vide a unique opportunity to study the effect of day-to-day medical practice and even the natural history of major diseases since, according to Estes, the remedies used cannot have contributed therapeutically to recovery. The author reminds us that diagnoses at St. Medard's time differed from ours, for they were based on symptoms rather than etiology. The major medical problems were catarrhs, diarrhea, dysentery, VDs, wounds from duels and explosions, and, the greatest scourge: scurvy. Therapy was directed against physiological imbalances, and the drugs used were not specific like many of ours, but still logically used within the framework of humoral, solidist, or "chemical" disease theory. In the final chapter Estes gives us an in-depth analysis of St. Medard's data which are re-arranged in 13 tables. This allows for the reconstruction of treatments of various disorders with the most commonly prescribed drugs and serves as a basis for the evaluation of efficacy. Thus, "the efficacy of ineffective drugs" is the result of, subjectively, the rational use of drugs within an accepted pathophysiological system and, objectively, the *vis medicatrix naturae*. This is in contrast with the crude but true healing methods in surgery.

In conclusion: Another fine book by Estes, informative and thought-provoking, complete with lists of St. Medard's drugs and surgical equipment, health records of the crew, graphs, maps, and an index.

Marcel H. Bickel, Bern

Ferrari, Giovanna: **L'esperienza del Passato. Alessandro Benedetti, filologo e medico umanista**. Firenze, Olschki, 1996. 360 p. Ill. (Biblioteca di «Nuncius», 22). Lit. 69 000. ISBN 88-222-4465-6.

Alessandro Benedetti was classified amongst Renaissance polygraphists, a rather disappointing author for the history of science, best remembered for the take-down anatomy theatre he invented. However, Giovanna Ferrari's book offers a careful reconsideration of this character. Through selected topic, she stresses the reciprocal, subtle (and so far neglected) relationship between Benedetti's anatomical work and his physiological achievements. In his case, the dichotomy setting humanists and scholars, orators and scientists in opposition (a disciplinary division alien to those concerned) is – Ferrari emphasizes – confuted by the fact that both Benedetti's careful philological work and his approach to the corpse disclose his links with tradition and practice at the same time and in the same way.

In contrast to the obsolete opposition between internalistic and externalistic history, Benedetti's life and works are now presented as an "unstable mixture" of overlapping individuals and milieus. The evident limits of the chosen time span (micro-history: 1490–1510 ca) are actually transfigured. The author's thorough commitment lends historical substance to this period, demolishing its traditional definition as "pre-Vesalian", and unmasking positivistic prejudices within this definition. Ferrari entwines the biographical reconstruction (on the basis of her vast knowledge of Benedetti's work, correspondence, documents and manuscripts) with the "anatomy of a book", i.e. the vicissitudes of Benedetti's anatomical treatise. This is a good example both of the Renaissance renewal of anatomy and of the retrieval of Latin doctrine and speech after Medieval Arab "havoc". The author highlights Benedetti's classic sources but, even more, his ambition to keep together both the cult and the desertion

of antiquity, his creation of an interlanguage being an original mixture of Latin and Greek terms, a fully Latinized medical lexicon absorbing Greek terminology and inserting it “by authority” into the Latin vocabulary.

Under the form of the humanistic treatise, Ferrari unveils a passionate defence of freedom in research and a truly practical guide to dissection. It is the surgeon (who ignores causes) who is subordinate, not anatomy, and Benedetti claims for himself both the role of the author, who instructs verbally, and of the active anatomist. His prose – as Ferrari’s analysis reveals – aspires to verbally reproduce direct observation and goes so far as to exclude pictures and plates, because words, if used appropriately, are more ductile and of the greatest effectiveness in communication: writing simulates reality. The suggestion of truth, typical of rhetoric, therefore passes from the *bonae literae* to science. The *Anatomice* – Ferrari claims – is indeed a “spoken” text, set in a “crowded” context, more than a book to read in seclusion. It did in fact have a strong oratorical trait and, in particular, it fell within the genre of the XV century orations on human dignity. As the author rightly points out, it builds a “moral” reading of anatomy upon the beauty of the body (which was anything but self-evident).

With her reference to Benedetti’s experience as an editor of Pliny’s encyclopaedia, Ferrari examines the philological and technical aspects of Benedetti’s edition, although it is elsewhere that she very acutely pinpoints its peculiarity. It is actually a “sincerely conservative” philology, but it is also, and for the first time, specifically competent in Pliny’s science. The author ascertains just how far classical study and literary knowledge influenced epistemology. She concludes that it was precisely the use of classical Latin which induced scholars to develop better observational skills, to seize perceptive differences to which the vernaculars were less sensitive. The new language, made up of a denotative glossary, simulated reality and seemed perfectly fitted for the new institution: the anatomy theatre. This, in fact, acquainted most people with the corpus of shared knowledge; it was the theoretical and practical route out of the Aristotelian tradition. It also required studied ‘performance’ manners, and so it ensured the reliability of personal experience in a very modern way.

The controversies in which Benedetti was involved as both a physician and a philologist are very clearly identified: the debate with Fuchs and, even more, with Leonicens, about the theoretical and methodological structure of medicine and science, which went far beyond the authors’ choices of field between Latin and Greek antiquity. Ferrari’s judgement of Benedetti’s learning as a collection of elements resistant to any banal, mechanical unification is very well-argued. Benedetti’s work is actually a complex programme combining a literary strategy with the construction of a physical space (the anatomy theatre), a public (the witnesses’ community) and an ideology (“moral anatomy”). Ferrari’s book looks at the whole of the best historical knowledge, and it is generally well-balanced in its ambitious aim: that is, to produce a synthesis of the history of science and philology. However, in the latter field, she does, at times, include a disproportionate amount of ‘technical’ data and erudition (albeit ‘intelligent’ erudition) as compared with historical analysis and critical reconstruction.

Maria Teresa Monti, Milano