



**QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**



**Maynooth  
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## ABSTRACTS

# Medicine in the Medieval North Atlantic World

Maynooth University, 19–21 March 2020

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British Library, Sloane MS 282, f. 18



**IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL**  
An Chomhairle um Thaighde in Éirinn

## PLENARIES

**Thursday: Guy Geltner (University of Amsterdam):**  
‘Public health and the environment in Galenic practice’

**Friday: Debby Banham (University of Cambridge):**  
‘The beginnings of English medicine: editing the oldest medical compendium from England’

**Saturday: Charlotte Roberts (Durham University):**  
‘Palaeopathology: what can it tell us about the history of disease and medicine?’

## POSTERS

### **The impact of lead on health in medieval Britain: Did they know it was poisonous?**

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Lead is a toxic heavy metal which accumulates in the human body causing severe health implications ranging from memory-loss through to death. As one of the oldest known occupational and environmental toxins, it has been mined and utilised for 6,000 years being especially popular in the Roman and Industrial periods. Lead poisoning is still an issue for our society being responsible for 0.6% of the world’s disease burden. Despite this and extensive research, no known lead exposure level that is safe and little is known about its use and effects in the medieval period. My thesis examines the impact of lead in medieval Britain (1100-1500 AD) through analysis of the material culture, textual evidence and human remains to determine the potential sources and impact of Pb on different regional populations and strata of medieval society. Most importantly, it uses these sources to assess whether it was known in the medieval period if lead was poisonous and how it impacted their health. This poster summarises how

lead impacts the body and the current records of medical and textual evidence from the medieval period.

## **MIMNEC: Medieval Irish Medicine in its North-western European Context**

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### PAPERS

## **Late medieval Irish medicalese and its European context**

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More than a hundred Irish medical manuscripts have been preserved. These contain translations made between c. 1350 and c. 1500 of many of the same Latin works as were being translated elsewhere in Europe at the time, such as the *Trotula* texts on women's medicine, John of Gaddesden's *Rosa anglica*, Guy de Chauliac's surgeries, and Magninus Mediolanensis' *Regimen sanitates*. Much work of editing and analysis of the language remains to be done on these texts, but preliminary investigations suggest that they contain a core of familiar, but often repurposed, native words along with a great deal of complex new terminology, generated by linguistic processes which include borrowing, hybridization, code-switching, calquing and suffixation. In all of this too, Irish seems in keeping with what was going on elsewhere in Europe.

This paper brings together a substantial corpus of Irish medical vocabulary, including many terms not recorded in any

dictionary, to analyse the techniques by which new terms were created and to compare these to the processes of vernacularization observed in medical texts in other European languages. Evidence of contact between the vernaculars, such as the appearance of Irish-language glosses on medical texts in English, will be considered also. In all, the aim is to lay some of the groundwork that might enable us to ask whether those translating into different European languages were independently imitating the techniques of their Latin exemplars or whether we should be thinking in terms of a shared approach to the vernacularizing of medical material.

### **Liturgical sources in nonsensical ritualised remedies**

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Many early English remedies with instructions for a ritualised performance contain obscure words, phrases, or entire formulas that demonstrate attempts to utilise several foreign and ancient languages. These have been traditionally understood as garbled formulas that are at best poorly copied passages from exotic classical and Christian sources that were completely misunderstood. Scholarly attitudes towards the attempted use of Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, Irish, and Latin (among other as of yet unidentified languages) in early England has tended to focus on the errors and corruptions in such attempts to prove that knowledge of languages was desperately poor at this time. However, the fact that efforts were made to include such languages in, significantly, public and private ritual contexts reflects a lot about medieval attitudes to these classical, biblical, and erudite languages. Ecclesiastics seem to have engaged with them seriously and in earnest from the early eighth to eleventh centuries in England – to whatever degree of success – and familiarity at the very least with their alphabets was an important component of advanced monastic education. Hebrew and Greek in particular enjoyed an elevated status as the principal languages of Scripture, hebraisms and grecisms gave ‘hermeneutic’

compositions a significant degree of distinction in highbrow intellectual circles, and ancient languages often occupy central positions in exegetical and historical tracts and discussions about the origins of language, salvation history, and the very cosmos itself. This paper will introduce a range of ‘gibberish’ remedial texts that claim to have power over the temporal and spiritual worlds, and it will consider some of their sources through identifiably rare words and phrases. It will then discuss the likelihood that these ritualised remedies appear to be in fact some of the most intellectually complex and esoteric products of the period.

