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*Recherches médiévales sur la nature humaine. Essais sur la réflexion médicale (XIIe–XVe s.)* by Danielle Jacquart

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The subject of humans with reference to knowledge of ourselves and our relationship with the natural and also supernatural world that surrounds us has been the preserve of numerous medical works from antiquity to the advanced modern age.

Danielle Jacquart's book, *Recherches médiévales sur la nature humaine. Essais sur la réflexion médicale (XIIe–XVe s.)*, brings together a total of 18 articles written over a period of roughly 20 years, 16 of which have already been printed in other miscellanies by the same publisher (SISMEL). This, however, does not compromise the book's topicality as high-impact research. Though subdivided into articles written at different times, the unity of the work is defined by a guiding thread, the perception and description of human nature in the Middle Ages, that links all the pieces, which tend to refer one to the other and thus provide clarifications for the reader's benefit.

The book's theme is complex, since it is set within the framework of a medical argument that intersects with philosophy and theology as well as with the accessory sciences strictly connected with medicine, such as astronomy/astrology, alchemy, and physiognomy. With the expository clarity that distinguishes her, Jacquart succeeds in leading the reader step by step, allowing us to penetrate by degrees into the work of the authors and their intellectual itineraries. She succeeds perfectly in her intent, even with works that are certainly not easy to approach, such as Peter of Abano's *Conciliator*. One of the most complex and discussed medieval authors, he is extensively studied in various articles in the book. The other authors chiefly dealt with are among the most important protagonists of medieval medicine, including Jacques Despars (on whose monumental work, the commentary on the *Canon* of

Avicenna, Jacquart is the leading expert [1980]), Michele Savonarola, and Bernard of Gordon. There is no lack of little known or obscure authors such as Angelo dell'Aquila and others who, though not physicians, developed their own thought on different aspects of human nature, such as Michael Scot and William of Conches. Not only does Jacquart contextualize the texts studied within their authors' cultural climate and society, she also follows the course of the medical or philosophical thought (or both) that informs these texts in explaining all the passages. In this way, she often tends to dwell upon ancient medicine and philosophy, and authors writing in Arabic. Yet sometimes she goes beyond the time-limits defined by the title of the book with incursions into texts written in the early modern period. Her acknowledged paleographic and philological expertise and her great knowledge of medical and philosophical texts in Greek, Arabic, Latin, and other languages mean that Jacquart can trace a highly coherent general outline. The book does not lack information of a philological nature, which never weighs down the narrative but suitably informs her readers and puts them in a position to seek out any avenues of future research, which, in many cases, Jacquart herself suggests. As a further enrichment, many articles are accompanied by passages drawn from manuscripts or from 16th-century editions.

There are three indexes in the book: the first gives the names of people, places, and anonymous works. This is followed by a rich and useful thematic index. Lastly, there is a list of the numerous manuscripts that Jacquart has consulted.

The article opening the collection, 'La physiognomonie à l'époque de Frédéric II. Le traité de Michel Scot', is a dissertation on the *Liber phisionomie*, the third book of the *Liber introductorius*, a work of an encyclopedic nature written by Michael Scot (1175–1232) at the court of Frederick II. The text, as Jacquart explains, was widely circulated in printed editions until the 18th century and was the first on the subject to be written in the West. In a meticulous analysis of the text, Jacquart identifies the Greek and Arab sources (in particular Rhazes' *Liber ad Almansorem*, which was translated by Gerard of Cremona) and the texts of the nearby Schola Medica Salernitana, by which it was inspired; and points out the discordances and the interesting aspects of their originality in the subject of physiognomy, which has been much debated since antiquity. Particular consideration goes to the presence in the *Liber* of a long section dedicated to generation, to the embryo and to the role of women in conception.

Ideally linked to the work of Scot, the second article, 'La morphologie du corps féminin selon les médecins de la fin du Moyen Âge', is dedicated to the way in which the morphology of the female body was perceived by physicians. Jacquart brings together various medieval works, including Peter of Abano's *Liber compilationis phisionomie* and its Arab and Greek sources. Except for a few allusions to their physiognomy and anatomy, these texts focus on the maternal function of women. Michele Savonarola's *Speculum phisionomie*, which establishes a bridge between the medieval tradition and the humanist one that sets humans at the centre of space in the universe, demonstrates greater attention to the female body than was given by his ancient and medieval predecessors. His text preserves the Aristotelian tradition in assessing (the inevitable) imperfection of the female body. As Jacquart specifies, this perception of the female body persists until the 16th century, when a change in the theoretical foundations of anatomical studies also changed the view of women.

