

## Book Reviews

Essay XIII, 'Disease, dragons and saints in the Dark Ages' is a good example: despite the fact that the sources for his primary narrative (the dragon that St Marcellus vanquished) are silent on this score, Horden creates a highly plausible and intriguing argument about dragons as markers of pestilence in the early medieval world. Here, as in essay III on 'Ritual and public health in the early medieval city', he uses cultural, medical and ethnographic anthropology to move beyond the earlier cultural historical analysis by Jacques Le Goff; Horden understands tales of dragons and their taming by holy men not only as Christian control of a pagan countryside but also as a reflection of fears over diseases and their ecology (marshes and riversides). The emphasis on ecology appears throughout the more recent essays in the volume, as part of Horden's interest in material environment, whether it be the architectural layout of a Byzantine hospital, travel to saints' shrines in search of a cure, or the geography of plague outbreaks.

Horden is expert at muddying the waters, seeking out the complexities of each topic and pushing beyond the limits of the sources. When asking "how medicalized were Byzantine hospitals?" (essay I), he acknowledges the hard task ahead of him: the term "medicalization" is difficult to historicize and define, few sources—both textual and archaeological—are extant and those that remain are not easy to interpret. Such problems are of course common when studying any aspect of Late Antiquity or the early Middle Ages, but are particularly acute when dealing with this subject. The essay provides a much-needed corrective to earlier views of the Byzantine hospital as approximate to a modern medical institution.

Peregrine Horden's essays are insightful, valuable and a good read. Whether analysing a historiographic tradition (essay VII) or addressing a specific historical theme, the articles in this volume point us in new directions that will benefit scholars in fields as

varied as the history of medicine, ecology, spirituality and medieval culture.

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**Danielle Westerhof**, *Death and the noble body in medieval England*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, Boydell Press, 2008, pp. xii, 190, £50.00 (hardback 978-1-84383-416-8).

Danielle Westerhof's study examines the relationship between death and the aristocratic (male) body in England from the twelfth to the fourteenth century. Bringing together an unusually diverse collection of source material, including medical treatises, legal codes, and theological doctrines as well as romances, chronicles, and surviving material culture, Westerhof investigates how the concept of nobility came to be encapsulated in the aristocratic body and illustrates the consequences of this belief on aristocratic culture and funerary practices, and on the judicial punishment of aristocrats for treason. Religious teachings on the corruptibility of flesh and the unchanging nature of saints' bodies were, as Westerhof demonstrates, fundamental to the formulation of practices associated with the preservation and burial of cadavers, while the liminality of death was reinforced by both religious doctrine and by the centrality of commemoration in elite medieval society.

Despite its title and with the exception of the final chapters, Westerhof's study is more frequently concerned with "the dead" than with "death" itself. She only briefly introduces the socially regulated process of dying "a good death" before moving on to positioning the cadaver within medieval discourses on death and considering the role of putrefaction in contemporary understandings of cadavers. A chapter entitled 'Embodying Nobility' has very little

to do with death at all, but its argument that the concept of nobility was made physically manifest inside the body, or, more precisely, the heart of an aristocrat, provides a crucial foundation for much of the remainder of the book. The central chapters restate much that is already accepted about aristocratic burial patterns, including the factors that influenced aristocrats to choose particular types of burial institutions. However, the established view that family precedent most frequently determined where an aristocrat was buried and commemorated is lent further support by Westerhof's new research into multiple burial, the separate interment of body and heart/viscera: her large dataset convincingly demonstrates that bodies were most frequently interred at ancestral foundations while hearts could be bestowed more independently. Analysis of the social function of multiple burial is preceded by a description of the practices of bodily separation, embalming, and the severe sounding *mos teutonicus* (which involves boiling the flesh from the skeleton), and their use in preserving bodies for transport as well as multiple burial.

Two chapters dealing with treason—a failure of nobility—seem incongruously attached to a study which otherwise examines the broad picture of death among the medieval nobility; much is made from relatively few judicial executions. However, Westerhof is able to relate these isolated instances to wider culture by returning to the idea of embodied nobility, which has, in the case of aristocratic traitors, become corrupted. Supporting her argument with examples derived from legal tracts and records of execution, she demonstrates that the punishment of aristocratic traitors was “a careful negotiation of common symbols and values between those in power and the rest of society” (p. 116). Westerhof describes the variable processes of execution and attributes the use of horrifying techniques such as evisceration and quartering to a social function: destroying the physical incarnation of moral corruption.

*Death and the noble body* has a few important weaknesses, including an occasionally over-literal acceptance of romance tropes and a failure appropriately to treat the argument that economic shifts played the most significant role in the creation of the concept of nobility in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—a failure which threatens to diminish Westerhof's larger case. Moreover, many of the book's arguments have previously been made in other studies of death in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the book offers valuable new information on multiple burials and a fresh perspective on the link between aristocratic burial and aristocratic execution in medieval England.

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**Tony Waldron,** *Palaeoepidemiology: the measure of disease in the human past*, Walnut Creek, CA, Left Coast Press, 2007, pp. 148, £27.99 (hardback 978-1-59874-252-7).

This book outlines the current methods used in epidemiological studies of modern clinical data and discusses their application to the study of disease in the past. The author states in the preface that *Palaeoepidemiology* aims to build upon his previous book *Counting the dead* (Chichester, 1994) to encourage the better “use of epidemiology ... than has generally been the case”. Waldron's epidemiological training and clinical expertise have clearly been influential in his research, bringing a valuable perspective to his analysis of human remains from archaeological contexts. *Counting the dead* represented a significant discussion of the biases encountered when interpreting burial assemblages, as well as the appropriate statistical techniques of analysis and the use of proper terminology.

*Palaeoepidemiology* is a short book divided into ten chapters. Waldron has an