

Santé et société à Montpellier à la fin du Moyen Âge. Geneviève Dumas.

The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400–1500 102.
Leiden: Brill, 2015. xiv + 592 pp. \$250.

In the Middle Ages, academic medicine was taught in but a handful of prestigious places such as Paris, Bologna, Padua, and, of course, Montpellier. Professors of Montpellier's medical faculty, such as Arnaud de Villeneuve and Bernard de Gordo, have been studied extensively (see Luke Demaitre, *Doctor Bernard de Gordon: Professor and Practitioner* [1980]); some of their work, namely that of the Catalan master, has also led to the publication of critical editions (*AVOMO* [*Arnaldi de Villanova Opera Medica Omnia*] collection, ed. L. García Ballester et al.). However, as Geneviève Dumas states, although

the university, its professors, their intellectual production, and the milieu of translators working in Montpellier have attracted the interest of researchers, the relationships between the *studium*, the city, its professional environment, the hospitals, and the urban population have attracted little attention. Based on recent studies on the intellectual and the social development of medieval medicine and, more specifically, on the considerable scholarship on the town of Montpellier, this book investigates the relationships between medicine, health, and society in a university town that comprised some 40,000 inhabitants before the plague of 1348.

The study is based on comments and treatises of the masters, and on communal archives that are rarely considered in traditional work on Montpellier's medical past. The scope is considerable as the author begins with the first notarial records of the late decades of the thirteenth century and ends with the first manifestations of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The first and the second parts of the book discuss the professional community, studied through its institutions (faculty and professional guilds) and its members (physicians, surgeons, barbers, apothecaries-grocers), their training, and their careers. The third part examines different practices and the involvement of practitioners in public-health issues (mainly in the organization of hospitals and in fighting both plague and leprosy, described as contagious diseases).

The fourth and final section of the book is devoted to the relationship between learned medicine and illegal practices or deviant knowledge (such as necromancy), and to the economic activities and social networks of practitioners. This last part, based on the examination of tax documents and notary acts (wills, sales, loans), provides the most innovative results. Dumas concentrates on the economic and social activities of practitioners. They were well integrated in professional guilds, in urban sociability, and in social events. As elsewhere, in Montpellier income generated thanks to the practice of medicine is difficult to evaluate because of the lack of contracts relating to cures. Often medical practice is but one source of revenue: doctors, but mostly barbers and surgeons, were active in the investment market, through purchases, sales, loans, or foreign-exchange contracts. Practitioners were among the active actors in the local economy. In the same vein, Dumas manages to reconstitute in detail the diversity of social networks in which practitioners were active and which could differ according to their status. If physicians who were often foreigners and were not always established within the town provide few examples of family dynasties before the fifteenth century (with the notable exception of Arnau de Vilanova and his nephews John and Armengaud Blaise), the cases of surgeons and apothecaries enable the author to demonstrate the importance of family ties: in these groups, matrimonial alliances were strategically devised by actors in order to strengthen their economic position.

Santé et société à Montpellier à la fin du Moyen Âge is based on an extensive bibliography and includes some useful maps, tables, and appendixes. Its main merit is to propose a synthesis that combines an intellectual history of medicine and its economic and social issues. But the reader will regret that it is often wordy and confusing, because of repetitions (parts 1 and 2 are sometimes redundant) and the length of some chapters,

such as the fourth about the careers, which is poorly introduced. While the author strives to take into account all the results of earlier research, the reader gets lost in the twists and turns of a long text in which it is difficult to distinguish what is new from what is already known. Too frequent typographical errors and spelling mistakes convey the impression that a final reread would have been necessary in order to reach a neater result.

Marilyn Nicoud, *Université d'Avignon et des Pays de Vaucluse*