

tos elementales; no obstante, se puede dar un dato aproximado. En el Reino de Valencia, un 10,5% de alfabetizados frente a un 89,5% de iletrados; y en la capital, de las 40.000 personas que vivían intramuros, alrededor de 4.200 tendrían conocimientos de lectoescritura en distinto grado. Lógicamente, la distribución de los alfabetizados en el territorio era muy desigual, los centros administrativos grandes y medianos, como Valencia, Játiva o Orihuela, concentraban la mayor parte de letrados mientras que las zonas rurales estaban sumidas en un desierto de letras.

Finalmente, el epílogo sirve para hacer una reflexión en clave actual. Mirar hacia atrás es un ejercicio necesario para comprender el presente y alcanzar a entender, por ejemplo, las consecuencias derivadas del uso cada vez más residual de la escritura con tinta. Las nuevas tecnologías eliminan las características personales en la escritura creando un estilo homogéneo. Obviamente, también tiene consecuencias en educación. En los actuales tiempos de reforma educativa, el libro cobra especial relevancia. ■

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■ **Rafael Massanet Rodríguez, ed.** La medicina en la Edad Moderna desde el prisma de las Humanidades. Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter; 2023, 392 p. ISBN: 978-3-11-099095-9. 120 €

For a long time, in Spain as in Italy and in other countries, the history of medicine was considered to be the preserve of retired doctors, famous surgeons and erudite professionals—from apothecaries to hospital managers—who went on reconstructing the history of their professions. Their work was based, on most occasions, on a rather irregular knowledge of the methods and objectives of historical research. While the history of science could be left without fear of error to the care of philosophers or, in some select cases, historians, medicine enjoyed (suffered) a “suspended” status. This ambiguity was reinforced by a commitment to a version of modern medicine that placed the clinic, the doctor-patient relationship, and in many cases a religious interpretation of the doctor’s “mission” at the centre of the scene, namely, to comfort and encourage, to heal both body

and mind, if not the soul. Even laboratory medicine, the new and sometimes revolutionary discoveries in fields such as physiology or pathology, were in the background.

In more recent times, the Medical Humanities were born in the field of education for future doctors. Once again, it seems that doctors were encouraged to try to draw on some basic notions taken from the human sciences, literature and art, for a better understanding of the challenges and difficulties of their activity.

This book, by adopting a refreshingly new perspective, completely reverses the picture: in fact, it examines early modern medicine from a variety of humanistic approaches and methodologies: classical philology, art history or anthropology devoted to decolonial and postcolonial studies. This diversity allows a plurality of motifs and topics to emerge: it may thus be difficult to follow and adequately describe them all, as it often happens with edited volumes containing a substantial number of essays. I will simply attempt a brief classification of the main threads that compose its vivid and fascinating fabric. However, it must be underlined that for the non-Spanish reader one of the main reasons for the interest in the short chapters is their pronounced local character. Not all of them are devoted to Spain in the strict, geographical sense: but all of them refer to the Spanish world in some way and are thus meaningful in that they highlight the highly sophisticated character of Iberian science and medicine in an age that the standard account still sees as dominated by Italian, Dutch, French practices, texts and institutions. A reversal of this intellectual geography of knowledge has been going on with great success for at least a couple of decades now, but it is still worth underlining that the Spanish Empire circumstances on these fields have not yet received all the attention they deserve.

Some of the best essays in this book are based on a great wealth and diversity of sources, allowing us to reconstruct, for example, a 'lost' and intriguing population of doctors in the case of Pamplona and its Brotherhood of San Cosme and San Damián, whose examining activity at the end of the 16th century is analysed by Fernando Serrano Larráyoz; or the treatment of the sick at the *Hospital de los Inocentes* in Seville, a hospital for the insane, as explained in the chapter by Pablo Alberto Mestre Navas; or that of the sick women of Mallorca, whose difficult situation is described by Victòria Bauçà Nicolau. Equally interesting are the chapters on Amatus Lusitanus, whose international career took him from Salamanca to Rome, to Ragusa, to Thessaloniki. Special mention should be made of the intersection of pharmacology and medicine, with a touch of humour, in the chapter written by Ana Isabel Martín Ferreira and Cristina de la Rosa Cuba, who examine the Portuguese doctor's recipes for dyeing brown hair to obtain

the much-coveted blond colour, a cliché in books of secrets and collections of recipes. The necessary work of text editing is behind other chapters, such as the one by Marina Díaz Marcos on Theodoricus Gerardus Gaudanus' commentary on Galen's *De simplicium medicamentorum facultatibus*. Several chapters deal with the so-called unnatural, and especially with dietary prescriptions in the regimina, for special patients such as women, convalescents or the elderly. Many hitherto relatively unknown humanistic treatises are described and contextualised at the intersection of literature and narrative on disease; the chronology and geographical scope extend to include the 18th century Anglo-Saxon authors Daniel Defoe and Cotton Mather.

Equally interesting are the chapters on the Spanish colonial empire. Gloria Cristina Flórez's chapter delves into Peruvian medical and religious works of the 16th and 17th centuries, while Eduardo Azorín García's chapter reconstructs the complexity of issues of hygiene, medicine and urban politics in late 18th-century Havana through the exemplary case of the *ventanas voladas*, small balconies protruding onto the streets. Several chapters, rich in illustrations, deal with the role of the visual arts in medicine; one of them, by Jacobo Hernando Morejón, deals with the way contemporary comic artists have depicted diseases in the early modern period.

As the editor emphasises, the book was conceived during the last pandemic: it therefore, to some extent, bears the scars of an experience that has not yet been fully processed by any of us, academics and citizens, doctors and patients alike. Although the brevity of the introduction is to be regretted, which prevents it from doing justice to all the issues the book addresses and framing them in a more convincing way, offering a more structured view of the volume as a whole. Nevertheless, all the chapters deserve attention and many of them leave the reader wanting to know more about specific authors, cases, texts and places. ■

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