

reveal another flaw of the book: the relative disregard of studies published after Leiser's and al-Khaleedy's article of 1987. For generations, members of Sulamī's family were appointed as *madrasa* professors in Damascus, yet Leiser fails to refer to the thorough studies by Louis Pouzet ('Les *madrasas* de Damas et leurs professeurs durant le VII/XIIIème siècle', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* [1991/2], 52: 121–96, and *Damas au VIIIe/XIIIe siècle*, Beirut, 1988).

These problems of the introduction notwithstanding, Leiser has presented a text which allows important insights into diverse aspects of medicine in Ayyubid Egypt.

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Victoria Thompson, *Death and dying in later Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 4, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2004, pp. x, 236, £50.00, \$85.00 (hardback 1-84383-070-1).

Historians of medicine might think there was little for them in this book after reading, in the author's initial case-study of the remarkable Æthelflæd of Mercia (d. 918), that "We do not know . . . how she died or what kind of medical treatment she may have had". But interesting ideas about the body appear as one reads on, for instance that the mind was "understood as part of the body" and not of "the *sawl* or *gast*, which leaves the body at death", so that death, and the activities which follow it, could be experienced by the individual as the illness that preceded it was. Unfortunately the sources do not specify when this non-soul consciousness ceased (burial? judgement?), but this is one of a group of ideas which emerges strongly from this study, making a close and inevitable connection between illness and death. A "good death" was one in which the dying person, having lived out their allotted span, was able not only to receive the sacraments, but to say farewell to the grieving friends and relations around the bed. Thus the sickbed turned almost imperceptibly into the deathbed, as part of an ordered series of events, and, as Thompson points

out, even the grave could be called "bed" (*legerē*).

Because of this intimate connection between illness and death, Thompson has a good deal to say about the former in her examination of the latter. In doing so, she subjects the Old English medical texts to an examination rather different from that they usually get from scholars specializing in medicine. For instance, she draws attention to parallel Anglo-Saxon ideas about external causal agents of illness (flying venom, elfshot), decomposition (worms), and eternal punishment (serpents, demons). As she says in one of her chapter-headings, the body was "under siege in life and death". This understanding is a useful counterweight to M L Cameron's emphasis on the "rational" and (sub-)classical in Anglo-Saxon medicine, which led him to overestimate the degree to which humoral theory was current and understood in early medieval England (*Anglo-Saxon medicine*, 1993). Nevertheless, as Thompson points out, the medical texts themselves have little to say about death, no doubt at least partly because of their need to claim success for their prescriptions ("he will be well at once" etc.).

The "medical" texts that do concern themselves with death are the prognostics (notably the sphere of Apuleius, but including several others), but these are rarely found in medical manuscripts. They tend rather to travel with texts on the calculation of Easter, with which they share an interest in knowledge of the future. These obviously belong to an ecclesiastical, as well as a learned, milieu, whereas Old English medicine arguably occupied a different part of society. Thompson shows that the Anglo-Saxon church drew very little on medical thinking, either local or sub-classical, in developing its ideas about the flesh, despite the fact that its writers could elaborate an extended metaphor of the confessor as physician of the soul. The influence was rather in the opposite direction, with snatches of liturgy and quasi-liturgy occurring frequently in medical charms. Interestingly, however, the association of sin with leprosy seems not to have been current yet in England.

Thus Thompson's book turns out to contain a great deal of interest to the historian of medicine. It is also well written and illustrated, and therefore recommended to anyone interested in Anglo-Saxon medicine, not as a distant echo of the classical tradition, or a forerunner of later medieval developments, but as part of a distinctive culture with a complex set of ideas about life, death and the body.

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Angela Montford, *Health, sickness, medicine and the friars in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries*, The History of Medicine in Context, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004, pp. xv, 302, illus., £57.50 (hardback 0-7546-3697-6).

This book confronts the now familiar topic of medicine and religion from a practical perspective. It reconstructs the responses to illness of friars in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, providing both an account of a neglected aspect of mendicant life, and access to the attitudes of patients—a group ill-represented in the mainstay sources of histories of medieval medicine. Despite the attraction of certain friars to extreme asceticism, Montford argues, the benefit of health for pursuance of the Orders' missions became an increasingly important guiding principle in confronting physical frailties. This opposition, between strict (or, as she puts it, "over-zealous") observance and following medical advice, continues throughout the book, which outlines how the financial demands of treatment and of providing adequate facilities for the afflicted were weighed against injunctions to a life of poverty. The study traces adherence to medical precepts in a range of different areas, such as the siting of infirmaries and the food given to patients. It documents the therapies employed in the convents, from medicinal simples to surgical techniques, and emphasizes the particular problems these posed for the communities of friars.

The nature of the friars' involvement in the care of the sick changed during the period covered by the book. In the fourteenth century

emphasis shifted from domestic provision of nursing and medicines to dependence on secular services. Montford relates this change to the incorporation of university-based medicine into guilds set up to police the occupational boundaries of medical practice. Certainly, healing outside the convents by *fratres medici* was the subject of successive prohibitions within the Orders, perhaps spurred by worries of scandal, and was in any case increasingly subject to civic legislation.

The book proceeds along straightforward methodological lines. It is focused primarily on the Dominican Order, supplemented occasionally with information concerning the Franciscans, and it juxtaposes writings setting out ideals of mendicant life with records of practice from the convents of S. Domenico and S. Francesco in Bologna. This combined approach directly confronts the problems of the lack of circumstantial detail in the account books and the normative character of the instructional treatises. If there is a complaint to be made here, it concerns the use of Europe as a context when discussing medical issues: national variations are ignored that might have added strength, and certainly nuance, to the arguments presented. If wider attitudes and institutional enforcement are so important to the story of the decline of medical practice, for example, it is surely worthy of note that all the examples provided of Franciscan and Dominican healers working after the ban are English; England, in contrast to the Italian examples pursued at greater length in the book, was without effective regulation or guild control of physic until the sixteenth century.

In general, the book is most impressive when dealing with the practicalities of convent life: the discussion of the surgical procedures employed and the problems associated with them is exemplary. It is less convincing in areas where conceptual issues come to the fore, such as the simplistic treatment of divination, amulets and magical cures; but there is a broader concern. Concepts are taken as givens and set against one another—the study is structured as a fight between medicine and religion in which the behaviour of the friars is the battleground. Theological, philosophical, practical, "medical"