

Jean A. Givens, Karen Reeds, and Alain Touwaide, eds. *Visualizing Medieval Medicine and Natural History, 1200–1550*.

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The editors of *Visualizing Medieval Medicine and Natural History, 1200–1550* are at pains to present their enterprise as a “conversation” (xv, xvii) that is by no means at an end. Although much of the material was first aired in public at two conferences in North America in 2003, the volume has a clear rationale and a coherence that take it well beyond a mere transcript of the proceedings of a meeting. The research and the questions are continuing, and the interlocutors are

maintaining their exchanges while inviting a wider specialist audience to mull over the issues raised.

The chronological limits indicated in the title suggest, correctly, that no pedantic definition of periods is being followed. The scientific and medical culture of the West from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries cannot be separated from traditions and influences derived from classical antiquity — Aristotle, Pliny the Elder, Dioscorides, and Galen — Byzantium, and the Arabs, which justifies looking at texts and their illustrative accompaniments in this perspective. Thus the book moves well into what can be claimed as the Renaissance, in particular apropos of Leonardo da Vinci, a suitable subject for an investigation that stresses its interdisciplinary character.

Seven chapters reporting sharply focused pieces of research are framed by two more general essays. Peter Murray Jones's "Image, Word, and Medicine in the Middle Ages" ranges widely over manuscripts, murals, and even rings to argue against glib and anachronistic assumptions that his objects of study serve the same purpose as the illustrations in modern medical textbooks. Once the cultural and religious context is understood, students know that they have to proceed with extreme caution and sensitivity. At the other end of the volume, Claudia Swan's "The Uses of Realism in Early Modern Illustrated Botany" reinforces the message and poses the troubling question, "Why were early-modern botanical treatises illustrated?" (239). It is true that both late medieval manuscripts and early printed books of this kind are copiously provided with illuminations and woodcuts. Beyond the "cognitive role of images" (249) the author wonders about commercial considerations in the book world of the sixteenth century. Without doubt both aspects need further work, especially when increased attention is being paid to the buyers, patrons, and readers of inevitably expensive productions. Art and book historians cannot be indifferent to such problems.

The intervening contributions fall into two groups. The first concentrates on individual manuscripts or discrete groups of elaborately illustrated texts: Alain Touwaide, "Latin Crusaders, Byzantine Herbals," Cathleen Hoeniger, "The Illuminated *Tacuinum sanitatis* Manuscripts from Northern Italy ca. 1380–1400: Sources, Patrons, and the Creation of a New Pictorial Genre," Sarah Blake McHam, "Erudition on Display: The 'Scientific' Illustrations in Pico della Mirandola's Manuscript of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*," and Jean A. Givens, "Reading and Writing the Illustrated *Tractatus de herbis*, 1280–1526." The last-named crosses the script-print divide to the *Grete Herball* printed by Peter Treveris of Southwark in 1526. Bearing in mind the lessons of Peter Murray Jones's essay, the various authors have approached the details of works produced over three centuries in Mediterranean and Northern Europe with due circumspection. The studies are not exhaustive, and gaps in research are not hidden. We learn, for example, that Pico's Pliny manuscript has not been collated with early printed versions. Similarly, it is possible to imagine revisions of certain interpretations. Pico may have included the Essenes in his program for the decoration of his Pliny,

but we must not be too much influenced by what we have learnt since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 all concern Leonardo: Monica Azzolini, "Leonardo da Vinci's Anatomical Studies in Milan: A Re-Examination of Sites and Sources," Piers D. Britton, "(Hu)moral Exemplars: Type and Temperament in Cinquecento Painting," and Karen M. Reeds, "Leonardo da Vinci and Botanical Illustration: Nature Prints, Drawings, and Woodcuts ca. 1500." Whether it be attempting to reconstruct the Milan medical milieu with which Leonardo was familiar, or his influence on portraiture drawing on the theory of the four humors, or his tangential connection with early nature printing, the authors treat their subject with the requisite critical distance. These are useful correctives to hagiography and offer promises of interesting new work.

A complex text has been set with a respectably small number of literals. The abundant footnotes give adequate ammunition to specialists grappling with the literature and with the arguments presented. On the other hand, it is regrettable that readers have to be referred to color plates in facsimiles that are available in relatively few libraries. The many black-and-white illustrations are a rather poor substitute in many cases.

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