## **Anatomical catalogues in Anglo-Saxon England**

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The body appears to be a relevant element of concern within poetry, charms, and all those didactic works which carefully record and list parts coupled to different aims, some of which are still to be unravelled or re-examined today. Lists of body parts were compiled both in Latin and the vernacular. A number of bilingual catalogues were also in circulation at the time.

Although antique and medieval medical treatises usually dealt with dietetics and diseases arranged in an *a capite ad calcem* order, Anglo-Saxon full anatomical catalogues occur in discrete types of texts such as vernacular poems, interlinear glosses to Latin texts, and sections of Latin-Old English class glossaries.

Anatomical lists were employed in ‘soul and body’ poems such as the Vercelli-Exeter *Soul and Body* and the fragments of the *Soul’s Address to the Body*. In these texts, the lists serve both penitential and didactic purposes, effectively exploiting the correspondence between body parts and specific sins.

Lists of body parts in interlinear glosses to Latin texts and sections of Latin-Old English class glossaries frequently overlap and can be traced back to two main sources: Isidore’s

*Etymologiae* and the Hisperic poem *Lorica of Laidcenn*. Book XI of Isidore's encyclopaedic work provided a rich list of body parts with Latin explanations which were translated and adapted in the interpretations of Anglo-Saxon class glossaries. The influence of the *Lorica of Laidcenn* on the Old English glossarial tradition, although already pointed out, deserves further attention.

Previous scholarship has drawn attention to *lorica*-like apotropaic lists of body parts in several Anglo-Saxon charms; however, these lists are usually in Latin and were not translated. In this context, further attention must be given to other formulaic texts such as excommunication formulas, which feature anatomical catalogues with by Old English interlinear glosses.

## **Were they all pigs? From individual to public health care in medieval Trondheim, Norway**

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How did health and welfare become a public responsibility? Why? And when? What was behind this process, with a result so fundamental to western societies' social systems? Carole Rawcliffe, amongst others, has pointed at the fact that late medieval rulers of English towns spent much resources and many efforts in creating well-functioning sanitary systems and devices in the urban landscape. Her and others' research finds that the Victorian historians have grossly underestimated the Middle Ages' knowledge of sanitation and practise of cleanliness, and so have exaggerated the importance of the Victorian period's glorious achievements in this field. This calls upon a clarification of how sickness and health care in general developed from an individual to a public responsibility. In Trondheim, Norway, a town on the periphery of medieval Europe, public health care did not appear until around the 1670s. What were the

driving forces which led up to this fundamental social, political and mental change in attitudes towards body and health? Based on archaeological evidence from Trondheim, i.a. drainage, wells, latrines etc from the 10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century, this paper will briefly discuss what might have affected health conditions in the town during the period of 1000-1600, which have influenced on the idea(s) of health from being an individual to becoming a public responsibility. It will be argued that the emergence of a public health management derived from a number of changing practices (like waste and water supply practices), which can be proven to have taken place in the urban landscape, *either directly or incidentally* prevented diseases and debility caused by the particular physical environment that constituted the medieval urbanscape and its daily life.

### **Afflictions of the head in the *Acallam na Senórach***

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The late twelfth or early thirteenth-century Irish literary text *Acallam na Senórach* (“the conversation of the old men”) contains a number of characters who suffer from afflictions of the head, ranging from headaches to leaking brains. In this presentation, I will examine some of these medical conditions, and will attempt to connect them with broader European medical tradition. This paper forms part of a wider investigation into the extent of the medical knowledge present in Ireland during the time prior to the appearance of the earliest medical manuscripts.

