

HENRI DE MONDEVILLE (1260-1320): A PRECURSOR IN AESTHETIC SURGERY

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A native of Normandy, Henri de Mondeville was a well-read clerk who studied medicine in the city of Montpellier which had the first French university, created in 1220. Unlike the well known Renaissance surgeons like Ambroise Paré or Pierre Franco two and a half centuries later, Mondeville received the title of Doctor of Medicine which allowed him to be recognized as a true physician among his peers, as compared to the barbers or barber-surgeons who were considered as servants doing minor surgical procedures.

Mondeville completed his training in Paris under the direction of Lanfranco da Milano (1245-1345) who was the founder of the Parisian surgical school and had brought to France the knowledge acquired in the famous Italian universities of Salerno, Bologna and Padua. He also met another renowned surgeon, Jean Pitard (1228-1315) who was the surgeon of the king. With his support, Mondeville himself became one of the surgeons of King Philippe le Bel (1268-1314) and later of Louis le Hutin (1305-1316). Although he gained surgical experience on the battlefields, he lamented the ingratitude and perfidy of his regal patrons and did not hesitate to address his critics “to the shame of his Royal Majesty”:

On the order of our Lord the King, I have uselessly lost a great deal of time to my great despair in Arras, in England, in other parts of his realm, in several of his armies and at his Court, hoping that he would pay me what was due me, —after which, on further order of the King, renouncing all profit, I have returned to Paris and have lived there, at least for short intervals; I have wished again to take up little by little, the work which I have abandoned. Greatly occupied, however, in Paris: by virtue of the great reputation which I enjoy among the students, the citizens, the personages at Court and the stranger in passage, I am often hard put to write a line a day, without counting that I must go to the schools and run all day here and there to earn a living, until with the sole grace of God who



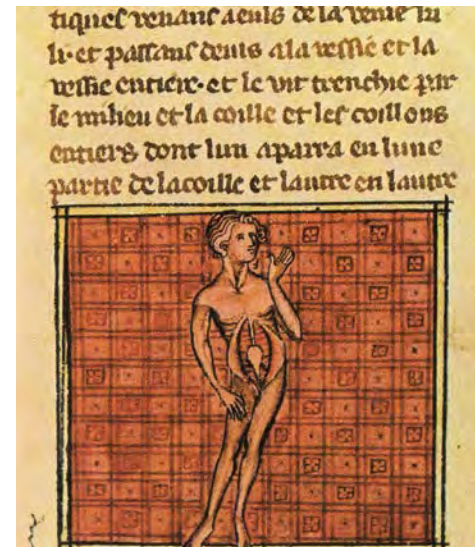
Henri de Mondeville, according to a miniature of French manuscript 2030 (Bibl. Nat. Paris), written in 1314.

is not generous, I have provided by the work of my hands, all that is necessary for me and my household; not being either selfish, nor ambitious, nor avaricious, and not wishing avidly to embrace the whole world, but being content with that which is necessary for me to make a living; as I see our surgery, so indispensable to the human race, being insufficiently transmitted, and since I am able to arrange it a little better, not being obligated to any person as one will see later, not married out of fear that the perversity of a woman and the necessity of paying her expenses and furnishing her a home would divert my spirit from the composition of this book, and from the execution of other useful works of the same nature, and fearing for all these reasons the divine judgment and dreading to be held responsible for the ignorance of my colleagues, I have decided to resume the present work.

In fact, the so-called “present work” is a fourteen-year involvement on a medico-surgical treatise, which he was not able to finish before his death. *Cirurgia* has been translated from Latin to old French

during the life of Mondeville, but fell into oblivion for about 500 years. Although copied a few times during the Renaissance, one had to wait to the end of the nineteenth century to rediscover the original text of Mondeville, translated into modern French by Edouard Nicaise.

By disagreeing with his contemporaries and the mentalities of his time, he often appears as a transgressor. His innovative ideas were not recognized for their value. Claiming the autonomy of science in regard to theology, although he was initially a clerk, we can see through his writings the birth of a laic spirit in medicine, hostile to the medieval tradition of mystery. Defending the unity of medicine and surgery, Mondeville wanted to make of his art a specialty depending on a new medical science, based on anatomy. For the plastic surgeon, the writings of Mondeville are particularly interesting with regard to several aspects.



