

consciousness of the higher ranks of the healing profession, while it defended Jewish (as well as Islamic and Scholastic) contributions to the long-term development of medical knowledge.

The reader of these essays will come away with a strong sense, not only of the dynamism that characterises the small but energetic community of historians of medicine and science in Spain, but also of how, thanks to their efforts, many old clichés are now biting the dust. One certainly bids them well. At the same time, the sympathetic observer may wish that they had taken a few more risks in their analysis, which is heavily outweighed by description. Sacrificing any of the rich empirical detail that is so often found in early modern Spanish documentation would obviously be a mistake. But leavening that detail with a sharper and more sustained analytical effort would help attract greater attention to a sphere of historical research that – as this volume clearly demonstrates – deserves to be much better known.

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**Rebecca Laroche,** *Medical Authority and Englishwomen's Herbal Texts, 1550–1650, Literary and Scientific Cultures of Early Modernity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. xii + 196, £55.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-7546-6678-3.

Our understanding of the complexities of lay engagement with healthcare and medicine in early modern England has been illuminated in recent years by the investigations of literary scholars in a field formerly the preserve of medical and social historians. The author of the present work brings the techniques of textual analysis and take-no-prisoners style of academic literary studies to bear on her chosen theme with somewhat predictable results. There is a rich seam of fruitful insights buried

in this study but readers of weaker constitution may be forgiven for giving up before encountering it.

The central aim of the work is to analyse surviving evidence of female ownership and use of printed vernacular herbals in England in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to shed light on the place of such products in women's lives and their relationship with established (male) medical authority. The date range in the title is slightly misleading as these are the approximate outer dates of the herbal publications themselves – from William Turner's *A New Herball* (1551) to John Parkinson's *Theatrum Botanicum* (1640) – rather than the covering dates of the author's body of evidence: she helpfully lists the twenty-four individual pieces of evidence of female ownership and use dating from c.1597 to 1689 in an appendix. Principal among these are the well-known memorials of Margaret Hoby, Grace Mildmay and Elizabeth Isham. Laroche's discussion of these three women's interaction with the printed herbals in their possession, and that of the other less well-documented female inscribers of printed herbals in her survey, is subtle and suggestive, but in the absence of much supporting evidence there is little she can offer by way of general conclusion, apart from the obvious fact that these interactions were varied, depending as they did on a range of differing personal, social and geographic circumstances. One cannot avoid feeling that closer engagement with the much larger body of evidence provided by female-authored and inscribed manuscript recipe books of the period would have served the author well here, whilst admitting that this would necessarily have diluted Laroche's forensic focus.

The last chapter of the book is a discussion of the textual and other influences in the construction of Isabella Whitney's *A Sweet Nosgay, or Pleasant Posy* (1573), a socioeconomic satire on contemporary London using herbal texts as source material. Laroche's treatment is again sensitive and, in the view of this reviewer, persuasive in locating the seminal influences in

contemporary cheap print medical texts, and particularly in William Bullein's *A Dialogue both Pleasaunte and Pietifull* (1564), written a year after the devastating plague of 1563. However, there is perhaps less of direct interest for medical historians here than in earlier chapters and the entire section has the air of an appendix, somewhat detached from the core of the book.

This is a valiant attempt to extract meaning from a range of materials that tantalise and entice, whilst remaining stubbornly resistant to easy interpretation. The author herself concludes her work with an exhortation to others to ferret out further examples of female ownership and use of printed herbals, and this is surely right. It is in the nature of pioneering works to be provisional and open-ended. Few rare books catalogues provide the level of provenance detail that makes identification of female owners or inscribers anything other than serendipitous. Meanwhile, conventional, and no doubt unavoidable demarcations between the management of printed books and manuscript holdings in libraries inevitably militates against seamless access to these resources by scholars. In these circumstances, Rebecca Laroche has made a commendable contribution to establishing foundations for further study in this area.

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**Rosemary Poole,** *A Truly Happy and Affectionate Family: Life Among the Denmans, Crofts and Baillies 1733–1847* (Sawbridgeworth: privately published, 2008), pp. 144, £15.00, paperback, ISBN: N/A.

*A Truly Happy and Affectionate Family* is an edited collection of personal documents from three eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English families, the Denmans, the Crofts and the Baillies. The editor, Rosemary Poole, who herself is a direct descendent of the

Denman–Croft line, focuses especially on the characters of Thomas Denman (1733–1816) and his wife Elizabeth (1747–1833), their twin daughters, Margaret (1771–1847) and Sophia (1771–1845), and their son, Thomas (1779–1854). Poole wished to incorporate 'as much original writing as possible in order to enlarge an understanding of the conventions that the writers used in their recording of events and not in any way to fictionalise the narrative' (p. 9). This original material includes extracts from the diary of Elizabeth Denman, the autobiography of Thomas Denman, family correspondence, poems penned by the sons of Margaret Denman, Thomas and Richard Croft, and fourteen illustrations of the family members. The editor intersperses these primary documents with her own editorial comment and narration in an attempt to give the reader as full a picture as possible of the lives of the families under examination. The book has a broadly chronological structure, with eight chapters, some of which concentrate on specific characters, and others on particular primary sources. There are also five appendices, which contain additional primary documents.

As reflected in the title, the book's most striking feature is the emotional warmth enjoyed between members of the families, and particularly between Elizabeth Denman and her children and grandchildren. '[I] felt truly thankful to the Father of all mercies, for permitting me at my advanced age, to enjoy the cheerful sport of my children and my grandchildren and I was highly gratified to see the harmony which subsists amongst them' (p. 66), is a typical entry in Elizabeth's diary. Poole writes about the family with empathy, respect, and sensitivity, and displays a real interest in the thoughts and feelings of the central characters. Her expert knowledge of the family history is demonstrated by her clear and detailed descriptions of the events, and her subtle piecing together of the various strands of the family's complicated history in order to create a coherent overall story. Through this story, the reader gains an insight into the everyday life of an upper-class family, and