### **Old English cures from the Ireland of Solinus and Bede**

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Bede, drawing upon Solinus' *De mirabilibus mundi* described Ireland as an island rich in milk and honey, and noted that Irish vegetation was efficacious in treating the wounds of serpents, since the land itself is poisonous to snakes. It is unsurprising then, that Old English medical compilations make occasional reference to *materia medica* from Ireland in the treatment of injuries from venomous animals. What is more surprising is that two separate Old English medical compilations preserve a prayer identified in the Old English as Irish, but which has thus far resisted interpretation as a legitimate Old Irish inscription in part due to the fact that it seems to have been transcribed into Old English orthography which does not well represent the Old Irish language. I will consider the occurrence of this Old Irish prayer as congruent with the perceived efficacy in late antique and patristic natural history of anything that comes from Ireland in the treatment of certain kinds of injury while also positing that information regarding the form of the Irish prayer (it is names as a litany in the Old English) may potentially yield a means of interpretation despite the unusual orthography of the text by comparison with the corpus of Old Irish metrical litanies.

## **Medical vocabulary in early mediaeval Celtic Latinity**

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The Celtic countries provide no surviving works, whether in Latin or the vernacular, explicitly concerning medical practice from before 1200; nor are there surviving manuscripts of texts from the European tradition. Consequently, most of what we know is gleaned from mentions in other areas, especially legal and ecclesiastical sources and literature. Lexicography can provide another tool. In the digital Archive of Celtic Latin Literature from which the Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic sources draws its citation, approximately 50 words from the letter range A-



H have been identified as used in technically medical senses; additional words can be drawn from our on-going unpublished work. Of the vocabulary in circulation, approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  is attested in Late-Antique literature. This paper will explore the extent to which the medical vocabulary attested in Celtic Latinity falls within the European mainstream, and will attempt to identify possible sources whence this vocabulary may have been drawn.

## **‘Greaselamps, frankincense, and dragon’s blood: The stable as medicalised environment in late medieval England**

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One of the key developments in the history of medieval medicine over the last few decades is the broadening of the study of medical practitioners to include the wider panoply of individuals and groups engaged in providing healthcare. As well as university-trained physicians and surgeons, historians increasingly recognise the importance of apothecaries, empirics, cooks, washers and other body-practitioners in the development of the ideas and practices of health and illness. One large group of practitioners who have been largely overlooked are horse-doctors and other equine carers. This is particularly true of late medieval England which has been treated by historians as a veterinary backwater in comparison with Mediterranean Europe.

The health of elite horses in particular was regularly monitored and maintained, they were the subject of a broad array of veterinary treatises and were cared for by a highly specialised and often quite successful set of practitioners known as ‘marshals’. One particularly successful set of horse-carers was the English royal stablemasters, who held a position somewhere between forest administrators and royal physicians. They oversaw large herds of elite war- and riding horses for the crown and were responsible for breeding,

raising, and training horses as well as providing medical and surgical responses to injury and disease and maintaining the stable as a healthful, 'non-natural' environment. Their records offer significant insights into the theories and practices of elite non-human healthcare.

This paper will use late-medieval royal stablemasters' accounts and contemporary horse-medicine treatises to explore the healthcare of English royal horses as an example of the relationship between elite patients and practitioners. It will look in particular at the construction of stables as healthful environments drawing comparisons with hospitals, palaces, and urban healthcare. It will examine the relationship between stable-provisioning and contemporary medical theory and discuss elite horses as the recipients of occupational and long-term care.

## **Female book production and medical texts in the eighth century**

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While there are several references to women receiving or producing manuscripts from early medieval England, there are extremely few examples of manuscripts known specifically to have been owned or produced by female monastic houses. Michelle Brown has suggested that several members of the early Insular prayerbooks may have been produced in female houses or for a female audience (Brown, 2001); among these is British Library MS Royal 2.A.XX (the *Royal Prayerbook*), copied in the late eighth or early ninth century, which contains several charms related to staunching blood. The most complex of these texts is closely related to a charm found in a series of additional entries added following the main text in Basel MS OUB MS F III 15a. This manuscript, dating to the middle of the eighth century, was copied in Frankia in the area of the Anglo-Saxon mission, and its main text was likely copied from an Anglo-Saxon exemplar. Given the close

