



Ancient Medicine And The Medieval Mind

NEW YORK CITY, *Nov. 10* – What became of the knowledge preserved in ancient medical texts as scientific inquiry rolled on toward the modern era? How did medieval practitioners adapt the ideas set forth in centuries-old documents such as the Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus? In the final two lectures of its fall series, “Medicine Before Modernity,” The New York Academy of Medicine presents two acclaimed speakers who will explore the influences on, and development of, pre-modern medical practices.

Both lectures start at 6 p.m. in the Academy at 1216 Fifth Avenue (103rd St.). Lectures are free, open to the public, and are preceded by a reception at 5:30 p.m. No reservations are required. Room numbers will be posted in the lobby on the night of each event.

November 29, 2005

Michael McVaugh, PhD

“An Ailment Not to be Treated’: The Rationality of Pre-Modern Surgery”

This lecture will focus on European surgical developments in the 13th century, when surgeons tried to understand what a “rational” surgery would be. Dr. McVaugh will argue that their understanding did not necessarily coincide with our own. Beginning with a brief consideration of the Edwin Smith Papyrus, which some have called “rational” in its approach to surgery, Dr. McVaugh will focus on what that might mean in pre-modern surgery. He will also offer an account of the changing treatment of major head wounds and conclude by comparing 13th-century surgeons’ attitudes with those expressed in the Smith Papyrus and with the attitudes expressed by 17th century surgeon Richard Wiseman. (The Smith Papyrus is on display at the Metropolitan Museum through January 15, 2006 as part of The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt.)

Michael McVaugh is William Smith Wells Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he studies the history of medicine and science from the Middle Ages to the late 17th century. Much of his published research concerns the growth of medical learning within a university setting in the Middle Ages, particularly the 13th and 14th centuries, and the concomitant medicalization of European life. His books include *Medicine before the Plague: Doctors and Patients in the Crown of Aragon, 1285-1335* (Cambridge University Press), and he is the general editor of the collected Latin writings of one of the medieval physician, Arnau de Vilanova (d. 1311). He is now at work on a general account of the development of medieval surgery. At Chapel Hill he teaches courses in medieval history, the scientific revolution, “classical” science (1700-1950), and early modern medicine (1500-1700).

Of special interest to those involved in women’s health:

December 7, 2005

Monica Green, PhD

“Gynecology and Surgery: Alliances of Knowledge and Practice in the Pre-Modern Period”

This talk will focus on one of the Academy’s prized possessions: a surgical and gynecological compendium of texts produced in northern France around the middle of the 13th century. Like the Smith Papyrus, this manuscript represents a “first” in the history of medicine: it is the oldest known volume to combine surgical and gynecological texts as if they were intimately related. These two ancient branches of medicine – surgery and gynecology – had been practiced originally in isolation, but began to meld in the 14th and 15th centuries. Increased knowledge of Arabic surgical texts emboldened male surgeons in Europe to incorporate more gynecological procedures into their surgical repertoire. According to Dr. Green, this process began the transfer of gynecological treatment from the hands of women to those of men.

Monica Green is Professor of History at Arizona State University, with Affiliate status in Women's Studies and Bioethics. She teaches courses in medieval history, women's history, and the history of science and medicine. She has published extensively on various aspects of the history of women's medicine in medieval Europe, and is now extending her interests to interdisciplinary, cross-cultural studies of women's health. Several of her major essays were collected in *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West: Texts and Contexts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), while her edition and translation of *The 'Trotula': A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 2001. She has just completed writing a major history of women's medicine and medical practice in pre-modern Europe, *The Masculine Birth of Gynecology*, and is now undertaking a general study of the medical school of Salerno in the 12th century. Green is the recipient of numerous grants, fellowships, and awards.

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Editors: Interviews with guest lecturers and Academy experts are available by appointment. Call Maria Dering at (212) 873-6715.

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