

Yet, even as these modern epidemics were marked by heightened fears of foreigners, sharpened social divisions, and racialised policies of border control and quarantine, they could also be sources of solidarity, bringing together working classes, ethnic minorities, colonial subjects and others against state, medical or colonial authorities. While cholera, smallpox and plague are used to exemplify how epidemics could bond one group against another *within* society, other epidemics are shown to bond together society as a whole. In a chapter on American reactions to yellow fever, Cohn argues that the 1853 epidemic bred new forms of tolerance across class and racial lines, particularly in the American south. However, the outstanding example of unity-in-the-face-of-adversity emerges from the 1918–19 influenza pandemic. Cohn dedicates five chapters to the pandemic, tracing reactions in the United States, Canada, Britain, continental Europe and India. While epidemiologically catastrophic, Cohn's extensive newspaper analysis shows that, above all else, in every country surveyed, collective responses were characterised by 'compassion, volunteerism, and martyrdom' (p. 413), rather than blame or violence.

This book exemplifies the great potential of new digital resources for disease history, but also some of the pitfalls. The sheer volume of reactions catalogued and compared is impressive and clearly demonstrates Cohn's central claim that responses within and between epidemics varied extensively. But there is comparatively less in the way of explanation for why such variation existed. A mixture of biological and cultural factors is identified. On the one hand, it is suggested that reactions could stem from the particular etiological, clinical or epidemiological characteristics of a disease; on the other hand, they could stem from particular meanings signified by a disease, the types of people associated with it, the preventive measures employed or the authorities tasked with their implementation. The conclusion that there are 'no easy answers' (p. 539) rings true, but this is not altogether satisfying.

Historians of medicine and disease have developed fine-grained contextual analyses of why epidemics became culturally, ideologically and politically charged when and where they did. At turns, *Epidemics* delivers such analysis, but it is overshadowed by an approach that seeks to broadly delineate epidemics according to those that did or did not spark blame (or compassion). While this approach makes it possible to sift through and organise a vast array of material, the reader is left searching for why, as Cohn suggests, the diseased were generally not attacked in the ancient world, why they were in medieval (plague) and early modern (syphilis) worlds, and why some were (cholera) and were not (influenza) in the modern world.

The tension within *Epidemics* between its breath-taking synthesis of digital sources and its narrow analytical framework makes it difficult to judge what its overall impact will be on the historiography of epidemics. It is, without question, an immensely valuable resource. I have found it especially helpful for teaching students about how online newspapers can be used to systematically reconstruct the multiple perceptions, responses and lived experiences of modern infectious diseases. But by far its most important contribution is to challenge historians to look more closely at the complex ways in which epidemics past have brought people together. This is a critical message for the moment in which we are now living and, if not already, it should be a critical part of our teaching, research and policy agendas.

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Emily Kesling, *Medical Texts in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), pp. xii + 233, £60, hardback, ISBN: 9781843845492.

The subject of this book is a collection of medical texts in Old English, known since the nineteenth century as Bald's *Leechbook*, *Leechbook III*, the *Lacnunga* and the Old English *Herbal* and *Medicina de quadrupedibus* (medicines from four-footed creatures). Dr Kesling gives us the first book length treatment of these texts to be published in over 25 years, greatly advancing the scholarship in an often neglected field of study. She briefly notes the scope of the texts and their sources in the introduction

(pp. 1–22), then devotes a full chapter to each of the four collections, the *Herbal* and *Medicina de quadrupedibus* being considered a single composite text, before presenting a unifying thesis in the fifth and final chapter, supplemented by an appendix of illustrative quotations and a short index. As the title suggests, this book is written from a perspective of literary scholarship, rather than the history of medicine, but it describes this fascinating corpus of vernacular medical texts, all compiled or translated before the end of the tenth century, in sufficient detail to be of interest to historians of early medieval medicine. The general argument of the book seems to be an antithesis to the historiography of the mid-twentieth century in which the ritual elements of the Old English medical corpus were described as the production of an uneducated, even ‘semi-pagan’ laity. Kesling consistently argues that the texts were produced in a monastic environment, and much of her final chapter is devoted to dispelling the notion that these texts contained heterodox material that would be described as *drycraeft* (sorcery) or *wiccecraeft* (witchcraft) in Anglo-Saxon penitential or homiletic literature, concluding that ‘there is remarkably little similarity between these [medical] texts and the actual practices associated with *drycraeft*’ (p. 185), and noting even that ‘the [ælf] remedy as it exists is clearly a learned piece, part of the wider literary and ecclesiastical tradition of the period’ (p. 92).

Chapter 1 locates Bald’s *Leechbook* in the context of late antique Latin medical literature, comparing the synthesis of multiple Latin sources to the translation style developed at the ninth-century court of Alfred the Great. This task is no easy feat; many of the source texts, including the Latin Alexander and Galen’s *Ad Glauconem* have not been printed since the sixteenth century, while sources such as the *Physica Plinii* and Oribasius, *Synopsis* and *Euporistes* exist in multiple Latin versions, some of which may at times agree more closely with the Old English text than those Latin versions quoted by the author; for example on pp. 32–33 in which the *Physica Plinii Florentino-Pragensis* I.14.8 is syntactically closer to the Old English than the quoted *Physica Plinii Bambergensis* 13.9, and in the appendices on pp. 192–193 the New Latin Oribasius as found in Molinier’s edition under the siglum ‘La’ may agree more closely with the quoted Old English than the text provided from the Old Latin Oribasius under the siglum ‘Aa’.