relationship with the Royal charm, it is likely that the blood charm in the Basel manuscript also had an ultimately Insular source. Felice Lifshitz has argued that these additional entries were copied from a manuscript belonging to the female monastic community of Kitzingen (Lifshitz, 2014). If this is the case, these texts perhaps provide evidence for a network between female religious houses in England and on the Continent. The *Royal Prayerbook* and the additional entries in the Basel manuscript also contain independent evidence of the knowledge of Latin medical texts. This paper will examine this evidence and suggest that eighth-century women's monastic communities were interested in medicine and likely played a role in the transmission of medical texts in this period.

## **Locating the mind with monsters in early English medicine**

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Monsters lurk within the pages of the *Leechbooks*, the *Lacnunga*, the Old English *Herbarium*, and the Old English *Medicina de Quadrupedibus*. As incongruous as they may appear from a modern medical standpoint, however, these elves, maran, and nihtgengan, among others, are fully integrated within the pathologies and remedies of the early English medical corpus that they populate. Nevertheless, their appearances do follow certain patterns: certain supernatural or monstrous beings tend to find themselves within groupings of ailments that affect the brain and head areas, while others are associated primarily with fevers. This paper will use the intersection of monsters, mental health, and medicine in order to test the theory most prominently put forth by Leslie Lockett regarding the so-called 'hydraulic model' of early English mental and emotional activity. Can we follow monsters to the mind? Or do they lead us somewhere else in the body entirely?

## **Early Irish literature and the embodied mind**

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In his exploration of the philosophy of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein observed: “Where our language suggests a body and there is none: there, we should like to say, is a spirit” [ *Philosophical Investigations* , 36]. Pre-dating the advances in cognitive linguistics, this statement sums up the way we use the language of embodiment to describe and comprehend abstract concepts in terms of our physical experience. The mind in particular is an entity that lends itself to embodiment because it is inseparably connected to the physical body and yet its precise nature is elusive.

Medieval literature does not lack the embodied mind motif. It appears to be one of the most prominent themes in Old English poetry as many important recent studies have shown. However, no such attempt has been undertaken in regards to Irish literature of the early middle ages, at least not one specifically focused on embodiment. That is why in this paper I propose to examine the metaphors of embodied mind and particularly the motif of mental journey in Irish religious literature from c. 800-1200. The journey metaphor, especially common in visionary texts, presents the human mind or soul as a wanderer and the realm of thought as a tangible world. This imaginative presentation simplifies the work of mind through embodiment and conveys the idea of exploration with which mental experiences are often associated. By exploring this literary motif, the proposed study will shed some light on how the work of the mind was conceptualized in medieval Irish texts.

## Originality and innovation in medieval and early modern Welsh medical charms

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While most Welsh healing charms can be placed firmly within a wider English and European tradition, several seem to be completely unique. There are two charms that best demonstrate the ways in which Welsh charms could be reworked from a shared, inherited tradition into rich examples unique (so far) to the Welsh corpus. The first charm is a late-medieval medical charm for scrofula found in two manuscripts belonging to the end of the medieval period in Wales (early sixteenth century). It contains familiar motifs such as the counting down formula found in charms like the *Job had nine worms* charm type of medieval England, and the *Nine were Node's sisters* charm for scofula in the Old English *Lacnunga*. The first part of my paper will examine the scrofula charm and the ways in which the Welsh version builds on these familiar motifs while also creating something wholly unique.

The second part of my paper will consider a Welsh charm to protect men and their property (namely cattle) from being bewitched or made ill by witchcraft. This charm most typically exists in manuscripts of religious prose rather than medical recipes, and it was copied down and used from at least the fifteenth century through to the nineteenth century. It is overtly religious with faint echoes of common cattle protection charms of medieval England. In presenting these charms, I wish to explore the originality of these late-medieval Welsh healing charms, but I also hope to highlight the ways in which the echoes of a shared European tradition demonstrate that the Welsh healers and compilers of manuscripts were active in the process of transmission of medical knowledge across Europe in the medieval period.

