Pietro D'abano Encyclopedia Article

Pietro D'abano

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Contents

Pietro D'abano Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Pietro D'abano.....3

Pietro D'abano

c. 1250-c. 1318

Italian Physician and Philosopher

A professor of medicine at Padua, Italy, Pietro d'Abano (also called Peter of Abano) attempted a synthesis of Arab medicine, Greek philosophy, and the Catholic worldview that prevailed in the Europe of his day. He is remembered for his book *Conciliator differentiarium*, and for his efforts at making Padua one of the Western world's centers for medical study.

As his name indicates, Pietro was born in the town of Abano, near Padua. During his career, he traveled throughout France and Sardinia, and visited Constantinople. He also met the celebrated traveler Marco Polo (1254-1324), from whom he obtained information about Asia.

In addition to his work at Padua, Pietro practiced medicine in Paris. During his travels, he was said to have discovered and translated a lost work of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), and this may have influenced his attempt—in the tradition of Ibn Sina (Avicenna; 980-1037) and others—to reconcile Greek thought with revealed religion in *Conciliator differentiarium*.

Such ideas were still considered dangerous in late medieval Europe; moreover, Pietro's dabblings in mathematics and astrology, and particularly his writings on magic, made him an object of suspicion. He was said to possess crystal vessels through which (to borrow a modern term) he "channeled" seven demons, each of whom gave him special knowledge about one of the seven liberal arts.

As time went on, rumors of Pietro's alleged abilities as a sorcerer became more and more outlandish. He was said to have the power to cause money to return to his purse after he had spent it, and when a neighbor forbade him to drink from a certain spring, he supposedly used his dark powers to divert the stream from the neighbor's property.

The latter claim was sufficient to bring him before the Inquisition, which tried and acquitted him. Later he was brought before the court on the same charges of sorcery, but before the second trial ended, he had died. He was declared guilty posthumously, and the inquisitors ordered that his bones be dug up and burned.