GIOVANNI DI PASQUALE


Luca Demaitre introduce il lettore al mondo dell'intellettuale e storia della lepra medievale e moderna. Lo spazio di studio è evidente che la lepra è una malattia che ha afflitto l'umanità per secoli, e questo volume mi aiuta a comprendere meglio il contesto storico e sociale in cui è nata e sviluppata.

Proprio facendo tesoro di questa lezione, la vicenda degli studi degli ultimi anni sul problema dei saperi tecnici e scientifici degli antichi ha dimostrato come la tesi storigrafica del blockage sia da considerarsi superata.
his work: archival texts, chronicles, hospital documents are placed side by side with medical treatises and juridical and religious sources. The first result of such a link is the delineation of the physician as judge of the patient as well as the establishment of the *judicium leprosorum* as a fundamental step in the recognition of the disease. From the reading of Demaître’s reports emerges the prominence physicians gained as professionals through the practice of the *judicium*. The annual *Schau* at Nuremberg (1493) is a major example of periodic group inspection of people suspected with leprosy. Despite the medical tenets of *judicia*, there were social implications: on the one side, many people sought to be cleared from leprosy, since leprosy implied to be avoided and excluded from the community. On the other, being leprous signified not being abandoned. In fact, medicine, religion and municipal authorities participated in the assistance of the sick person, especially through leprosaria and mercy. The attitudes of people towards leprosy implied a double ambiguity, as a sick person could conceal his symptoms so as not to be avoided by the community and a healthy person could counterfeit some symptoms in order to receive assistance. So, the practice of the oath of the patient to tell the truth became an essential tool for diagnosis and physicians’ competences frequently were submitted to social pressure. But the social concerns of leprosy went further with the practice of reporting suspected patients, thus needing a process for contagious disease and a declaration of guilt.

From a cultural point of view, Demaître points out the factor of the power of words in the definition and description of the disease and patients. The many labels of leprosy reflect the opinions on sick persons in society as well as the difficult approach to malady in medical science. In this case, the overlapping of the names of *elephantiasis*, *lepra*, *leontiasis* and *saturiasis* is just an example of how medieval and renaissance physicians tried to reconcile different sources, from Galen to Avicenna, Hippocrates, Aretaeus of Cappadocia and Rufus of Ephesus. Demaître enables the reader to follow the complex path of the nosology and pathology of leprosy in premodern medicine through an essential panorama of the foundations of humorism. The many tables and figures which accompany his explanation are a tool to understand, in a synthetic way, the complicated debate on the disease. However, the divergent doctrines and the many definitions of leprosy seem to vanish when one must switch from definition to description: no doubt about the uncleanness and badness of the disease and its repulsive qualities, hideousness and horribleness.

Describing leprosy as hideous and fetid leads to the question of the contagiousness and infectiousness of the disease, which received a great impulse by the doctrine of sympathy (*analogia, similitudo*), as exploited by physicians such as Arnau de Vilanova, Girolamo Fracastoro and Jean de Varanda. At the same time, the thoughts of authors like Velasco de Tharanta show the richness of sources which contributed to the crystallisation of leprosy as contagious: a source such as the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* (especially I 7 and VII 8) could give light to the formulation of such a concept. Nevertheless, the linking of sources like medical treatises and certificates shows that the idea of contagiousness was to be completed by that of heredity of the disease, namely, the possibility of the onset of leprosy in the womb, for instance, because of conception during menstruation.

The notion of heredity and contagiousness is linked to the aetiology of leprosy. Once again, Demaître’s explanation enables the reader to follow the debate on causes of leprosy in the context of humoral pathology and hygiene, from “the six non-naturals” to leprosy’s stages, types and correlates. All these items are developed through to the last two chapters of Demaître’s book, which deal with diagnosis, prognosis, prevention and treatment. This is the necessary final step, where the theoretical concerns find their practical application in the way the physicians visit the patient and recognize the signs of the disease. The identification