## **Singing to sanity**

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In recent years the study of medieval literature and medicine have moved closer, but there is still an emphasis on either ‘what did they suffer from?’ or ‘is this a metaphor for x?’ which are valid and interesting approaches. Scholars such as Antonia Harbus and Stefanie Künzel have used conceptual metaphor theories to identify the language which is used to characterise disease and pathology in Old English texts, and Deborah Hayden has shown the significance of versification in Irish medical texts. My paper will extend this work and consider the relevance of literary themes and ideas in the performance of healing rituals. Recently Karen Jolly and James Paz have delivered important contributions to the understanding of ‘science’ in an early medieval context. My paper will build on this work and examine a range of different texts, including some of the more ‘challenging’ charms and poems and consider the ways in which literary themes are used in medical contexts.

## **How to identify fools: Instructions from a Middle Irish legal commentary**

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This paper will focus on a remarkable yet little-known legal commentary that is found in 16th-century Trinity College Dublin MS 1336/1 and that explains how to recognise whether someone is of unsound mind. I will offer a translation of the commentary and a discussion of its date. By identifying the sources (both native and non-native) from which some of the citations were drawn, I will show how this

text reflects the state of medical learning in 15th- and 16th-century Irish legal centres.

## **The *Materia Medica* of Gaelic physician Tadhg Ó Cuinn (1415): at the interface of theory and practice.**

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The *Materia Medica* of Tadhg Ó Cuinn belongs to a corpus of medical literature in Irish, mostly translations or adaptations of Latin works, composed by Gaelic physicians in the late medieval period. Medical texts survive in almost 100 medieval manuscripts held in collections in Ireland, and reflect the mainstream of contemporary European medical theory and practice, itself informed by older Graeco-Arabic works. The wide-ranging subject matter treated in the Irish manuscripts supported a high quality medical training for students in the schools maintained by Gaelic physicians.

Micheal O Conchubhair completed a translation of the *Materia Medica* in 1991. His translation, based on the copy in TCD MS 1343 held in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, is now accessible online at <http://celt.ucc.ie>. It is openly available, in English, to a wider readership than ever in its lifetime.

A compendium of the ‘materials of medicine’, 238 of the 292 chapters of the *Materia Medica* are based on plants or plant-derived substances or products. It is a landmark work in the history of plant-based medicine in Ireland, standing at the interface of the practice and theory of medicine.

To illustrate this interface, the paper will focus on two species of *Plantago*, each the subject of a chapter in the *Materia Medica*: *P. major* (cruach Padraig) and *P. lanceolata* (slanlus). Both have a long and widespread history of use, and remain in the repertoire of herbalists today. The paper will look at Ó Cuinn’s indications for these plants, and the resonances of these indications in other traditions and other times. It will look at the way in which use of the plant is validated by

reference to Galenic theory, the bedrock underpinning medical practice in medieval Europe.

## **Old Norse concept of health in the perspective of body-soul relation**

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Old Norse adjective *beill* means both healthy and whole, intact and cheerful, and the word holy (*beilagr*) is derived from it. Health, from the point of view of this root, appears to be an integrity of man, with psychological, physical and spiritual realms not being strictly distinguished. From this point of view, I would like to examine the hypothesis that emotions were perceived as bodily phenomena in Old Norse environment.

I would like to analyse examples- taken from different sagas genres and Eddic lays - of involuntary physical manifestations of emotions as swelling, dyeing and exhaustion without any physical reason. Especially grief seems to be there a force that physically paralyses as inability to move is one of main manifestations of this estate. In my paper, I would argue that this specific form of expressing in our view mental estate (e.g. grief) as a sickness reflects an interconnection between body and soul. Physical state was thus at same time expression of a mental state as the psycho-physical connections were obvious for readers or listeners of that time.

Therefore, in this context, it is not possible to lead a dividing line between disease and emotion, i.e. to distinguish if the pain is physical or mental. Dealing with the Old Norse literature, we have thus the opportunity to imagine that illness is not a consequence of a psychic state but is identical with it.



