



ALBERNI, A. (ed.). *Speculum al foder*. Girona: Edicions Vitel·la. 2007. 137 pp. ISBN: 978-84-935295-7-4.

This comprehensive volume, compiled by Anna Alberni, fills in the void that existed in the assimilation of a work so extraordinary as the *Speculum al foder*. Apart from the exclusive bibliophile edition of Ramon Miquel i Planas (1917) and some informative translations, this work was only accessible in the editions of Teresa Vicens (1978) and Michael Solomon (published by The Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies of Madison in 1990). Until now this type of philological edition, with an introduction and references that facilitate the study of the sources and textual variants of the two manuscripts wherein this 15th century anonymous work was preserved, has been lacking.

The volume opens up with a preface written by Lola Badia, in which she highlights that the text not only affords physiological explanations, as related to the production of sperm or the internal processes of the human body, but also offers remedies, homemade recipes and practical pieces of advice from the perspective of applied andrology, within the framework of humoral theory, in a manner similar to other medieval treatises of health following the precepts of Galenic medicine. As Alberni affirms, the work is quite a faithful translation of the *Liber minor de coitu*, an anonymous treatise of andrology fixed in Salerno in the 12th century from the famous *Liber de coitu* by Constantinus Africanus (which makes use, in turn, of unknown Arabic sources). A compendium of the Ovidius' *Ars Amandi* is also produced in the *Speculum* and the last part of the work, without known textual source, is devoted –in an unprecedented way in all medieval Romance literature– to the handling of women and the art of selection of position for mating in order to obtain satisfaction in coitus (as possibly inspired by Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*).

Next, in the introduction of the work Alberni details the most relevant information about the two manuscripts where this work has been archived (complete in the ms. 3356 of the Biblioteca Nacional in

Madrid and fragmentarily in the ms. 10162). She covers previous editions, parts and contents of the text as well as the language of *Speculum* and also makes reference to the style of the work, concluding a review of peculiarities of this text and the criteria for orthographic regularization which have been followed.

As a treatise on andrology and sexual hygiene, Alberni locates *Speculum* in the tradition of medieval *regiments* of health and famous handbooks in the Middle Ages, normally translated from Latin originals, like *Regimen sanitatis ad regem Aragonum* by Arnau de Vilanova. On the other hand –and following the opinion of Jacquot and Thomasset–, Alberni also sees the *Speculum al foder* as akin to Arabic treatises on sexual hygiene, combining medical knowledge, stories and pharmacopoeia. It is no surprise to perceive an Arabic influence behind this text, if we bear in mind that there were cultural areas, like Catalonia, which were very receptive to the cultural mixture coming from the East (the fertile case of the monastery of Ripoll is the paradigm reported in detail by the researcher).

The volume concludes with an erudite «postilla» by Lluís Cifuentes about the use of Catalan in the scientific and practical works at the end of the Middle Ages where he explains the rise of the Bourgeoisie from the 13th century, the revaluation of the application and instrumentalism of knowledge, and how such historical changes favoured a great number of translations into Catalan of scientific Latin works with practical application (especially in the area of medicine and natural sciences). Also considered are translations of Arabic works and other works in the Romance languages, as well as the writing of original works, such as the *Speculum al foder*. In short, half way between scientific prose, practical treatise for health and the erotic discourse, this Catalan text is a unique work in all medieval European literature that has found, at long last, an accurate and rigorous edition which will become obligatory reference for future studies about the *Speculum*, medieval sexuality or the medical tradition in the Late Middle Ages.

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