

A Mediterranean Understanding of Nature in a Fourteenth-Century Agricultural Manual

Ruralia commoda, written by Piero de Crescenzi between 1304 and 1309, was the first large-scale agricultural manual written in Europe since the 5th century. Produced for King Charles II of Naples, it reflects Angevin support for gathering medical and scientific knowledge. Crescenzi's manual quoted large passages of Greek, Roman, and Islamicate texts, revealing his university training not only as a lawyer but also as a physician. For example, Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* was cited more than any other text in the introduction, bringing Islamicate medicine directly into the practice of maintaining agricultural land and the health of the plants, animals, and humans on it. It also directly brought Avicenna's *Canon* into conversation with Greek and Roman agricultural treatises.

This book traveled widely. In the fourteenth century, it was copied for the papal court in Avignon and likely influenced the enigmatic murals in the heart of the papal palace. It moved north, with other forms of Mediterranean landscape and veterinary knowledge, as it was copied by wealthy book owners. But it was rarely a static status symbol. There is frequently evidence of use even on the most elaborately illuminated manuscripts.

This text encapsulates the sharing of written knowledge across times and cultures of the Mediterranean. It shows both wide-spread and regional methods of care for plants and animals. Analysis reveals shared conceptions of nature shaped by an interest across the Mediterranean in Aristotelian natural philosophy and Hippocratic medicine. The book shares millennia of interest in plant and animal generation and physical structures. And it continues to use the concepts of airs, waters, and place to understand plant, animal, and human health.