## **Medieval environmental responsibility. Public initiatives in Trondheim in the late middle ages**

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Recently, scholars of various disciplines have challenged the modernistic view that medieval people were indifferent to their environments. The term “healthscaping” has been coined to denote the physical, social, legal, administrative and political process of providing urban environments with the means to promote resident's health, safety and wellbeing.

Trondheim, Norway, 1000–1600 CE is the case for a study within the international, interdisciplinary research project “Medieval Urban Health – From Individual to Public Responsibility”: <https://www.ntnu.edu/museum/medieval-urban-health-from-individual-to-public-responsibility-ad-1000-1600-medheal600->

We will present three fields of particular interest:

- The scarcity of documentary sources represents a challenge. One of the few that applies for Trondheim, King Håkon V's decree from 1313 that prohibited throwing waste, rocks and bark into the river, can be interpreted as an environmentally prophylactic measure. Resorting to relevant analogies, e.g. in Copenhagen, several decrees were issued from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards that indicate attention to waste, manure and impurities as harmful to the city's inhabitants.

- Interestingly, some of the Danish decrees identified the connection between uncleanness and dangerous

illnesses. A plausible reading may be that the authorities' attention was not primarily directed towards environmental issues, but rather to the Galenic concept of “miasma” – foul smells that were the direct cause of disease. Thus, care and epistemological awareness is required in interpreting such measures.

-Plague represented a watershed regarding health conditions. However, the impact of plague in urban societies is poorly understood. A working hypotheses is that the Black Death perhaps did not have the violent effect that has been ascribed to it. We also question whether the population of Trondheim in fact decreased considerably during the Late Medieval period. Furthermore, the discovery of the plague bacterium *Y. pestis* in a burial dated to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century may require rewriting the history of plague in Northern Europe.

## **Nordic landscapes as agents of pharmaceutical possibility**

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This paper examines the role of landscape in perceptions of pharmaceutical potential at Nordic royal courts between the mid-thirteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries, especially the effects of two movements: increased royal efforts from the thirteenth century to emulate non-Nordic courts, and an augmented flow of *materia medica* and medical texts from elsewhere in Europe to Norway and Sweden throughout this period. Together, these two forces challenged established understandings of the value and capability of north Atlantic landscapes, but also influenced Nordic perceptions of pharmaceutical possibilities in Europe more broadly.

This paper begins by examining how changing Nordic perceptions of ‘exotic’ intersected with ideas about medicinal ingredients’ origins. It proposes a re-evaluation of geographical texts and ideas about herbs in circulation at the Norwegian royal court in the mid-thirteenth century, focusing on Haakon IV’s *Konungs skuggsjá*, especially the chapter on Ireland. Portrayals of the Irish landscape’s potential for producing medicinal substances are compared to descriptions of medicinal plants in Nordic geographies found in sagas and law codes, which are in turn put into the context of new ideas about local natural potential. This was amplified by Haakon IV’s diplomatic overtures that capitalized on Nordic ‘exotica’, exploiting natural resources such as gyrfalcons and white bears to bolster his European image. These efforts in turn impacted the perceived fertility of Nordic landscapes for other uses, including pharmaceutical possibilities.

Finally, this paper explores the effect of these changes on subsequent royal Nordic valuations of ‘exotic’ and of imported substances through analysis of Nordic adaptations of foreign medical recipes. It focuses on reductions in the number of ingredients, the creation of new plant equivalencies, and the exclusion of preparatory instructions. These alterations are considered together with Nordic ideas for the potential of the ‘domestic exotic’ as well as with broader medieval ideas about plants’ universality.