Anatomical figures attributed to Mondeville

Treatment of wounds

According to the ancients, suppuration was useful, and if it was not produced of itself, it had to be provoked by the use of suppurative medicaments. These treatments often lead to inflammation and phlegmon. This was the method in vogue in Mondeville's time to which he took violent objection. He insisted that suppuration was not only unnecessary to the healing of a wound, but was harmful and dangerous, that it increased suffering and disability, resulted in disfiguring scars, and led to complications and death. In its place he championed the method of Theodoric, claiming, “Every simple wound can be cured without the production of a notable quantity of pus, on condition that, without omitting any of the contingents, one treats them according to the teachings of Theodoric and ourselves.” This treatment entailed the immediate removal of foreign bodies, the prompt control of hemorrhage by whichever means was required, and the closure of the wound as quickly as possible, by bandaging alone if that sufficed, otherwise by suture. Dressings consisted of compresses wrung out in hot wine and held in place by adequate bandages. Sup-

portive treatment included rest, nourishing foods, and wine.

Mondeville graphically expressed the violence of the opposition to these innovations. He states,

It is rather dangerous for a surgeon to operate differently than is the custom of the other surgeons. We have experienced this in the treatment of wounds according to the method of Theodoric, Master Jean Pitard and myself who have first brought it to France, and have employed it in Paris and in several wars, against the wishes and opinions of all, in particular of the physicians. We have suffered the disdain and shameful words on the parts of laymen and of our colleagues, the surgeons; and even threats and dangers. From certain laymen and physicians, every day and at each change of dressing, we have endured disputes and words so violent that half-vanquished and fatigued with all the opposition, we would have been close to renouncing this treatment and abandoning it entirely, had it not been for the support of the most serene Count of Valois. But this Prince has come to our aid, as have several other personages who have seen wounds cared for in the camps by this method. We were further sustained by truth; but if we had not been firm in our faith, known to be close to the King, royal physicians and

somewhat lettered, it would have been necessary for us to abandon this treatment.

Concerning *facial wounds*, Mondeville made a special note on the treatment of nasal injury:

One has to notice that, mainly for the treatment of wounds of the nose, a completely separated or gangrenous piece will never reunite. Reason: because the vital spirit is instantaneously lost, and that it is as impossible to recover as for the soul. It is however possible to recover sensitivity when it has not been entirely separated. If it becomes adherent, it may be sufficient or insufficient. In the latter case, it is better to amputate and let the wound heal by itself. If it can be saved, one has to remove what has grown against nature, to freshen the tissues until they ooze blood for a better reincarnation and suture them with a triangular needle.”

The placement and the duration of the stitches have their importance:

The result can be modified by the suture, because if you are in a hurry to remove the stitches, the nose may not be incarnated or very little and with the movements of the nostrils, it will separate and that shall be worse than before. If you delay the removal, it will form a scar marked with a cross.

Mondeville takes this opportunity to make a few general thoughts:

Concerning nose cuts, one has to make the following general remark, that it is very difficult for a surgeon without celebrity, to dare employ a new way to operate while abandoning the one of the ancients, because, if the treatment is successful, people will say it would also have succeeded with the ancient method; if it goes wrong, it's proof that the ancient method is better. A surgeon with great reputation does not have these difficulties.

Mondeville adds cynically:

If it is useful or necessary to make the

Mondeville, continued from page 43

trial of a new method, one has to do it before on the poor people; if it goes wrong, the surgeon can excuse himself more easily; if successful on several occasions, he might use it as an example for the rich.

Aesthetic medicine and surgery

The most original writings of Mondeville concern the embellishment of males and females by various methods such as dermabrasion and epilation. Of course, most of these methods had been described before, particularly in the 11th century's Trotula written by the women doctors of Salerno. However, Mondeville was the first to emphasize the reasons why qualified surgeons should include these treatments in their practice and justify the high fees of the surgeons compared to the physicians who do nothing with their hands! He is however somewhat ambiguous about this practice:

This embellishment is against God and Justice, and most often is not the treatment of a disease, but is made to falsify and fraud, besides that this subject does not please me. However, a surgeon who lives in provinces or cities where there would be many women of the court, and would be renown as a good operator in this art, could receive a considerable advantage and the favor of the ladies, which is not a small thing nowadays.

