

Nancy G. Siraisi. *Communities of Learned Experience: Epistolary Medicine in the Renaissance*.

Singleton Center Books in Pre-Modern Europe. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. ix + 164 pp. \$45. ISBN: 978-1-4214-0749-4.

This small, elegantly printed volume offers a revised version of three lectures delivered at the Charles Singleton Center for the Study of Pre-Modern Europe at Johns Hopkins University in October 2010. It is devoted to epistolography among physicians in the Renaissance and spans the time period from 1521 to 1592–1603 (from the publication of the *Epistolae medicinales* by Giovanni Manardi to Orazio Augerio's tenure as a professor at the University of Padua). This period translates into a clear itinerary of medical epistolography, from the imitation of a genre cultivated in classical antiquity and reactivated in medical humanism to the end of medical humanism, and from internationalism across confessional and political boundaries to strictly local interests.

Each of the three chapters is devoted to an author or group of authors of letters. Chapter 1, "Contexts and Communication," focuses on Nicolò Massa (1485–1569) and Girolamo Mercuriale (1530–1606). With Massa, letters are both personal and medical (*consilia* and theoretical questions as the transmission of disease [plague] and contagion). They are addressed to correspondents in Northern Europe, crossing the divide between Catholic and reformed polities. With Mercuriale, letters to addressees in Northern Europe decrease and aim to stay in touch with intellectual life outside Italy, carefully avoiding religious controversy. Nevertheless, they were addressed to key figures of the reformed world and gradually shifted from medicine to natural history.

Chapter 2, "The Court Physician Johann Lange and His *Epistolae Medicinale*," zooms in on the Heidelberg physician Johann Lange (1485–1565). Initially a medical humanist, Lange included in his letters dialogues in the way of Plato and covered a great variety of topics, with no interest in physiological theory or the relationship between medicine and philosophy. Lange was involved in the Lutheran reform of Heidelberg University in 1558, characterized by both medical humanism and the promotion of learned medicine (by opposition to other forms of medical practice, including Jewish medicine). Lange's interests are strictly local in nature and limited to university medicine.

In chapter 3, "The Medical Networks of Orazio Augenio," the focus is on the Italian physician Orazio Augerio (ca. 1527–1603) and his personal itinerary from Le Marche (where he was a town physician) to Turin and Padua (in whose universities he was appointed professor of medicine in 1578 and 1592, respectively). His letters reflect differentiated concerns, from pathology and therapy as a town physician to academic polemic as a university professor. Also, they bring to light the networking efforts of their author to obtain the support of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities and ensuing professional promotion. These letters are technical (sometimes becoming real treatises) and show no humanistic-philological approach to text when dealing with classical medical literature.

These chapters are framed by an introduction and a conclusion that survey current research on Renaissance epistolography and sum up the diverse facets of epistolography presented in the work, respectively. In her conclusion, Siraisi stresses how collections of letters (with all their diversity) throw light on Renaissance medical practice and knowledge. The volume includes four black-and-white illustrations, abundant notes of erudition, and an index.

Though revised for publication, the text has maintained its oral nature and reads harmoniously and with pleasure, particularly because supporting evidence has been collected in notes that are not only masterpieces of erudition, but also an unlimited source of information for any specialized research on the epistolographers under study, their collections of letters, and their milieus. Analysis is a model of historical investigation, packed with data, astutely decrypting the hidden messages of texts, and offering refined interpretations together with alternative hypotheses. A chronological table of cited letters and editions, together with a list of manuscripts (instead of references scattered in the notes: see 93n13, 112n62, 118n22, 122n38, 136n9) and a more detailed index (distinguishing, for example, Pliny the Elder, author of the *Naturalis Historia* [40] from his nephew, Pliny the Younger, author of letters [8], and adding a reference to a citation of Pliny the Elder [52]) would have usefully completed this otherwise remarkable introduction to Renaissance medical epistolography.

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