

for developments in learned medicine, and on academic medical texts, part III incorporates poetry, eyewitness testimonies (that of a German doctor in early fifteenth century Paris is particularly fascinating) and satirical literature, and addresses Spain, the Latin East, England and other areas.⁹ Admittedly, other regions could have been considered, such as Scandinavia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Eastern Europe, though the addition of further texts would arguably have made the book unwieldy. Similarly, more space might have been given to the role of women as medical practitioners and to the distribution of medical care in the family home and the parish community, though the reader is made fully aware of these dimensions of medieval medicine.

This book might have presented a different narrative of medieval medicine, in which scholarly medicine and its broader social and religious context were integrated throughout. However, the organisation of the book is highly effective, and enables the reader to select specific sections of interest as well as to gain an overall understanding of medieval medicine. The work represents a major feat in scholarship: Faith Wallis has translated many of these sources herself, and presents a valuable analysis of the major developments in this period that shaped many aspects of medicine as we know it today.

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Alun Withey, *Physick and the Family: Health, Medicine and Care in Wales, 1600–1750* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. xii + 240, £60.00, paperback, ISBN: 9780719085468.

Alun Withey's first book is an important contribution to the history of early modern medicine, uncovering the rich and diverse experience of disease, care and bodily knowledge in Wales 1600–1750. The central proposition of the work is that Welsh healthcare during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was not the folkloric, ritual-obsessed, practice that historians have previously presented it as. The paucity of work on the subject of Welsh healthcare – Withey states that it has been thirty years since a whole book has been devoted to the subject – validates the book alone. However, Withey goes beyond simply providing the 'Welsh perspective' to an English-dominated historiographical question: how did early modern people understand and treat disease? Rather, *Physick and the Family* makes a very real and original contribution to the history of pre-eighteenth-century Wales as a whole. The use of both Welsh and English language sources and his focus on linguistic, intellectual and physical exchanges between England and Wales give his argument real credit. Perhaps most impressive are the 3,000 probate records that he brings to bear on his central questions: how did early modern Welsh people experience illness, how were they treated and where did these remedies come from?

The book is divided into three parts. The first and shortest deals with the sorts of conditions early modern Welsh people suffered from. Drawing from recent studies on population mobility, Withey concludes that visiting markets and the significant numbers of wandering traders, vagrants and beggars circulating in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Wales provided opportunities for the spread of disease. This, crucially, means

⁹ For the testimony of the anonymous German postgraduate student who attended Dr Guillaume Boucher (d. 1410) and Dr Pierre d'Ausson (d. 1409) in Paris, see *op. cit.* (note 2), 348–51, 396–400.

that Welsh people were exposed to the same kinds of infectious ailments that those in England suffered from. This neatly sets up the mechanisms for the book's central argument that Wales was engaged in contemporary medical developments in England: sharing the same causes and symptoms of disease and ill-health necessitated searching for the same remedies, and thus demanded a similar body of medical information.

The second part discusses the acquisition and transmission of bodily and medical knowledge. Prior to the seventeenth century, the Welsh book market was more or less non-existent (an average of one Welsh language book was published per year between 1660–9). Withey highlights the importance of the collection and absorption of English medical texts by interested literate Welsh parties. However, he argues that a strong oral culture meant that printed medical theories trickled down, evidenced by a borrowed English vernacular vocabulary in the Welsh terms for ailments. The proposition that the clergy were particularly important agents in communicating bodily and medical knowledge is an interesting one and richly evidenced by ministers' notebooks and marginalia of parish registers.

The third part is devoted to how this knowledge was put into practice by early modern Welsh people in caring for the sick. Withey here deals with the performative aspect of illness in adopting a sick 'role', of which the growing culture of epsitolarity played an important part. As there were no Welsh hospitals until the nineteenth century, family members were for most people their first nurses. It is argued that this made illness a household event, which had greater social import through correspondence. Building on recent work by Elaine Leong and others, *Physick and the Family* suggests that, although nursing and healthcare were often seen as the special role of women, men often played an active role in domestic medicine, evidenced in the large number of male-owned and penned remedy books which survive.

One difficulty with the book is the fact that the volume of surviving Welsh sources pales in comparison to the wealth of English sources documenting early modern medicine, a fact which Alun Withey freely acknowledges. A particular challenge appears to be uncovering the minutiae of physicians' practices, something which has no doubt contributed to the characterisation of early modern Wales as the domain of lay healers and cunning folk.

The historiographical questions that plague the historian of English domestic medical practices in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – whether individuals actually read the vernacular medical texts which flourished as a genre – is here overcome by an analysis of the mechanisms of oral and social communication. Rather than an insurmountable problem, Withey uses the relative lack of published Welsh vernacular material to instead focus on referral networks and this makes Wales an ideal case study for showing the potential power of the 'trickle down' effect of medical information and knowledge.

With an emphasis on the diversity of the early modern Welsh population, *Physick and the Family* will be very important reading to historians of early modern Wales. However, it should also be useful to historians of early modern medicine more generally. Withey's particular interest in the role of families and neighbours in caring for sick individuals taps into more recent work on familial-dictated domestic medicine in England. Alun Withey delivers on his three aims: to provide a reappraisal of Welsh medical history, to contribute to the wider social history of Wales and to finally place Wales in the context of early modern British and European history of medicine more generally. This latter point is perhaps the most significant contribution of the book, one that Withey hopes will lead

to greater integration between Welsh and British histories. One senses that *Physick and the Family* will most certainly not be the end of the dialogue as more and more Welsh sources are examined for what they reveal about British domestic healthcare across the board.

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