

MEDIEVAL MEDICINE

A READER

edited by

FAITH WALLIS



University of Toronto Press

Copyright © University of Toronto Press Incorporated 2010

www.utphighereducation.com

All rights reserved. The use of any part of this publication reproduced, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, or stored in a retrieval system, without prior written consent of the publisher – or in the case of photocopying, a licence from Access Copyright (Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency), One Yonge Street, Suite 1900, Toronto, Ontario M5B 1B5 – is an infringement of the copyright law.

Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders: in the event of an omission or error, please notify the publisher.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Medieval medicine : a reader / edited by Faith Wallis.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4426-0169-7 (bound). – ISBN 978-1-4426-0103-1 (pbk.)

1. Medicine, Medieval. 2. Medicine, Medieval – Sources. I. Wallis, Faith

RI41.M43 2010

610.902

C2010-900973-8

We welcome comments and suggestions regarding any aspect of our publications – please feel free to contact us at news@utphighereducation.com or visit our internet site at www.utphighereducation.com.

North America
5201 Dufferin Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M3H 5T8

UK, Ireland, and continental Europe
NBN International
Estover Road, Plymouth, PL6 7PY, UK

2250 Military Road
Tonawanda, New York, USA, 14150

TEL: 44 (0) 1752 202301
FAX ORDER LINE: 44 (0) 1752 202333
enquiries@nbninternational.com

ORDERS PHONE: 1-800-565-9523

ORDERS FAX: 1-800-221-9985

ORDERS EMAIL: utpbooks@utpress.utoronto.ca

The University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial support for its publishing activities of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP).

Book design and composition by George Kirkpatrick.
Printed in Canada

CHAPTER TWO

CHRISTIANITY, DISEASE, AND MEDICINE

The Christian faith grew up in the age of Galen, and its historic fortunes intertwine with those of Galenism in a manner that is far from coincidental. Christianity held distinctive views on illness and healing, and these attitudes prevailed throughout the Middle Ages, though they were expressed in changing ways. Suffering was not something natural, but the unavoidable consequence of human sin; however, there was a distinction between one's own suffering, which was to be embraced with patience as a message or a test from God, and the suffering of others, which was to be relieved through Christian charity. Since God was the lord of nature, a disease could be at once natural and divine. One could treat it with secular medicine while at the same time acknowledging its moral meaning and adopting a suitable mental attitude of penance and submission. These avenues were not mutually exclusive. In fact, it was recommended that they be combined, but in the appropriate order: prayer first and foremost, then natural remedies. Strictly speaking, natural remedies were divine remedies: God the creator endowed plants with healing properties, and God was also the ultimate source of the physician's knowledge and skill. Christianity's process of coming to terms with Greco-Roman rational medicine was therefore one of conditional reconciliation. These conditions included privileging practical medicine, which could be appropriated for the work of charity, over theoretical medicine, which seemed either superfluous or potentially a threat to the notion of divine causes and cures.

Much was at stake here, because Christianity was a religion of healing. It offered "salvation" — a word that in many languages, including Latin, is the same as that for "health" (salus). Acts of healing played an exceptionally important role in the revelation of the faith. In the Gospels, Christ's many miracles of healing were hailed as signs of salvation. Conversely, the salvation proclaimed by Christ's followers was destined to be consummated in a transcendent act of healing: the resurrection of the body at the end of time. Hence Christianity's principal rival in the world of late antiquity was not primarily the professional physician, but rather the healing god Asclepius. Asclepius, ancestor and divine patron of Hippocrates himself, treated his devotees with methods that were very like those of human physicians. But unlike the cures of his human counterparts, Asclepius's were immediate and exceptionally reliable. Over against Asclepius stood the Christian saint. Alive, the saint could through his merits receive the grace to replicate Christ's miracles of healing, which were also instantaneous and sure; dead, his relics served as a reservoir of sacred medicine, and his shrine, a sort of Christian Asclepion, became the resort of the sick. Like Asclepius as well, the saint healed within a framework of medical concepts and therapeutic expectations that were inherited from the pre-Christian world, though his power to heal came from the divine realm.

Christianity continually asserted the primacy of spiritual healing through therapeutic rituals of prayer, anointing, and exorcism, but even these liturgical practices shared some important features with the medicine of classical antiquity.

I. SAINTS AS HEALERS

12. A SIXTH-CENTURY BYZANTINE SAINT DISPENSES MEDICAL ADVICE: THEODORE OF SYKEON

The cultural and religious landscape of late antiquity has come into much sharper focus over the past thirty years or so, thanks in large part to the remarkable work of the historian Peter Brown. According to Brown, the advent of Christianity signaled a crucial shift in the locus of divine power. Classical Mediterranean religion situated the divine in places (e.g., shrines or groves) or in impersonal channels such as oracles. Late antique religion, however, understood divine power as a force embodied in exceptional human beings: philosophers, mystics, wonder-workers, and, in the case of Christianity, martyrs and saints. Contact with a living "holy man" could result in physical healing, religious enlightenment, safety from danger, and even the resolution of social conflict. St Theodore of Sykeon was one such holy man. He lived in Anatolia, the central region of modern Turkey, at the end of the sixth century, a time when the eastern Roman Empire was under increasing attack from Persia. Some of the tension and uncertainty generated by this situation can be detected in the account of the saint's life. For the most part, however, Theodore's biography records the saint's exploits of healing, and these are quite typical of the range of early Christian medical miracles. The recipients include everyone from slave girls to the son of the emperor.

