

2 RECENSIONS

Le texte suivant a été publié le 2 mai 2012 dans

The Medieval Review (TMR)

The Medieval Studies Institute

Indiana University

Ballantine Hall 644

1020 East Kirkwood Avenue

Bloomington, IN 47405-7103

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Gifreu, Patrick, ed. and trans. Arnaud de Villeneuve. *Le Livre des Vins*. Perpignan: Les Éditions de la Merci, 2011. Pp. 158. EUR 20.00. ISBN: 978-2-9531917-7-6.

Some academic books might drive us to drink, but this little translation encourages one to raise a glass gladly. The *Liber de vinis* (also known as the *Tractatus de vinis*) is a brief work in Latin often dated to 1309-1311 and ascribed to the fascinating polymath Arnau de Vilanova (c. 1238-1311). Arnau moved in a sophisticated politico-ecclesiastical orbit: born in southern Aragon and trained in medicine in Montpellier, student of Hebrew and Arabic, friend of Ramon Llull, he was court doctor for (among others) Jaime II of Aragon, Frederick III of Sicily, and Pope Clement V. In his spare time, he wrote theological and medical texts in both Latin and Catalan. Influenced by Joachim of Fiore and Pierre de Jean Olivi, Arnau fell into the apocalyptic currents of Spiritual Franciscanism, was condemned for his writing on Antichrist, and spent the last years of his life defending the dissenting friars. While there is much rewarding research on his dramatic career--such as the masterful work of Michael McVaugh--one obstruction to Arnau studies is the challenge of untangling the authentic from pseudonymous writings, a challenge that has most recently assigned the *Liber de vinis* to the latter category. Yet while Arnau's authorship of *De vinis*

is unsure, inarguably the text reflects the thriving world of medicine in the later medieval Mediterranean.

The *Liber de vinis* is not a theoretical treatise on wine; rather, it is practical in spirit and scope, a tool for a working physician. It comprises about fifty recipes for compound remedies, usually infusing a base of fermented wine with spices, fruits, or herbs, and employing other techniques for refining the mixture, such as boiling and filtering. The book's perspective is then chiefly pharmacological, demonstrating a keen knowledge of botanicals and environment. In a common division in medieval medicine, the author distinguishes compounds and materials suitable for internal use from those best for external applications, the latter most amusingly apparent in *les vins cosmétiques* recommended to brighten skin and to smooth wrinkles. (This was a preoccupation in two other works credited with some uncertainty to Arnau, *De ornatu mulierum* and *De decoratione*.) Gynecology is a prominent theme, with various wine remedies recommended to boost fertility, maintain a pregnancy, increase milk production, and regulate menstruation. Psychology is another. The author continued a venerable tradition of offering wine, in its ability to expel

melancholy humors, as cure for depression: "Il l'élève en lui apportant la joie qui fait oublier la tristesse" (45).

The *Liber de vinis* demonstrates the author's digestion of classical, Arabic, and Hebrew texts and commentaries, agricultural as well as medical. Citations frequently appear of his predecessors and colleagues, including Galen, Palladius, Constantine the African, Avicenna, Pliny the Elder, and Maimonides. Yet the continuing clinical liveliness of this tradition is visible through the author's frequent references to experience, habit, and experiment (e.g. "c'est la formule que je préfère," 152). The author's practical knowledge also encompassed wine itself: the impact of different barrel woods; the uses of must; and the process, of which Christian Europe was then newly aware, of distillation.

Yet beyond the text's practicalities, or rather vivifying and elevating them, is the author's delegation of wine's powers to divine providence and his location of medicine within a spiritual frame.

Wine approached curative perfection in its preservation of virtues and balancing of humors. And as Patrick Gifreu notes, for the author health was spirituality, the

pondering of the natural world and its influences upon the body finally illuminative of God's relationship with the soul. Both soul and body were transformed by wine: "C'est un bienfait pour le corps mais aussi pour l'âme" (45). God, "généreux donateur de tous les biens," was master of sickness and sadness as well as health; "Dieu tire profit de la maladie," which directed the Christian to consolation (38). Repeatedly the author bound the prosaic to the sublime, and vice-versa. The power of the grape to affect the body might seem miraculous, but in the hands of a knowledgeable doctor, "il n'a rien étonnant...Il suffit de le connaître" (66). While the workaday utility of the recipes in soothing pain and sickness constantly gestured to the profound realities of God's omnipotence, the reverse was also true: "la science de la Médecine ne se révèle qu'à ceux d'entre eux qui contemplent les choses universelles" (67).

