

Book Reviews

Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the soul. The life, death and resurrection of an English medieval hospital: St Giles's, Norwich, c. 1249–1550*, Thrupp, Sutton Publishing, 1999, pp. xviii, 334, illus., £30.00, \$55.00 (hardback 0-7509-2009-2).

“Better far he had contented himself with amassing less and turning what he had got to account.” So, prophetically for modern academics, wrote the posthumous editor of John Kirkpatrick, the eighteenth-century local antiquary. Kirkpatrick died before completing his history of the hospital of St Giles in Norwich. For her own magisterial study of that institution, Carole Rawcliffe has not only amassed a very great deal; she has written up her material elegantly and comprehensively; and she has published it all in time for the hospital’s 750th anniversary celebrations. This hospital, founded by Walter Suffield soon after his consecration as bishop of Norwich in 1245, still functions on the site where it was first established, to the north east of the cathedral. It has been successively a hospital for sick paupers, an almshouse and secular college selling suffrage for the dead, a hospital again after the Reformation, and (its present function) a retirement home. Yet more remarkably, the archive of the Great Hospital (as it became known after the Reformation) survives in abundance, despite the Reformers’ depredations and the library fire of 1994. Together with the records of the city and the cathedral priory, it furnishes the hospital historian with a rare opportunity. This opportunity Dr Rawcliffe has seized to the full.

By tracing the evolution of the hospital between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, she has given us a “total history” which finds no parallel in the modern scholarship of English hospitals and few in that of European foundations. Specialists in different aspects of this totality will each

find different things to praise: for example, the painstaking reconstruction of property and financial matters; the chapter on liturgy, enhanced by the unique survival of a diagrammatic processional in which the positions to be taken by tonsured priests are seemingly indicated by doughnuts; the prosopography of the hospital’s masters, which undergirds a penetrating account of St Giles’s place in local and national affairs; the detailed narration of Reformation manoeuvrings and of the emergence in Norwich of a “poor law” *avant la lettre*.

The overall achievement is, however, greater than the sum of these local successes. First, as the title of the book indicates, *medicina sacramentalis*, medicine of the soul, is given its due as being absolutely central to the medieval hospital and as, potentially, no less therapeutic than its somatic counterpart. Second, the whole environment of the foundation, from its devotional imagery to its garden and its bedding, is viewed as contributing to the health of its inmates. On both counts, the contrast between the thirteenth-century hospital with its emphasis on nursing the elderly and the chronically sick, and the post-Reformation “God’s House”, with its salaried physician who might hope to return at least some of his charges to the city’s workforce, is put into proper perspective. Third, St Giles is shown to refute the charges of universal mismanagement and corruption that have been levelled at later medieval hospitals more or less since the reign of Henry V. The transformation of hospital into chantry and almshouse is persuasively interpreted as an inevitable means of financial survival, and as by no means the abandonment of all charitable activity. Indeed, a fourth facet of Dr Rawcliffe’s achievement is to have given us a view of medieval charity that is novel in its avoidance of implied value judgement. The support variously provided by St Giles

to poor priests and scholars, corrodarians, and a staff of craftsmen is seen not as the perversion of charity to the deserving poor but rather as its extension. Fifth, the medieval hospital is firmly established as a major type of religious house—one that from now on will have to be given a considerable place in any synoptic study of music, education, architecture, and a number of other topics in medieval ecclesiastical history.

Finally, because of these larger implications, and because Dr Rawcliffe's discussion is animated by numerous comparisons with hospitals elsewhere in England and continental Europe, this is not just the total history of one institution; it comes close to being a general survey of later medieval and early modern English hospitals. To echo President Nixon on the Great Wall of China, St Giles was, in its quiet way, a great hospital; and now, almost three centuries after Kirkpatrick, it has found a more than worthy historian.

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Monica H Green, *Women's healthcare in the medieval west: texts and contexts*, Variorum Collected Studies Series CS680, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, pp. 412, illus., £59.50 (hardback 0-86078-826-1).

Over the last fifteen years, Monica Green has established an international reputation for work on medieval women's health care which effortlessly combines meticulous scholarship with stimulating ideas. She has brought medical texts to the attention of those working in medieval studies—in the process, deftly correcting a number of often-repeated but unfounded assumptions about the content and use of medical manuscripts—while translating the complexities of the medieval world to medical historians. It is therefore very

valuable to have a number of her most important essays on the recovery and interpretation of medieval medicine available in one volume.

This rich collection brings together seven separate pieces, arranged under the section titles 'Historical questions and methodologies', 'Identifying the texts' and 'Exploring the contexts'. It includes Green's important 1996 essay, 'The development of the *Trotula*', an analysis of the Latin and vernacular versions of the *Trotula* manuscripts which forms a prolegomenon to her forthcoming monograph. This is followed by Green's study of the omission of "Trotula" from Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la cité des dames*, a work which also condemns books on "the secrets of women" as "lies". The juxtaposition of Christine and Trotula enables Green to shed new light on Christine's attitude to the female body as well as raising questions about the use of medical texts in fourteenth- and early-fifteenth-century France. The final essay, on the gendering of medical literacy and book ownership, is previously unpublished, as is a useful appendix listing all the western European gynaecological texts written between the fourth and fifteenth centuries.

In the Introduction, Green presents her own work as "clearing the land". Critical editions exist of few medical texts from her period, while many texts are not only anonymous but also undated. However, as she points out, the work of recovering forgotten manuscripts and establishing the "original" text is not enough. Texts are "moving targets", being copied and altered by historical individuals. Green never stops at the philological level, but uses the materials she has uncovered to develop a methodology better able to extract information from the specific types of sources available to the medieval historian. In the process she challenges assumptions about the sexual division of medical labour—that "women's health was women's business"—and about the divisions between lay and professional, Latin and vernacular,