## **Medical knowledge in two Middle English manuscripts: their use and users**

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My research aims at analyzing the collections of Middle English medical recipes transmitted by two fifteenth century manuscripts: Naples, National Library, MS XIII.B.29 (hereafter Np) and Cambridge, Trinity College Library, MS R.14.32 (TCC). Np is a miscellany dated 1457 and written in the Dorset dialect. It contains medical recipes, two romances,

a hagiography and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* – a selection of texts that suggests it was possibly compiled for a woman. TCC, to which little scholarly attention has been paid so far, is datable approximately to the second half of the 15th century and linguistic scrutiny provided by the *LALME* classifies its dialect as East Anglian. The manuscript contains only medical and scientific texts, which has made me assume that it belonged to a medical practitioner or to a student of medicine.

My study wants to illustrate that some of the remedies described in both the manuscripts are almost identical. On the basis of such evidence, I intend to pursue a dual aim: (1) the presence of the same recipes in two codices from different areas of Britain confirms the widespread assumption that medical knowledge in the Late Middle Ages constituted a common heritage shared by a vast community made of both specialists and lay people; (2) a close analysis of the collections reveals a number of incongruities of different nature – be they the ingredients required or different degrees of complexity of the procedure. As a result, this paper aims at reconsidering the use made of both manuscripts; besides, it also wants to shed some new light on how the competence of their users might have influenced the form of the recipes therein.

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**"And bathis are goode to be vsid in tyme of colde":  
Therapeutic baths in medieval English medicine**

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The purpose of this study is to analyse the development of bathing practices in medieval England through examination of a group of medical texts. Starting from the analysis of some of the most popular medical manuscripts of the Old English period, such as BL Royal MS 12 D XVII, BL Harley MS 585, BL MS Harley 6258B, and moving on to texts of the Middle English epoch, such as the vernacular versions of *Secreta Secretorum* and the translation of *De Re Rustica* by Palladius, *The boke of nurture* by John Russell and other medical treatises transmitted in codices as, for example, Glasgow, University Library MS Hunter 307 and Cambridge, Trinity College Library MS R.14.52, the study will explore different aspects of therapeutic baths. It will show how in the Old English period scattered references to baths are found only in relation to other medical remedies, such as potions and diets, while, in the Middle English period, thanks to the influence of the so-called Salernitan School, bathing started playing a vital role in medical practice, so that sections of medical treatises were devoted to remedies involving also baths and their therapeutic virtues. The medical and scientific properties of baths and their role in achieving the patient's psycho-physical wellbeing will then be examined also in relation to other remedies, including potions, diet and exercise. Finally, particular relevance will be given to the material aspects of bathing

practices, with reference to objects used for the cleansing process or to enhance the qualities of waters, such as medicinal herbs, flowers, stones, spices, oils, and sponges among others.

## **The Old Irish healing charms in the Stowe Missal and the protective spell in the Karlsruhe book cover**

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The three charms on the last page of the Stowe Missal (Royal Irish Academy MS D ii 3; *c.* 800) and the protective spell on a fragmentary manuscript page, once used as a cover for another manuscript (Karlsruhe Badische Landesbibliothek Aug. Fr. 18; first third 9<sup>th</sup> cent.) comprise together four of the altogether seven Old Irish charms surviving in contemporary manuscripts. In both cases, the context in which the spells are found is not medical, but liturgical. In the light of this, form, function and possible purpose of these four brief texts will be discussed.

## **Lexical pairs in the Old West Norse medical manuscript tradition**

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Lexical pairs of the type “loanword/foreign word : native word” are a widespread phenomenon in Old Norse-Icelandic prosa texts. They have been found to appear in the texts according to four different dynamics (simple loanword/native word alternation, intrastemmatic variation, synonymic dittologies, explicative insertions). A great concentration of such lexical pairs is strictly related to textual typologies involved with the transmission of foreign knowledge and the

translation and adaptation thereof in the vernacular (Tarsi [forthc.]).

The aim of the present paper is twofold: 1) to give an exhaustive overview and characterization of the lexical pairs elicited from the extant medical literature in Old Norse-Icelandic (MSS AM 655 xxx 4to, AM 194 8vo, AM 434a 12mo, AM 696 i 4to, AM 673a ii 4to and RIA 23 D 43, cf. Schwabe 2011), and 2) to provide an analysis of philologically notable cases together with an overview of the phenomenon under discussion for the literary typology comprising the analyzed texts, i.e. “Treatises”.