Source: trans. Elizabeth Dawes and Norman H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies Translated from the Greek* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948), pp. 146-48, 151-54, 156, 158, 181-82. Greek.

[St Theodore's "Holy Pharmacy"]

83. A woman living near Saint Theodore in the quarter of Sporacius brought her blind child of four years old to the saint who was lodging in the quarter of Varanas. He made the sign of the Cross over her eyes and blessed some water: with that she was to bathe her eyes every morning. This was done for three days and on the fourth day the child saw clearly. Her mother had previously been paralyzed, lying on her bed for seven months, but was cured by the saint's prayer.

[Exorcism of a Demon]

84. The slave girl of a magnate had been possessed secretly by a demon for twenty-eight years so that she was always ill and did not know what caused the malady. Her master brought her to the saint praying that either by death or a restoration to health she might be liberated from her sickness. Saint Theodore took hold of her head and prayed that the cause of her illness might be made known and driven away. Immediately the demon in her was disturbed and tore her, shouting: "You are burning me, iron-eater, spare me, strangler of demons, I adjure you by the God who gives you power against me." Theodore bade the demon be silent and told the girl to return in a week's time. On the following Wednesday she came and once more the demon in her became excited and abusive: "Oh this violence that I suffer from this harlot's child! Twenty-eight years I have possessed this girl and none of the saints found me out, and now this harlot's son has come and has made me manifest and handed me over to dread punishment. Cursed be the day on which you were born and the day that brought you here!" Theodore rebuked the demon with the sign of the Cross: "Even if I am the harlot's son, nevertheless to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God I bid you in his name leave the girl and never take possession of her again." The demon shouted in reply: "I do your bidding and go out of her, but after three days she will die." The saint answered: "Come forth and the will of the Lord be done. For a God-fearing man may not trust you, since your words are vain and false." The demon tore the girl, threw her down at the saint's feet, and went out of her. And she, coming to herself, said: "It is through your holy prayers, father, that I have been healed, for I saw the demon coming out of my mouth like a foul crawling thing." Theodore prayed over her and dismissed her, bidding her remain in the church for seven days. And the word of the demon proved to be false, for after some days the girl and her master returned to the saint-giving glory to God.

[Christian Therapy: Prayer and Anointing]

85. A woman who was paralyzed was brought to the saint by her attendants: he bade them put her on the ground: he seized hold of her head with his left hand, and stretching out his right hand to the East, he prayed to the God who gives healing and had cured the paralytic. He anointed her with oil, made the sign of the Cross over her, raised her up, and straightway she began to walk....

87. A sailor had been put under a spell by someone and was troubled by an unclean spirit: his limbs trembled and he suffered from many other symptoms

so that he was reduced to penury. The saint prayed over him and blessed oil with which he was to anoint himself and dismissed him. After some days the sailor returned cured to the saint: his affairs were prospering and "by way of fruitbearing and as a memento" he brought the tackle of his boat to Theodore, who was only induced to accept it after much insistence.

[St George Heals through a Dream]

88. A wrestler, wrought upon by an unclean spirit, suffered terribly in his head and all his limbs and came to the saint for healing. Theodore prayed over him and gave him wine and oil: "Go, my son," he said, "to your home and when you lie down to sleep on your bed in the evening anoint yourself with the wine and oil and whatever you see in a dream come and tell me." The next day the wrestler returned and said that in his sleep he had seen a young man wearing a cloak and "coming to me, as it seemed, from your holiness: he seized me by the hair of my head and drew me to himself and immediately all the pain was drawn off from my joints and bones and from all my limbs and through my hair there came forth, as it were, a violent wind." The man was cured and Theodore explained to him that the young man whom he had seen in his sleep was Christ's glorious martyr, George.

[The Saint Delivers a Prognosis]

The guardsman's wife, Theodora, besought the saint on behalf of herself and her husband to tell her which of them would die first. It was with great difficulty that the saint was persuaded to do as she wished; he prayed to God and received a revelation that her husband "would be short-lived in comparison with her." Day after day with many tears she besought Theodore to pray to God that he would quickly transport her from this present life. At last the saint was persuaded and prayed to his master Christ, who has a ready ear, to grant her desire. And assured by a divine revelation, he said to her: "God has granted your request; now look to yourself, for it will not be many days before you die." With great joy she set her affairs in order, and after forty days she departed from human life.