This translation derives from the *Opera omnia* printed in Bâle in 1585. Medievalists may find exiguous the apparatus provided by Gifreu, a poet, fiction writer, and translator. The question of the *Liber de vinis's* authorship is largely untreated here, as Gifreu firmly ascribes it to Arnau without discussion ("son authenticité n'est plus contestée,"

24). For those who accept Arnaldian authorship, there is still much missing. While Gifreu includes a brief introduction to Arnau's life and work, it contains few footnotes, and the bibliography is cursory. There is no index.

No matter who the author, one would benefit greatly from a fuller discussion of the *Liber de vinis*'s complicated textual history in manuscript and print. Gifreu does not explain why he chose the 1585 Bâle printing as his source, nor references W. L. Braekman's edition of a Middle Dutch translation and H. E. Sigerist's modern English translation of a German version printed in 1478. Most seriously, some descriptive footnotes are borrowed heavily from the French Wikipedia (e.g. 64, n. 30; 65, n. 34). The translation is generally faithful to the Latin, although the style adopted by Gifreu departs from it by adopting the cadence and vocabulary of modern pharmacy instructions (use of imperative verbs; anachronisms like "placebo" and "contre-indications").

Even if one must use Gifreu's translation cautiously, any easily available text of the *Liber de vinis* is to be warmly welcomed, given its puzzles of authorship, transmission, and language, and the related lack of an authoritative Latin edition. (McVaugh has pointed out that manuscripts do not

even have a consistent incipit. [1]) The *Liber de vinis* is a remarkable medieval conflation of what are in the modern academy unfortunately distinct subfields: the histories of medicine, of food and drink, of religious life and theology. And it reinforces what many of us know already: that "le vin est le meilleur ami de l'homme" (47).

Notes:

1. Michael McVaugh, "Chemical Medicine in the Medical Writings of Arnau de Vilanova," in *Actes de la II Trobada Internacional d'Estudis sobre Arnau de Vilanova*, ed. Josep Perarnau (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2005), 261-262.

Le texte suivant a été publié en 2012 dans

Mediaevistik 25 · 2012 pp. 458-459

**Mediaevistik: International Journal of
Interdisciplinary Medieval Research**
*Internationale Zeitschrift für interdisziplinäre
Mittelalterforschung*

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Arnaud de Villeneuve, Le Livre des vins, traduit du latin, présenté et annoté par Patrick Gifreu, Les Éditions de la Merci, Perpignan, 2011, 163 pp.

This is a charming and, to some extent, useful French translation of Arnaud de Villeneuve's *Liber de vinis* or *Tractatus de vinis* from ca. 1309-1311. It was written while Arnaud spent time in northern Africa and it was dedicated to King Robert of Naples. It has survived in a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and in a late-medieval manuscript from the fifteenth century, today housed in the Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig. In 1517 the treatise was included in the complete works by Arnaud, printed in Lyon. A

Udah ben Salomon Nathan translated it into Hebrew in 1358 and Wilhelm von Hirnkoken did the same, translating it into German in the fifteenth century. The large number of printed versions produced between 1478 and 1500 in Germany, and then also in the sixteenth century (close to thirty), confirms its great popularity. This treatise belongs to the large corpus of medical texts that focuses on the healing powers of all kinds of wines, especially spiced wines and spirits. The wines that Arnaldus recommended in his recipes were aperitif wines, laxative wines, procreative wines, cosmetic wines, ophthalmological wines, and wines for specific ailments (loss of memory, old age, etc.). Many times he specifically referred to distillation, and also focused heavily on the properties and powers of herbs to be added to the liquids. As Patrick Gifreu rightly emphasizes, all these approaches to wines from a medical point of view, and also the distillation process looked back to a long tradition, but Arnaud was an excellent compiler and innovator as well, which explains why his treatise enjoyed such a popularity in the late Middle Ages. Another reason certainly proves to be the amalgamation of alchemy, theology, medicine, theology, and politics in this treatise, and the fact that he identified the medical doctor as Christ's disciple, hence

as *parvulus Christi*, which was to become a standard trope in much of medieval and early modern medical discourse (such as in Theophrastus von Hohenheim, known as Paracelsus). Arnaud, drawing heavily from ancient writers, attributes to wine many different healing properties, clearing up the blood, reducing fat, strengthening the heart and giving support to all organs. Moreover, wine creates a happy mood, so dispels sorrowfulness. Wine, as he says, "creates the perfect harmony of all parts of the body" (45-46). Following Galen's theory of the humors, he claims that wine warms the body and the heart, and refreshes the body affected by fever. His conclusion: "Wine is the best friend of people" (47).

The present book offers a brief introduction, outlining both Arnaud's biography and work as a medical researcher and practitioner, followed by the French translation of the text. Gifreu includes a very short list of research literature, and briefly comments the text from time to time, but otherwise this booklet only serves the general French reader. If Gifreu at least had accompanied the translation with the original text, this book would also be useful for researchers.

Nevertheless, it is a pleasant paperback and reflects well both on the translator and the publishing house.