There is a slight sense of discontinuity between the first and second chapters, as Chapter 2 considers ‘Elves, the Demonic and *Leechbook* III’ from an entirely different perspective, focusing almost exclusively on exorcisms and recipes in which Old English *ælf* (elf) occurs as part of a disease term. In Chapter 3, ‘The *Lacnunga* and Insular *Grammatica*’, the author uses a novel and welcome approach to situate elements of that medical compilation often derided as superstitious and ignorant, concluding that they ‘suggest a learned interest in the power of letters, words and language consonant with early conceptions of *grammatica*’ (p. 129). Chapter 4 considers the Old English *Herbal* and *Medicina de quadrupedibus* which are a direct translation of a popular ensemble of late antique pharmaceutical texts, the bulk of which have been published as the fourth volume of the *Corpus Medicorum Latinorum*. The author provides a solid analysis of the styles of translation, and credibly situates it in the tenth-century English Benedictine reform. This chapter also shows a more thorough engagement with recent work in the history of medicine than the second and third chapters. Some minor points could have been expanded, such as the significance of the  $\alpha$  recension of Pseudo Apuleius, *Herbarius*, briefly discussed on p. 148, or the identity of ‘the tremulous hand’ mentioned in passing on p. 151, although a study of this hand by Christine Franzen occurs in the bibliography.

The final chapter of the book, titled ‘Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England’, ties the radically different methods of analysis in the preceding chapters together with a discussion of prohibitions of magic, ultimately arguing that even the *galдру* (charms) found in Bald’s *Leechbook*, *Leechbook* III and the *Lacnunga* did not lie outside the acceptable realms of monastic orthodoxy. The chapter contains little discussion of medical practice, but rather considers literary depictions of the Anglo-Saxon medic, or *læce*, in contrast to those who are condemned for illicit practices. This is indeed a very thorough and welcome analysis and an antidote to twentieth century scholarship in which ‘the medical texts are always brought into discussions about magic or charms in Anglo-Saxon England’ (p. 185). It is perhaps a minor point but the form *gealdor* found in Bald’s *Leechbook* would not normally be emended to the citation form *galdor* on p. 172.

The short appendices, finally, provide extended illustrative quotations in support of the Chapters 1 and 3, respectively, and I note that the author had located these Latin sources independently of Doyle, whom she generously cites throughout Chapter 1. One flaw exists in the book for which I do not think the author is wholly at fault: internal cross references in the book are incomplete, never having been filled in during the page proofing stage, which strikes me as an unfortunate editorial omission as much as an authorial oversight, distracting the reader from the thoroughly researched and well worded argument.

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Howard Phillips, *In a Time of Plague: Memories of the 'Spanish' Flu Epidemic of 1918 in South Africa* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of Southern African Historical Documents, 2018), pp. xxvii + 193, ZAR660, hardback, ISBN: 9780994720719.

As the world is battling the Coronavirus (COVID-19), no book is as timely as Howard Phillips' *In a Time of Plague: Memories of the 'Spanish' Flu Epidemic of 1918 in South Africa*. The book is a stark reminder of the world's vulnerability to respiratory viruses. Between 1918 and 1919, South Africa, just like rest of the world, was at the mercy of one of the most deadly influenza pandemics caused by the H1N1 virus, commonly called 'Spanish' Flu. South Africa experienced two waves of the pandemic. The first wave, which was mild, arrived in the country through the port city of Durban in September 1918. The virus spread to the Witwatersrand and other towns in the interior through migrant labour routes (p. xi). It was the second wave of the virulent virus that was to shatter South African society and economy. In September 1918, two troopships – the *Jaroslav* and the *Veronej* – left Europe for South Africa. Transporting contingents of the South African Native Labour Corps, they passed through Freetown, which had become one of the hotspots for the mutant strain of the virus. Phillips notes that once the two troopships had passed through Freetown, 'cases began to appear amongst these men' (p. xii). When the troopships arrived in South Africa, the Cape Town authorities temporarily quarantined some of the troops. Because they did not show any symptoms, the soldiers were demobilised, and five trains transported the men into the interior of subcontinent, in the process spreading the virus. The virulent strain of the virus was also spread across South Africa by contacts and migrant labourers. The impact was devastating. Between September and October 1918, a period called 'Black October', an estimated 300 000–350 000 (60% of South African population) lost their lives (p. x). One can argue that it was a great equaliser as its effects were felt across race and class divides, and from urban areas to mining centres and rural areas. It had a massive impact on South Africa's society and economy. Besides those who succumbed to diseases, the 'Spanish' Flu led to a decline in birth rates, an increase in orphans and orphanages, destitution, emotional and psychological distress, religious awakenings and economic ruin. The state responded through public health measures, sanitary house reforms – which mainly targeted the white section of the population – and social distance efforts that saw the separation of races with the establishment of African townships located far from white suburbs.

*In a Time of Plague* adds a different and a welcome dimension to the literature of the pandemic. Published as part of the 'Spanish' Flu centenary, the book consists of transcripts of interviews Phillips conducted between 1978 and 1981 during his doctoral studies. Phillips also included selected letters sent to the British historian R. Collier from 1972 to 1973 and letters sent to Phillips in response to appeals to South Africans about the pandemic (p. xx). Phillips has assembled a treasure trove of 127 testimonies of women and men, of all races and from different parts of South Africa. The material gives us an interior view of the effect of the pandemic on many a South African. As Phillips notes, 'we hear anguish and confusion, acts of kindness, eerie silences in cities and fear of the plague' (p. vii).

*In a Time of Plague* is an invaluable rich collection of personal memories of the 'Black October' that capture the experiences of those who lived through the pandemic. Unlike previous works on the