[Curing Sterility through "Christian Magic"]

93. Three men possessed by demons came to the saint. At that moment the Patriarch Kyriakus sent for Theodore, as he was accustomed to do. To two of the sufferers he gave relief at once, but the third he left to suffer terribly, for he was possessed by a demon who refused to yield. Theodore said to the

demon: "Since our most holy patriarch has sent for me and I am not free to deal with you at the moment, stand in the same place while you are being tortured and don't move from it until I come back." The saint then went to the patriarch and was with him for some hours. Sergius, deacon of the cathedral and attendant on the patriarch, had a daughter who had been married for three years but was still childless. So Sergius placed his daughter and her husband by the winding stairway of the crypt – the so-called "Side Door" – and he besought the saint's attendant, the subdeacon John, who was in the office of Thomas, the treasurer, to bring Theodore down that way when he was leaving the Patriarch. This was done, and Sergius brought husband and wife within the gates and all three knelt at his feet and begged him to give them a child. But he said to them: "Do not come to me, children, but to God and he will grant your request." But since they still remained beseeching him, he took the girdles of both of them and put one on one side of him and the other on the other and kneeling between them he made his prayer and gave them the girdles to wear. And by the grace of Christ a boy was born to them nine months later. And the saint having left by the so-called "Side Door," reached his lodging in the quarter of Euarane. John the subdeacon came with him to see if the demon had kept within the limit laid down for him. They found that he had not only kept the limit but was hanging above the ground. The demon swore by the Most High that he would go out – only let the saint spare him. But the saint lashed him on the chest saying: "Many a time have you agreed to this and have played me false. I will not give way to you." But the demon with many oaths promised to go out that same night when the wood was struck for service in the cathedral. And having received alleviation of his punishment, at the hour agreed upon the demon left the man and in the same way the other two sufferers having waited for three days with the saint were cured at the hour of the midnight service.

[Theodore Heals a Woman with an Issue of Blood]

96. A woman who had suffered for ten years from an issue of blood came for the saint's blessing, bringing an alabaster box with myrrh in it. Round Theodore she saw a great press of people and secretly mixed with the throng hoping to pour the myrrh on his feet. Knowing this, the saint gathered his feet up underneath him and called out to her: "Cease, woman; what do you intend to do? This is a grievous thing which you have planned to do to me," and in fear the woman gave him the myrrh and besought him to pray for her. And he prayed and said to her, "The Lord Jesus Christ, who knoweth secrets, will give effect to the mediation of the holy martyr George according

to, your faith and he will fulfil your request." And immediately through God's grace the flow of blood was stayed and, declaring to all the miracle, she glorified God.

[Theodore Out-Performs the Doctors]

97. It happened that one of the children of the emperor Maurice fell ill of an incurable disease (for many sores had broken out on the child's body, so that it seemed to be a case of elephantiasis, a disease which some call "Paulakis," and others "Kleopatra") and, although the physicians had tried many remedies, nothing had done the child any good.

So the emperor sent for the holy man and had him fetched from the city to the palace at Hiercia (for thither the emperor had made a progress and there the child was lying); the servant of God said a prayer over the child and blessed some water; he bathed the child with it and left the rest for a further treatment; and through his holy prayer the child was cured of the disease and was restored to health. And at the invitation of the emperor and the augusta [*that is, the empress*] he dined with them and then he took his leave of them after giving them his blessing, and went his way, journeying to his own country, and thus reached his monastery.

[Healing through Relics of the Saint]

100. The blessed man greatly longed to find some relics of the glorious and victorious martyr George, and prayed to the latter to satisfy this longing. Now Aemilianus, the very holy bishop of Germia, had a piece of the martyr's head and one finger of a hand and one of his teeth and another small piece. So the martyr appeared to the bishop and exhorted him to give these relics to his servant Theodore for the church that the latter had built in his honor. The bishop sent to the monastery to the servant of God, and invited him to come and offer up prayers in the venerable Church of the Archangel in order that he might welcome him and give him the much-desired relics of the martyr. Theodore was filled with joy by this promise and left the monastery and went to the town of Germia and offered up prayer in the Church of the Archangel. The very holy bishop, Aemilianus, welcomed him warmly, and then conducted him to the monastery of the Mother of God, called of Aligete...

102. In those days Stephen, the bishop of Cadossia (which is under the jurisdiction of Nicomedia) came in a litter; for he suffered from gout in his hands and was paralyzed in all his limbs and could not even convey his food

to his mouth with his own hands, but his attendants had to supply his every need. He was carried thus into the church of the Archangel and fell at the blessed Theodore's feet crying and saying, "Have pity upon me, servant of the most high God and amongst all the others grant that I, too, may have my share in your miracles; for I know that God will give you whatsoever you ask." When the servant of Christ heard that he was a bishop, he was grieved at his act of obeisance and implored him to rise; then standing in prayer he besought God to dispel the bishop's diseases. After the prayer he ordered him to be laid on the right hand side of the church of the holy martyr George, that is, in the adjoining oratory of the holy martyr Plato (where Theodore's own cage stood), and he said to the bishop, "Be of good courage, my lord, for I trust to the goodness of God to release you from this sickness shortly." He also blessed and gave to him some oil for anointing himself and in two weeks the bishop was restored to health and after he had received the blessing of Theodore he left the monastery "walking and leaping and praising God [Acts 3:8]."