What are these cosmetic treatments for?

One must know that on men's face, especially on rich, noble and lascivious citizens, you may find ugliness curable and lucrative, which does not bother cultivators or peasants. The number of these uglinesses is 6: Excessive redness, superfluous whiteness, burns by the sun and the wind, dark and ugly colors, hair against nature, scarcity of the beard."

For women, Mondeville is more explicit. It concerns the care of the sexual regions, breasts, armpits, hair, face, neck, and hands. For a lasting epilation "we should pull out the hairs, and insert immediately in the holes of their roots hot needles. . . ." For big breasts, he advises tight bandaging. On the face in general, there are 17 conditions that should be considered for possible treatments, for the eyelids 25, for the nose 25 and around the mouth 57! The care of most of them requires sometimes an operating surgeon who wishes to help these women, mainly old women or courtesans who would like to feign youth.

A few women have the superficial layer of the skin removed with a fine razor, others apply a product made of cantaride and leaven which produces vesicles on the whole face; it forms thereafter a new skin. . . .

The sexual parts require double care, inside and outside.

Old courtesans require inside cares, mainly those who have an enlarged vulva, naturally or following repeated lubricous and easy coitus, in order to look younger or at least non-public.

At the end, Mondeville concludes that

. . . it is boring to relate and even more boring to operate; a whole day could not suffice to care for the whole body and each of its members. However, the careful artist, by praising the beauty and by praising his work, can take off a great profit, because the more a procedure is laborious in this kind of things, the more it is judged useful by the women.

The surgeons

Apart for these digressions on cosmetic medicine and surgery, Henri de Mondeville has written chapters on anatomy and is considered to be the first to have made dissections in France. He was also the first fully educated physician to defend the profession of surgeons:

There are more conditions to be fulfilled to make a surgeon than to make a physician. The perfect surgeon should know medicine and moreover learn the way to operate manually, things that requires a deep study pursued with concern and for a long time.

For this the surgeon should receive a decent salary:

What advantage does have a famous surgeon, renown and honest, if every day, from dawn to evening, without interruption, he runs from left to right, visiting his patients; if every night, reckoning in his mind what he has seen in each of his patients, he foresees and arranges what he should do the next day, if he spends all his forces for the others and if people says that he is doing great wonders, and then they don't give him a reputation and a retribution worth of his work.

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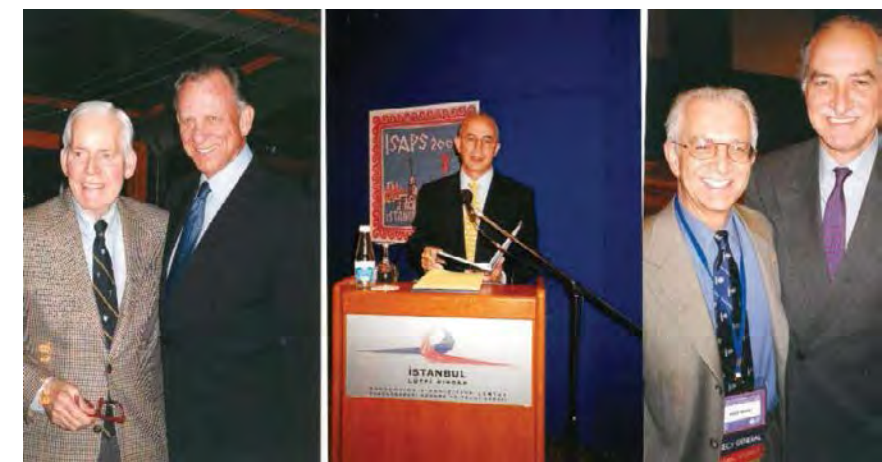


Drs. Seiichi Ohmori and
Ivo Pitanguy, 1950

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