

Book Reviews

MARIE-CHRISTINE POUHELLE, *The body and surgery in the Middle Ages*, transl. Rosemary Morris, Cambridge and Oxford, Polity Press, 1990, 8vo, pp. vii, 276, illus., £35.00.

The original edition of this book appeared first in 1983. This English translation follows that of Jacquart's book on sexuality in the Middle Ages: clearly Polity Press have found a niche in the English-reading market.

Ultimately, I think, Pouchelle's book can best be described as political. It aims to show, by doing it, that this kind of history is valid. It is partly defensive, the enemies being Anglo-Saxons (particularly in their adoption of "behaviourist" attitudes) and the rational positivism of modern doctors (which tries to dictate what was "scientific" in the Middle Ages). In opposition to this somewhat bloodless and external approach, the validity of the French treatment that Pouchelle is fighting to promote relies on getting inside Henri de Mondeville and re-creating his motives for action.

Pouchelle uses a number of devices to do this. The first is the Unconscious—"gleanings from the psychologist's couch"—that is, a largely psychoanalytic approach that points to enduring patterns in the mind, together with the "day-to-day workings of my own unconscious as detected in the phantoms and dreams aroused by Mondeville's text itself". The second is a Bachelardian study of the "anthropological structure of the imagination". Third is a systematic study of the power and significance of the analogies, similes, metaphors, and allegories used by Henri. The selection of material to receive emphasis in these approaches is generally made from a feminist viewpoint. It is also a feature of the work that these approaches have been illuminated by reference more to contemporary literary, religious, juridical, and iconographic materials, which "give us access to the medieval imagination" than to other medico-surgical works.

So it is certainly not behaviourist or positivist. It is another enterprise. So to criticize it as misdirected would be grossly chauvinistic and Anglo-Saxon. But it may not be inappropriate to point out some consequences of these different techniques. Whatever the justice in seeing a long *durée* in history, in practice it allows the historian to jump about chronologically with alarming agility. Lanfranc and Henri himself occasionally appear in the wrong century. With the whole of the Middle Ages to choose from any thesis can be sustained by selective quotation from the sources. Another problem is that a search for structures of thought from the kind of sources mentioned above occasionally obscures a simpler story. The distinction between the similar and organic parts, the sympathy between the parts of the body, the vein between the uterus and breasts, the inversion of the female genitalia, the nobility of organs and—central to this enquiry—many of the analogies made by Henri in describing the body were such well-known parts of standard Galenism that any learned medical man would use them as set-pieces. They are revealed only as platitudes of his education (but unremarked as such by Pouchelle).

Would it not be possible to see the Gallic and Anglo-Saxon styles as complementary rather than opposed? In medieval Europe a man kneels in supplication before his superior, and weeps. It is a symbolic act, and when he rises it is into a new relationship. Pouchelle wants to see the action as a regression to the foetal state, followed by a rebirth. But it is surely also a ritual in which the supplicant exposes the most vulnerable part of his body, the neck, to a man who has power and carries a sword. The arrangement into which the man then rises is that the sword is not used as long as he knows and keeps his place. When very similar things happen between animals, behaviourists operate on the only level open to them and explains that it is a ritual that establishes a hierarchy without the need to kill an individual of the same species. All may be valid accounts of the same action. Perhaps we need a Eurocrat to lay down rules for harmonization.

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BERENGARIO DA CARPI, *On fracture of the skull or cranium*, transl. L. R. Lind, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society vol 80, pt. 4, Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1990, 8vo, pp. xxv, 164, illus., \$20.00 (paperback).

With this first English translation from the Latin of Berengario da Carpi's 'Tractatus de fractura calve sive cranei' of 1518, Dr Lind continues his interest in an author whose 'Isogogae breves' (A Short Introduction to Anatomy) he translated as long ago as 1959. The title might be more aptly, 'On fracture of the skull-vault or cranium', for anatomically the skull is composed

of cranial and facial bones, and Berengario's treatise does not discuss the latter. Dr Lind tells us that Berengario is probably a dialectal corruption of his true name, Barrigazi, as entered on his will and testament, although Berengario is spelt "Beregario" throughout the last 80 pages of his translation, presumably a printer's error. Carpi is a small town near Bologna.

If treatises on 'Wounds of the head' were a feature of surgical works from the time of the Hippocratic corpus, Berengario expanded the subject in pioneering a separate monograph, being inspired by his successful treatment of Lorenzo Medici, Duke of Urbino, for a compound cranial fracture and, by his students' requests for information on this and other case observations. Considered by Dr Lind to be "the most important work on cranio-cerebral surgery of the early sixteenth century" and regarded by Malgaigne as the most important of Berengario's writings, the monograph is significant for clinical reports on named individual patients observed and also treated surgically by him, including instructive unsuccessful histories. There were six subsequent editions, the last in 1728. The classification of fractures, their symptoms, signs, diagnosis, and prognosis are thoroughly debated, and treatment by medical means is emphasized before accepting surgery in defined circumstances. The descriptions of operative techniques and the detailed illustrations of instruments (here reproduced in facsimile), including the brace trepan for the first time, comprise a fundamental leap forward and were to form the basis of works on the subject for many years subsequently.

At the least, Berengario's detailed monograph will intrigue and impress neurosurgeons, traumatologists, students of the surgical armamentarium, and social historians of the sixteenth century. The translation is preceded by an introductory essay and a select bibliography; it is well-printed and modestly priced.

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MIRKO D. GRMEK, *La première révolution biologique: réflexions sur la physiologie et la médecine du XVII^e siècle*, Paris, Payot, 1990, 8vo, pp. 358, (paperback).

The leitmotiv of this wide-ranging book is the emergence of quantification in the study of life sciences in the seventeenth century. In that century, according to Grmek, biology and medicine underwent a deep transformation, namely, the introduction of both experimental method and mechanical views.

The topic of the first section of this book is the importance of experiments in medicine. It opens with an essay dealing with ancient medicine's failure to produce consistent quantitative investigations. This, according to Grmek, was due to the fact that ancient medicine was based on the notions of qualities and humours—which could not be subject to "real" measurement. According to the author, a revolution occurred when the "Galilean method" was introduced in medicine. Galileo is the topic of the second essay, which, surprisingly, deals with the Italian scientist's personality and not with his "method". The remaining two chapters of the first part explore Santorio's and Harvey's "successful" quantitative investigations.

Grmek, who denies any importance to the plurality of versions of Renaissance Galenism and Aristotelianism, maintains that the emergence of the mechanical view of life was a watershed in physiology. This is the topic of the second part, entitled 'La machine vivante'. The chapter devoted to the beast-machine theory is not particularly original and is somewhat oversimplified: mechanical philosophy is considered a homogeneous conception of nature and is radically opposed to the qualitative (i.e., Aristotelian and chemical) views. Finally, Descartes' belief in *calidum innatum* is simply dismissed as a mistake. Some interesting considerations are contained in the essay dealing with Giorgio Baglivi's views of the living fibre, which in fact can hardly be described as mechanical. The most original and useful essay of the book is the one devoted to Edme Mariotte's controversy with Jean Pecquet and Claude Perrault about the seat of vision. Here Grmek rightly emphasizes that Mariotte's "incorrect" theory that the seat of vision was the choroid prompted important researches in the physiology of vision.

The last part of the book, dealing with medical practice, is more discursive than analytical. It contains the often-repeated statement that in the seventeenth century the university medical curriculum was merely obscurantist and that the "new medicine" flourished in connection with scientific academies.