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Medicine at Monte Cassino. Constantine the African and the Oldest Manuscript of his Pantegni

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Commentaire : Summary Fleeing his North-African homeland for Italy, Constantine the African arrived in Salerno and then joined the abbey of Monte Cassino south of Rome in c. 1077. He dedicated his life to the translation of more than two dozen medical texts from Arabic into Latin. These great efforts produced the first substantial written body of medical theory and practice in medieval Europe. His most important contribution, an encyclopedia he called the Pantegni (The Complete Art), was translated and adapted from the Complete Book of the Medical Art by the Persian physician 'Ali ibn al-'Abb?s al-Ma??s? (d. 982). This monograph focuses on the oldest manuscript of the Pantegni, Theorica, which represents a work-in-progress with numerous unusual features. This study, for the first time, identifies Monte Cassino as the origin of this oldest Pantegni manuscript, and asserts that it was made during Constantine's lifetime. It further demonstrates how a skilled team of scribes and scholars assisted the translator in the complex process of producing this Latin version of the Arabic text. Several members of this production team are identified, both in the Pantegni manuscript and in other copies of Cassinese manuscripts. The book breaks new ground by identifying a range of manuscripts produced at Monte Cassino under Constantine's direct supervision, as evidenced by their material features, script, and contents. In rare detail, this study explores some of the challenges met by 'Team Constantine' as they sought to reveal new knowledge to the West, which in turn revolutionized medical understanding throughout medieval Europe. This is really a quite remarkable study, utterly transformative of our understanding of one of the turning points in the history of Western civilization, the moment when Greco-Arabic medicine was introduced into the Latin European world. Michael McVaugh

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