation to disease is shown to include rabbinic and Cabalistic ideas. The author shows how Yagel's study of nature reaffirmed his belief in the unity of God and discusses his attitude towards prodigies of nature, contemporary scientific discovery, and various forms of magic. The interchange between Christian and Jewish thinkers at the time and the universality of all learning, a theme common to much of Yagel's writings, are cogently described. Yagel's familiarity with contemporary thinking and his use of rabbinic thought to harmonize unorthodox practice with religious doctrine illustrate the distinctive capacity of Jewish thought to adapt to current thinking while retaining continuity with its roots.

In the final two chapters, Yagel's views on metempsychosis are discussed. His wide-ranging knowledge of Christian and Jewish theology along with current scientific and philosophical thought led him to the conclusion that as life is not futile it must represent some form of purgatory. His understanding of Cabala is described as a rational science adaptable to the language of academic discourse, but at the same time Yagel claimed that only the Cabalist can fully comprehend the mysteries of creation.

The author brings us into the world of intellectual Judaism at a transitional period in European thought and demonstrates how Judaism could adapt to those ideas yet retain its identity and at the same time attempt to command respect within the larger intellectual community as a whole. This is an admirable introduction, both readable and erudite, to a very large and complex subject.

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UDO BENZENHÖFER, *Johannes' de Rupescissa 'Liber de consideratione quintae essentiae omnium rerum' deutsch: Studien zur Alchemia medica des 15. bis 17. Jahrhunderts mit kritischer Edition des Textes*, Heidelberger Studien zur Naturkunde der frühen Neuzeit 1, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1989, 8vo, pp. 213, DM 78.00.

The 'Book on considering the fifth essence of all things' was written around 1350 by the Franciscan monk Johannes de Rupescissa, Jean de Rocquetaillade, who was not a Catalan, as earlier supposed, but was born in the Auvergne. Because of his prophecies of the impending end of the world and coming of the Antichrist he spent much of his life on the run and in jail. Perhaps it is there that he found the time for his other writings, namely on medical alchemy. This was a method of supplementing the use of Galenic medicine by preparing remedies by means of combining distillation and dissolution in strong inorganic acids and using alchemical methods for preparing metal and mineral quintessences as well as plant distillates. The quintessence was originally the essence of the four elements. These four were in the cosmos and they were in man, and in the same way heaven was in the universe and it was in man. It was so in the healing substances and thus able to communicate with the heaven in man but it was covered by dense matter. That was why distillation and dissolution was necessary. Benzenhöfer rationalizes this in the light of modern knowledge by saying: "The basic purpose of the 'art of medical distillation' is to purify natural substances and to increase thereby their therapeutic effectiveness." Rupescissa retained the ancient humoralism but rejected the Galenic mixture of simples. The treatise became extremely popular because of its lucid and detailed descriptions of alchemical and pharmaco-chemical operations on specific substances to cure specific complaints. A great number of manuscripts has been preserved; it was translated into the vernacular several times over, and printed often, by itself and as part of other people's works. It influenced Brunschwig and through him Ulstadius as well as Paracelsus.

Of the Early New High German text one manuscript in the Codex M II 180 in the Salzburg University Library has here been reproduced. There is a text-critical apparatus with variant readings and a commentary on linguistic peculiarities and historical and other facts. The apparatus and the commentary follow separately after the text, which makes reading it more cumbersome than if both were at the bottom of each page.

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