'Médecine et morale. Les cinq sens chez Évrard de Conty († 1405)' is devoted to Évrard de Conty, personal physician to Charles V in the second half of the 14th century. It describes the outlook of this physician who turned moralist. His work in the vulgar tongue is of an encyclopedic nature and written in a wisely structured literary form. This work, which recent publishers have entitled 'Livre des Eschez amoureux moralisés', deals with the five senses on a medical and, especially, on an ethical plane.

The fifth article, 'Cœur ou cerveau? Les hésitations médiévales sur l'origine de la sensation et le choix de Turisan', is a study of the compromises which medical authors implemented in order to reconcile the greatest philosophical authority, Aristotle, along with his medical counterpart Galen, and the doctrine of the centrality of the heart or the brain. To arrive at the work of Peter Torrigiano, celebrated for an often-criticized mechanistic explanation of the heart, Jacquart tackles the problem by setting out from Galen's works and skipping the whole arc of medieval theories with Avicenna, Arnaldo da Villanova, and Averroes to face a question concerning problems of a medical, philosophical, and theological kind. From Galen, we come to the theory taught in the 12th century of the existence of three corporeal forces or virtues driven by three spirits, which are referred to the three main organs: liver, heart, and brain. Starting out from the presupposition that, in the Christian context and in conformity with the predominant system of Avicenna, it was

generally admitted that corporeal faculties were an emanation of the soul, the challenge was to make the three corporeal faculties correspond to the three hierarchical levels of the soul's power, that is, the rational, the sensitive, and the vegetative. The rational power, however, was excluded because it was understood as purely spiritual and this without a direct corporeal organ. Hence, the problem became that of determining the role reserved for the heart.

The sixth article, 'Calculus et pierres, suivi de note additionnelle. Le mode d'écriture d'Angelo de Aquila', concerns the description of a special, little-known, untitled work contained in the MS. BnF. lat. 4120, which was written in 1415 in Paris by Angelo dell'Aquila. The text brings together most of the remedies well known at the time for curing kidney stones, remedies ranging from those most rationally justifiable to the most incongruous such as applying the blood of a he-goat, which was still in vogue, as Jacquart explains, in Montaigne's day. Indubitably, the problem of curing kidney stones was widely felt, not least out of a desire to avoid a particularly bloody surgical intervention, as clearly explained in an article by Michel McVaugh [1998]. Incidentally, it should be mentioned that not for nothing was the healing of kidney stones one of the most requested miracles in hagiographic texts, in which fear of surgical intervention often emerges. Jacquart's interest in the text concerns its connection with the alchemical knowledge indicated in several parts of the text. Jacquart explains these alchemical passages clearly and thus opens up a fascinating avenue of research. In fact, as a final question, she wonders whether kidney stones might not serve in the processes of alchemical transformation and figure in the search for the elixir of life.

If medical knowledge can sometimes be placed in close relation with alchemy, the same is true to an even greater degree for astronomy/astrology. In 'Le soleil, la lune et les états du corps humain', Jacquart begins with a description of the *Compendium medicinalis astrologiae*, written around 1330 by Nicolaus de Paganica. This book highlights a part of Greek astrological knowledge that was mediated by its Arab counterpart and concerns the astral domination of the human body, especially by the Sun and Moon. The difficulties of integrating medical theory with astronomical knowledge created difficulties as early as the time of Galen, who scarcely managed in the *De criticis diebus* to save the Hippocratic calendar in accounting for the periodic attacks of fever. Jacquart demonstrates how the strong link in the Middle Ages between astrology and medicine was in any case superficial

