This book is a study of connections, parallels, and mutual interaction between two influential disciplines, medicine and history, in fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Europe. The elevation of history in status and significance, the expansion of the scope and methods of history, and the related (but distinct) growth of antiquarianism are among the most striking—and recently among the best studied—features of the humanist culture of that period. Over the same centuries, medical knowledge, too, was transformed in ways that linked learned tradition with empirical investigations and with an emphasis (not new, but greatly increased) on description, narrative, material evidence, and particulars; and humanism—in many senses of that slippery term—strongly influenced not only the content and presentation of medical knowledge but the entire intellectual formation of academically educated medical practitioners.

Since much evidence suggests that medieval and Renaissance medical learning was in general highly responsive to contemporary intellectual currents, I thought it would be worth inquiring into the extent both to which changing notions of history affected the literature of medicine and to which medical men contributed to historical writing. In short, I sought answers to these questions: What aspects of Renaissance medicine resonated with the contemporary understanding of history or historical method? What kind of history did medical doctors write? What kinds of doctors wrote history? Such answers as I found are in the following pages. As I pursued this topic, the
eclectic enthusiasm with which Renaissance physicians embarked on historical writing led me into many new areas and taught me a lot. I shall miss their company.

I owe thanks to many friends and colleagues for their help at different stages of this work. I am particularly grateful to the scholarly editors of the University of Michigan Press series Cultures of Knowledge in the Early Modern World—Ann Blair, Anthony Grafton, and Jacob Soll—and to two anonymous referees for the University of Michigan Press for very useful comments on the entire manuscript. I also wish to thank Frédéric Tinguely for reading and commenting on chapter 8 and Ian Maclean and Gianna Pomata for helpful discussions and advice. Remaining mistakes are, of course, my own. It has been a pleasure to work with Chris Hebert as editor. A grant from the Mellon Foundation financed travels to libraries in Europe and research expenses at home. At different times, Manu Radhakrishnan and Christopher Petit provided research assistance. Thanks also to Alice Falk for help with manuscript preparation. I am grateful to the staffs of all the libraries where I have worked, but especially to Miriam Mandelbaum and Arlene Shaner of the Rare Book Room of the New York Academy of Medicine.


Finally, as always, my greatest thanks are owed to my husband, to whom this book is dedicated.