The analysis carried out here sheds light on the modality of transfer of knowledge in the Middle Ages and provides an insight into the provenance of the possible sources of the Old Norse-Icelandic medical texts.

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#### **The scientific terminology of the Beaton medical manuscripts**

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While both the intellectual and practical value of pre-modern Gaelic medical literature has historically been questioned, even sceptics admit that it is a notable linguistic

achievement. The advent of scholastic medicine in the Gaelic world during the later Middle Ages saw literary Classical Gaelic's adroit re-employment as a medium for expressing the innovative philosophical and technical concepts of the medical curriculum, this being an unusual instance, in the medieval Europe context, of a language other than Latin being employed so comprehensively for this purpose. Indeed, recent research suggests that traditional bardic linguistic training may have sometimes formed part of Gaelic medical education. However, only a relatively small number of relevant texts have been edited, making systematic observations in this area challenging.

In order to better understand the dynamics of this genre's language, this paper presents a study of the lexis of the relevant manuscript literature using data from the Faclair na Gàidhlig Manuscripts Corpus. This tagged corpus of manuscript transcriptions relevant to the history of Scottish Gaelic, which is currently under construction, includes a range of practical and theoretical medical texts, mostly from manuscripts associated with the Beaton medical family. The paper explores their vocabulary by presenting a macro-level overview of what is shared and what is unique between texts and then considering the semantic range and development of some key items of vocabulary in detail. Particular attention is given to terms associated with the relationship between diagnostics and semiotics and to terms associated with the operation of medicines, as these are discussed in the corpus from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. It is argued that, while there are examples of rare terminology and wide semantic ranges, the discourse of medieval Gaelic medicine, as exemplified here, is disciplined and coherent and, indeed, a linguistic achievement worth further investigation.

## **The Veronica and female healing authority in medieval England**

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As early as the ninth century, the biblical Veronica appears in Medieval English manuscripts associated with healing; her name is invoked in charms, amulets and incantations calling upon her healing powers for a variety of diseases and conditions. This Veronica is the *Haemorrhōisa*, the woman in the miracle recounted in three of the four gospels (Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34, Luke 8:43-48) who was ‘troubled’ with the ‘issue of blood’ for twelve years and healed when she touched the hem of Christ’s robes. Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-c. 340) writes in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* of a statue of Veronica in Caesarea Philippi, kneeling at the feet of Christ whose robe is entwined with a plant purported to have miraculous healing powers. It may be pure coincidence that these three images—Christ, plant-based healing, and Veronica—are prominent in medieval English medicine, but it bears examination, nevertheless. The name Veronica first appears in the *Royal Prayerbook* (London, British Library, Royal 2. A. xx), an early ninth-century manuscript produced in Mercia. The *Royal Prayerbook* is a purposeful creation for a woman who appears to have been suffering from extreme menorrhagia, a condition not unlike the *Haemorrhōisa*/Veronica herself. Despite the earliest appearance of Veronica being connected to menstrual bleeding and female infertility, her name is also invoked in later medical manuscripts to help heal the sick and as a ward against evil that may cause diseases. Her name is also invoked against two unknown diseases: the so-called spring disease (*lenctenadl*) and elf disease (*alfadl*). Could the invocation of a female divine in these instances tell us something about the diseases themselves? In this paper, I will examine the role Veronica played in early Medieval English medicine, the contexts in which her name appears, and address why an infertile, impure woman achieved healing authority in early medieval England.

## **The placebo effect in medieval Ireland**

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The placebo effect is a complicated medical phenomenon which cannot be reduced to one simple formula. However, the efficacy of the placebo is believed to be connected with the expectations of the patient receiving the treatment. The effect points to the importance of perception and faith and the brain's role in physical health. Despite some detractors, placebos are still used to effect across different medical approaches, including conventional and CAM (complementary and alternative medicine) and in medical testing. This paper will examine whether the principles underlying the placebo effect can account for the reported miracles of healing in Medieval Irish texts. The use of saintly relics in the 'treatment' of specific medical complaints, in particular, will be explored.