

Book Reviews

LUIS GARCIA BALLESTER, *Medicina, ciencia y minorías marginadas: Los Moriscos*, Universidad de Granada, 1977, 8vo, pp. 163, 300 pesetas.

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The Moriscos, the Mohammedans turned “new Christians” of sixteenth-century Spain, were expelled from their homeland by royal decree in 1609. Dr. Garcia Ballester, in this thought-provoking study, shows how from an organized medical system with diplomas and licences, medicine among this oppressed and largely peasant minority came to be practised by unlicensed healers relying on traditional, often orally preserved, herbal remedies.

This decline was not uniform. In Aragon and Castile, the Arabic language died out swiftly: in Granada, from 1530 to 1750, the university willingly accepted Moriscos into its faculty of medicine; in Valencia, higher education was effectively barred to them, and massive discrimination ensured that for the most part they remained ignorant and illiterate. Even when they succeeded in becoming doctors, ecclesiastics frowned on them giving pastoral advice and assistance to “old” Christians, and, once converted, they became immediately liable to the serious charge of heresy, even for possessing a book written in Arabic. They were always open to accusations of sorcery, astrology, and carrying out unlawful circumcisions; and a spectacular cure, even one made on good Galenic authority, could result in hostility from Christian doctors and suspicion of a pact with the devil. But the low level of medical assistance available especially to the poor gained them patients even from the “old” Christians, and a consequently increased surveillance from the Inquisition.

Inevitably, given the type of evidence so far available, the overall picture is impressionistic: there is no clear account of the place of the doctor, as opposed to that of the healer, in the Muslim community, and the opposition, the Christian physician, remains in the shadows. This is a pity, for the question of doctrinal antipathy to traditional Galenic/Arabic medicine is important, especially as the physicians of the University of Valencia were early supporters of Vesalius and the new anatomy. Nor are we sure what medicine was available to the rural Christian poor: Cipolla’s studies of seventeenth-century Italy have revealed a much higher ratio of doctors in the community than had been thought possible *a priori*.

There is a full bibliography but no index: the map, p. 124, should have been given much earlier; the notes to pp. 118–120 are wrongly numbered; and the ferocious monk, Bleda, p. 99, probably wrote that the Moriscos sowed Muslim impiety under pretext and cover (colore) of healing the body.

This sadly-moving monograph achieves its aim of describing a cultural confrontation between two societies: and we look forward to the author’s promised work on the medicine of the previous centuries, when the Galenic synthesis was accepted and developed by Arab and Christian alike.

A. SHARF, *The universe of Shabbetai Donnolo*, Warminster, Wilts., Aris & Phillips, 1976, 8vo, pp. viii, 214, illus., £7.50 (£4.95 paperback).

Donnolo of Oria in south Italy (913–982) was a doctor who compiled a herbal