

Book Reviews

in the detailed list, pp. 344–53; Byz is, of course, Bizantium; and *Def.* refers not to Rufus, as the unwary might think, but to pseudo-Galen, who is assigned a wrong volume number in K. on p. 349 (read: 19). But Garofalo gives little or no help on bigger problems in his introduction, where questions of sources and genres should have been more widely discussed than in a few lines. Instead, he talks mainly of authorship (rightly rejecting Herodotus in favour of an anonymous writer of the imperial age, but without arguing for the date, which is still controversial), and of manuscripts. Yet it is somehow typical of the carelessness shown throughout this edition (for which author, translator, and series editor must share responsibility) that the block diagram on p. xix does not correspond to the list that it is meant to represent and that immediately precedes it. Similarly, Garofalo numbers his chapters from 1, and notes that some manuscripts have chapter numberings (those in V are curiously described as “continuous but sometimes omitted”): what he does not reveal, but the dust jacket alone makes clear, is that in the manuscripts the numbering of the existing chapters begins at no. 13, an important fact in considering the composition of this interesting treatise.

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Benvenutus Grassus, *The wonderful art of the eye: a critical edition of the Middle English translation of his De probatissima arte oculorum*, ed. L M Eldredge, East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1996, pp. xiii, 120, \$24.95 (0-87013-459-0).

The thirteenth-century oculist Benvenutus Grassus is known only for, and through, a single treatise: *De probatissima arte oculorum*, or *The wonderful art of the eye*. Yet that unique work spread his fame across Europe. Its original Latin version circulated in numerous copies, and was re-worked and augmented, a sure symptom of popularity and heavy use. It

was also translated very quickly into a number of vernacular languages. Two Middle English versions survive: one recension is represented by MSS Glasgow, University Library, Hunter V.8.6, and London, British Library, Sloane 661, and a second by Glasgow, University Library, Hunter V.8.16, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole 1468. L M Eldredge’s critical edition is in fact only an edition of Hunter V.8.6, with some variant readings from the Sloane codex; where this recension omits passages found in the original, they are supplied in italics from the manuscripts of the second group, especially Hunter V.8.16. Though the result is a text which no medieval reader ever saw, such editorial strategies are appropriate for medieval vernacular texts, whose forms are seldom canonized.

Eldredge’s edition is impeccable, his notes and glossary very useful. Where the reader is likely to be somewhat disappointed is in the introduction covering Grassus himself, the nature of the text, the manuscripts, and the quality of the translation. There is much that is commendable in this introduction: the medical identification of eye diseases described by Grassus is fascinating, though Eldredge tends to interpret medieval pharmacology in terms of modern standards of efficacy rather than in the light of its own notions of the nature and power of drugs—about which Benvenutus Grassus was proudly well informed. The problems really lie in Eldredge’s treatment of Grassus himself, and in his lack of attention to the context of vernacular translation of medical works.

Grassus was an itinerant oculist, but also a man with considerable exposure to scholastic medicine. Oculists, being specialists, were considered low-caste practitioners, and yet Grassus writes in Latin, employs the categories of Galenic physiology, pathology and pharmacology with ease, and expects his readers to as well. This raises some very significant questions about the diffusion of Scholastic medical culture beyond the walls of the university, and its appropriation by practitioners who were not necessarily university-trained—a subject very subtly

explored by Michael McVaugh in his *Medicine before the plague* (Cambridge, 1993). However, Eldredge's biography of Grassus does not allude to the status of oculists or to the ambiguous position of ophthalmology—half medicine, half surgery—within the canon of medical sciences. Moreover, it pays little attention to issues of genre: the *De probatissima arte* is structured as a *practica*, with the usual subdivisions into causes, signs and cures. Eldredge remarks that Grassus avoids Scholastic disputation, but this is less a personal preference than a characteristic of *practica* as a whole. Therefore it cannot stand as evidence of whether Grassus actually attended university or not (p. 11). Eldredge likewise does not compare *De probatissima arte* to other medieval ophthalmological works, nor is the question of the author's purpose and audience ever broached. Eldredge notes the didactic tone of *De probatissima arte*, but does not elaborate on this theme on the grounds that there is no evidence that Grassus ever taught in a university. But would the oculist's craft have been taught in universities at all? Were universities the only places where formal medical training could be had? Here again, some comparison to Latin treatises on surgery and their use of scholastic structures and concepts, even when destined for private reading, would have been useful: the articles by Nancy Siraisi and Peter Murray Jones in the recent collection *Practical medicine from Salerno to the Black Death* (Cambridge, 1994) would have been excellent starting points.

Similarly, one wishes that Eldredge had discussed the motives and audience for these Middle English translations. Who might Grassus' English readers have been? Surgeons like John of Arderne, who never attended university, but who were quite familiar with scholastic medicine? Here again, some comparison and context would have been useful, as well as some reference to the abundant scholarship on Middle English medical translation: one thinks immediately of the work of Faye Getz and Linda Ehrsam Voigts. For example, Eldredge describes, but does not analyse, the strategies of his

translators. Surely it tells us something that the author of Hunter V.8.6 omits the section on incurable cataracts. Can we not deduce something about the purposes of a translator who slides between third person reporting of Grassus' statements (often in the form of a summary paraphrase) and first-person close translation, translating closely when the passage concerns concrete techniques, and abridging the more theoretical material? How might this compare, for example, to the English translations of the surgeries of Lanfranc or Guy de Chauliac?

These lacunae of the introduction in no way detract from the value of a fine edition, but one cannot help but regret that the editor did not make anywhere near as much of his material as it deserves. Behind this sense of great opportunities lost lies a certain ambiguity about the audience for this edition. The series in which it appears (*Medieval Texts and Studies*) is essentially literary, but it is not clear whether the reader is supposed to be primarily interested in the translation as an example of Middle English writing, or as a document of medical history. There is no bibliography, and the literature cited in the notes and in the 'Suggestions for further reading' shows some surprising gaps. The discussion of Grassus' "extramission" theory of vision does not mention David Lindberg's *Theories of vision from al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago, 1976) and no notice has been taken of that marvellous synthesis of cultural history, Gudrun Schleusener-Eichholz's *Das Auge im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1985), which devotes two chapters to the anatomy and pathology of the eye. In short, Eldredge has furnished an excellent edition of an important text. Let us hope he is planning to gratify the curiosity he has piqued by preparing a monograph on Grassus and his medieval fortunes.

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