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Matthew M. Mesley and **Louise E. Wilson** (eds), *Contextualizing Miracles in the Christian West, 1100–1500* (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2014), pp. 231, £20.00, paperback, ISBN: 978-0-907570-32-5.

Miracles have been a perennial source of interest to medieval historians, and in recent years the level of interest has only increased as scholars from a growing range of disciplines have discovered the value of miracle stories as a source for their studies. This diversity of interest is reflected in this volume (developed from a conference held in Cambridge in 2011), which includes historical, literary and anthropological approaches to the study of medieval miracles.

Matthew Mesley's lucid introduction provides a useful summary of, and context to, the volume's contents; he also makes some interesting points about the wider field of miracle studies. In the opening essay, 'Peter Brown and Victor Turner: anthropological approaches to Latin miracle narratives in the medieval West', Anne Bailey demonstrates the influence of anthropology on recent historians of medieval miracles, and argues for the continued value of such approaches. She suggests that structuralism and ritual theory have particular value for those seeking to analyse miracle narratives, providing new ways to think about textual functions, the relationship between fact and fiction, and the ways in which historians unconsciously shape their own understanding of the past.

There follows an impressive pair of essays focusing on twelfth-century England. Simon Yarrow's 'Miracles, belief and Christian materiality: relic'ing in twelfth-century miracle narratives' highlights the dangers of analysing such texts; in particular, he criticises the still-lingering tendency to view miracles as evidence of a two-tier (elite versus popular) religious culture. It would be better, he argues, to refocus our attention on the material objects of cults and to reconstruct medieval religious belief in terms of its materiality. Whilst this is not an entirely novel notion, it is convincingly presented, and Yarrow supports his theory of 'relic'ing' with an impressive range of examples from twelfth-century texts. Kati Ihnat's discussion of 'Marian miracles and Marian liturgies in the Benedictine tradition of post-Conquest England' is another highlight of the collection. Demonstrating the prominence of the liturgy in early Marian miracles, and arguing for the centrality of miracles in Marian devotion in post-Conquest England, she makes a strong case for the necessity of studying the relationship between liturgical practices and miracle collections.

From the perspective of a medical historian, it is the second half of the volume which contains the most interesting essays. Louise Wilson's 'Conceptions of the miraculous: natural philosophy and medical knowledge in the thirteenth-century *miracula* of St Edmund of Abingdon' draws its evidence from two collections of the miracles of a mid-thirteenth-century archbishop of Canterbury. Wilson argues that new scholastic ideas about natural philosophy, theology and medicine were widely disseminated to clerical audiences, forcing hagiographers to disprove possible natural explanations for the miracles they recounted. In doing so, she raises important questions about the relationship between religious and medical knowledge in medieval contexts, although her arguments could have been strengthened by greater contextualisation of her evidence: it is somewhat unclear to what extent these authors were typical of thirteenth-century hagiographers (and, indeed, of clerics more generally).

Iona McCleery's 'Christ more powerful than Galen? The relationship between medicine and miracles' addresses similar themes. McCleery analyses three Portuguese cults, all of which are likely to be unfamiliar to English-speaking readers, and uses these case studies

as the basis for a re-evaluation of the relationship between religion and medicine in the middle ages. Historians have tended to study miracles from either a medical or a religious perspective, but McCleery convincingly argues that this is an anachronistic division and thus a more integrated approach is needed. She also demonstrates the potential of socio-statistical approaches to miracle collections: it is hard to disagree with her claim that ‘there is something inherently countable about miracles’ (140).

Irina Metzler’s contribution is also inspired by a numbers-based observation. Her essay ‘Indiscriminate healing miracles in decline: how social realities affect religious perception’ asks why ‘healing miracles, which had been so popular and numerous during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, take a numerical nosedive from the fourteenth century onwards’ (155). Some indication of the scale of this supposed decline would have been useful; Metzler refers to ‘interesting statistics’ in the work of André Vauchez and Pierre-André Sigal, but fails to quote them, or even to give detailed references for the interested reader to follow. Furthermore, whilst Metzler posits some interesting cultural explanations for this shift, she neglects to consider the possibility that the ‘nosedive’ might actually reflect a decline in the recording of miraculous cures rather than a decline in claims that such cures had taken place.

The last medically-focused contribution takes as its subject ‘St Edmund of East Anglia: “martir, mayde and kynge”, and midwife?’. Rebecca Pinner investigates the only childbirth miracle attributed to St Edmund, the beneficiary of which was Eleanor of Provence, queen of Henry III of England. Pinner’s discussion of the miracle and its context is engaging, ranging from antiphons to bull-based fertility rituals, but ultimately provides a somewhat overcomplicated solution to the problem of why a king might appeal to one of his favourite saints when his wife was experiencing a difficult labour.

The final essay (‘John Foxe’s golden saints? Ways of reading Foxe’s female martyrs in light of Voragine’s *Golden Legend*’) moves forward in time to the late sixteenth century. Fiona Kao’s study of Foxe’s portrayal of female martyrs is an interesting one, and her contention that his work was influenced by medieval hagiography appears plausible. But the essay has little to say about medieval miracles, and consequently it sits somewhat awkwardly alongside the rest of the collection.

Overall, *Contextualizing Miracles* is a welcome addition to the ever-growing body of literature on medieval miracles. Its breadth of approach ensures that it is useful to a wide range of readers, and there is certainly much here to interest medical historians. Although the quality of the essays is somewhat variable, the volume demonstrates both the vibrancy of current research and the great potential for further work in this field.

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Linda Palfreeman, *Spain Bleeds: The Development of Battlefield Blood Transfusion during the Civil War* (Brighton, Chicago, Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2015), pp. xviii, 204, \$64.95, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-84519-717-9.

Unfortunately, during the twentieth century we had to wait for a war to see a significant breakthrough in the technology involved in Transfusion Medicine. This occurred during the First World War where sodium citrate started to be used as an anti-coagulant for the first indirect blood transfusions, or during the Second World War when hundreds of thousands