since it was impossible to find a perfect agreement between Galen's theories, astronomical knowledge, and the rules of astrology, especially in relation to medical data. The two authors whom she considers, Bernard of Gordon and Peter of Abano, though contemporaries are very different from one another. While the former, in his practical manual, the *Lilium medicine*, uses astrology on a fairly superficial level, Peter was the only medieval author to attempt the impossible, that is, to find agreement between Galen's medical doctrine, Ptolemaic astronomy, and the rules of Arab astrology. His fundamental text is the *Conciliator*, which he began in Paris and completed in Padua in 1310. With great mastery, Jacquart guides the reader to the discovery of the astrological knowledge expressed in this exceedingly complex medico-philosophical work. It is interesting to observe how reference to the Sun shifts attention from astrology once more to alchemical medicine in regard to the use of gold in the medieval pharmacopeia. Pills, distillates, and gold leaf hark back to the Sun and their corresponding astral body. This argument leads Jacquart to mention medieval discussions about drinkable gold and the use of the seal with the lion's image in the treatment of kidney stones. We thus return to the alchemical value of the kidney stone already mentioned in Jacquart's description of the work by Angelo dell'Aquila.

Once more we find the much-discussed author, Peter of Abano, in one of the two previously unpublished articles that close the book. In 'La complexion selon Pietro d'Abano', Jacquart explains the author's concept of 'complexio' as it emerges from the *Conciliator* and from the *Expositio problematum Aristotelis*, a commentary on the *Problemata* attributed to Aristotle. Though it is a medical-philosophical concept with a broad tradition, it is not immediately comprehensible in Peter's works, which feature a high degree of complexity. Jacquart, however, with her full command of these works and of the tradition from which they derive, in particular Avicenna, succeeds in aiding the reader to penetrate Peter's tortuous thought.

Peter of Abano is also the subject of the article 'Autour de la *Compilatio phisionomiae* de Pietro d'Abano', which contains a discussion of MS. BnF. lat. 16089, a manuscript containing various texts of an alchemical, geometrical, astronomical, and necromantic nature. In this collection, described by Jacquart as 'quelque peu sulfureux', we find the oldest transcription of Peter of Abano's *Compilatio phisionomiae*. Jacquart outlines the chief characteristics of this work and describes Peter's attempt, in the context of

physiognomy, to unite the lower causes that are connected to physiology with the higher causes that are connected to astrology, while striving to remain within orthodoxy. We should point out that the *Compilatio* was written in Paris less than 20 years after the condemnation in 1277 of Peter's articles, which were censored by Etienne Tempier, bishop of Paris. Among the 219 indicted articles, there was one that touched directly on physiognomy.

Bernard of Gordon reappears in the article 'De la faillibilité de l'art médical aux erreurs du praticien au début du XIVe siècle. Une imperceptible marge', in which the attitudes and behavior of physicians as evidenced in their texts are considered in connection with the occurrence of error in their treatment of their patients. It is not at random that Bernard is taken into account since, as Jacquart explains, his *Lilium medicinae* of 1305 would become, in the following centuries, a reference-book on the subject of medical practice. Bernard advises prudent behavior, especially in predictions of negative outcomes. It is surprising to read, especially in relation to our own ethical and scientific criteria, that for a physician it was less embarrassing to err in offering a cure that proves unsuccessful subsequently than to identify accurately an incurable illness. Moreover, a mortal prognosis was disadvantageous in terms of therapy because it undermined the patient's trust. Interesting—above all because, as Jacquart underscores, it represents awareness of a new social responsibility—is the fact that the diagnosis of leprosy was emphasized as an error with serious consequences.

Another great protagonist in this book is Michele Savonarola from whose most substantial work, the *Practica maior*, Jacquart extracts the most original parts as she seeks its sources in the article with the eloquent title 'En feuilletant la *Practica maior* de Michel Savonarola. Quelques échos d'une pratique'. Jacquart's method of 'leafing through' in no way suggests a lack of in-depth knowledge of the *Practica* nor indeed of the entirety of Michele's writings. It is no accident that she states that the originality of the work is more discernible in the interstices of the argument than in its peremptory statements. This allows Jacquart to dwell upon a little-known and little-discussed but fascinating theme which opens up further research perspectives, such as the Savonarola's use of narcotics, notably, opium.

The book closes with an unpublished study of the process underlying the voluntary movements of the body as theorized by Jacques Despars, 'Le mouvement volontaire selon Jacques Despars († 1458)'. Its theme involves not

only medical matters but also others of a philosophical and theological nature since the voluntary movement of bodies brought in much-debated problems concerning the power and action of the human soul. Jacquart, in reinterpreting Avicenna's theories and bringing to light philosophical reflection in the centuries prior to Despars' work, penetrates the physician's thought and explains his complex system, which goes far beyond the physiology of Avicenna and the limitations imposed by medieval physiology and theology.

