

Cotton MS Vitellius C.iii, f. 20r, British Library

Herbal History Research Network

Early Medieval Remedies for Treating Cough and Lung Disease

Online Seminar:

Wednesday 12 May 2021, 2 - 4 pm (BST)

Explore the relevance of medieval receipts to current herbal practice
Engage with the meanings of Old English texts and their medicinal plants
Understand more about online access to medieval archives

Presentations

Making sense out of 'nonsense:' Medicinal remedies in early medieval texts
Dr Anne Van Arsdall

Wyrc briw wið lungnadle: Delicious dishes for lung disease
Val Thomas MA, MNIMH

To drink or smoke? Herbal remedies for respiratory complaints
Dr Frances Watkins MCPP, MNIMH

Round table discussion: How learning informs our research
Julia Nurse, Research Development Specialist, Wellcome Collection

Tickets: £15.00
https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/early-medieval-remedies-for-treating-cough-and-lung-disease-tickets-145204854629

Herbal History Research Network: www.herbalhistory.org

Anne Van Arsdall, Making sense out of 'nonsense': Medicinal remedies in early medieval texts

Medicinal remedies in medieval texts have long been deemed useless because of their ingredients, their imprecision, and their seeming reliance on magic and superstition—in a word, they are considered nonsense. The texts drawn upon for this talk come from early England, ca 800-1100, and were originally written down in the Old English language. They are typical for early medieval Western medical writings before university medicine began to dominate.

We will look at some of these remedies to ascertain whether such negative assessments are valid. My conclusion is that judgments depend largely on who is reading/translating them and for what purpose. Most scholars who translate and comment on such remedies are not trained in either medicine or pharmacology, and their aim is not producing useful tools for healers. I argue that the originals were written for health practitioners, assuming that readers could understand the terse instructions because of their practical experience. I suggest that it would be useful for textual scholars and practicing herbalists to work on such translations together, making sense out of 'nonsense.'

Anne has retired from the Institute for Medieval Studies, University of New Mexico, USA, and now researches and writes about early medieval medical texts; that is, writings in Western Europe during the centuries before university medicine began to dominate. Studying with practicing herbalists and folk healers has helped shape her understanding of these texts as she translates them from older languages. She is currently working on a revised edition of her book, *Medieval Herbal Remedies* (2002).

Val Thomas, Wyrc briw wið lungnadle: Delicious dishes for lung disease

A 'briw' was a key dish in everyday Anglo-Saxon cuisine. In its very basic form, a 'briw' was a thick soup or stew made from cereals, often barley or rye, although legumes and other vegetables could be added. Such a versatile dish also provided an excellent vehicle for the administration of herbs for medicinal purposes, and a number of 'briw' formulations can be found in Old English medical manuscripts. These were used, alone or in conjunction with other preparations, to treat a variety of conditions, including digestive problems, liver disease and skin issues, as well as for coughs. This paper will examine some of the 'briws' used in the treatment of coughs, in the *Leechbooks* and in the *Lacnunga*, many of which include plants which are still considered efficacious for the lungs. The paper will consider individual herbs and how they are combined to maximise benefit to the patient, and discuss the value of such formulations for modern practice.

Val is a medical herbalist, teacher and independent researcher. Her interest in the medical texts of early medieval England, began while she was studying English Literature at York University in the late 1970s.

Dr Frances Watkins, To drink or smoke? Herbal remedies for respiratory complaints

External remedies for treating cough and lung disease in tenth century England include medicinal 'dry drinks' or smoke inhalations. These herbal formulas were recommended as standalone medications or in combination with herbal drinks and plant juices, externally applied infused oils and chest salves. I do not read Old English and so rely on scholarly translations of the vernacular medical literature to understand what ingredients and instructions are given to the reader for making the herbal remedies. My presentation will discuss the preparatory methods for the smoke inhalations, the aromatic plants mentioned and relevance of these herbal therapeutics to practitioners today. I will also consider the advantages and disadvantages of working with the English translations of the medieval remedies and how this may change in the future.

Frances studied herbal medicine at Middlesex University and completed her doctorate at the University of East London investigating antimicrobials from native British plants used in wound healing formulations in tenth century England. She has published on this subject in *Drug Discovery Today* (2011) and *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* (2012).

Herbal History Research Network

A small group of researchers came together in 2010 with the overall aim of promoting scholarly research in the history of herbal medicine and herbal traditions. Founding individuals included professionally trained medical herbalists with active interests in the history of medicine, and contributors to seminars since then have included scholars with expertise ranging from classical studies to medieval, early modern and modern social and medical history, as well as archaeologists and ethnopharmacists.

The Herbal History Research Network (HHRN) aims to promote a scholarly approach in herbal history research which is systematic and developmental. HHRN also aims to connect together people who share common interests in researching the history of herbal medicine, and to support their development of skills and access to resources. Herbal history is essentially multidisciplinary and HHRN aims to help to disseminate research findings more widely in order build links between researchers.

Established in 2010, HHRN is now in its eleventh year and remains focussed on those initial aims. When we are able to facilitate live events again, we hope to support students of herbal history in the form of seminar bursaries.

Do join us for our very first online seminar about herbal remedies in early medieval England with the following outcomes:

- How to access medieval archives containing herbal recipes for respiratory conditions.
- Be more aware of some of the issues faced by researchers in medieval herbal history for example, plant identification and meaning of remedies through the Old English translations and Latin texts.
- Explore the relevance of medieval herbal recipes today, how they can be evaluated and what we can learn from them that is useful to contemporary herbal practice or not!
- Be updated on current research into herbal knowledge of medieval medical practice.

Spaces for this online seminar are limited so please do book your place using the Eventbrite link on the front page of this flyer.

Each presentation will last for 20 minutes followed by a Q&A session and we will finish off the seminar with a round table discussion chaired by Julia Nurse, Research Development Specialist at Wellcome Collection, on how our learning from today will inform our research projects.

Continuing Professional Development credits may apply. Eventbrite gives a receipt to use as proof of attendance, but please contact us if needed.

The seminar will take place via Zoom. After you have registered via Eventbrite, you will receive the Zoom link before the meeting. Eventbrite also sends a reminder just the day before the seminar.

Any queries, please email the HHRN Secretary, Alison Denham: herbalhistoryrn@gmail.com

We look forward to seeing you on 12 May 2021.