We find Despars once more in the article 'Où il est à nouveau question de Jacques Despars. Les marginalia du latin 6915', in which Jacquart discusses the complex philological question relating to the *marginalia* of MS. BnF. lat. 6915, which might have belonged to the physician himself, and which shows traces of his long work preparatory to his commentary on the *Canon* of Avicenna.

Despars is also widely quoted in the rich article 'Naissance d'une pédiatrie en milieu de cour'. In this article, Jacquart focuses on the most important texts which, from the end of the Middle Ages, gave birth to a genre of treatises expressly devoted to the care of children.

In certain articles, Jacquart, though citing concrete examples from medical texts, concentrates on general themes. Thus, in 'L'observation dans les sciences de la nature au Moyen Âge', she analyzes various treatises in order to understand the meaning given to observation and how the very act of observing was described since, as there was no uniformity of vocabulary, each medical author attributed different meanings to the act, while the univocal interpretation of perceptible data had created, since antiquity, difficulties due to the fact that the human body is subject to ongoing transformations. Likewise, the article dedicated to the literary genre of medical secrets, 'Du genre des « secrets » dans la médecine médiévale', sets out from the extremely ambiguous concept of the term 'secret' in the Middle Ages, which consisted in revealing what should not be revealed and which employed a rhetoric aimed at pretending that such divulgation was reserved to only a few initiates. Jacquart, beyond giving a summary of the concept of secrecy through interpretation drawn from various authors, concentrates on the work of the Arab physician Rhazes, who was decidedly against medical secrecy and thus defended a concept of medicine based on a doctrine of universal access and not the privilege of a few initiates.

In the article dedicated to the skin, 'À la recherches de la peau dans le discours médical de la fin du Moyen Âge', Jacquart clearly highlights how homeomeric parts were always paid little attention by medieval anatomists and how carrying out a study of the subject means dealing with the entire medical literature. This notwithstanding, she succeeds in giving a clear and wide-ranging picture of the subject of the skin from the standpoints of both anatomy and pathology.

Another leading figure in Jacquart's book is Mondino de' Liuzzi, whose name is linked chiefly to his famous *Anatomia*, which was written in Bologna in 1316 although, as is well known, his text did not serve to call anatomical knowledge into question. Her article, 'Au nom de la nature. Le plaisir sexuel selon le médecin bolonais Mondino de' Liuzzi († 1326)' is not another study of that work but rather a dissertation on Mondino's commentary to the chapter on the generation of the embryo in Avicenna's *Canon*, a commentary that has come down to us in a single manuscript only and in the form of a *reportatio* done in 1319 by one of his students. This is a far more original subject; and Jacquart, in placing the Bolognese physician's work in the context of the debate on generation since the last decades of the 13th century, with particular reference to the contribution of women, points out its differences with previous or contemporary works. Though giving ample space to Mondino's thought, the article also allows Jacquart to range through the theories of generation from antiquity to the Middle Ages.

Medieval medical culture not only involves texts written by physicians but is also linked to other disciplines. Jacquart reminds us of this with her article, 'Les emprunts de Guillaume de Conches aux théories médicales', on the important 12th-century philosopher William of Conches. She considers a large number of his works, including the *Dragmaticon* and the various *Glosae*, in order to understand the relationship they had with the medical works of the day, in particular with Constantine the African's *Pantegni*, and how much his calling himself *physicus* necessarily made him a man dedicated to medical practice. This article, as well as adding a tessera to William of Conches' importance in the development of medieval thought, opens a window on the philosophy of nature in the 12th century and on the way medical texts were used at the time to spread an anthropology that was of interest not solely to physicians.



With this brief survey, which does not in the least exhaust the contents of Jacquart's book, I have aimed to show how it offers the reader far more than what is promised by the title and the brief dust-jacket blurb. This is a very high-level work of great interest not only to historians of medicine, the sciences, and philosophical thought but to anyone studying medieval culture and society in general. If, on one hand, the authors studied by Jacquart asked themselves universal questions about human nature and were in constant dialogue with the oldest medical and philosophical authorities, they were, on the other hand, also representative of the cultural climate of their period and thus fully part of the social dynamics of their time, as Jacquart herself clearly notices in giving concrete examples.

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