

to poor priests and scholars, corrodarians, and a staff of craftsmen is seen not as the perversion of charity to the deserving poor but rather as its extension. Fifth, the medieval hospital is firmly established as a major type of religious house—one that from now on will have to be given a considerable place in any synoptic study of music, education, architecture, and a number of other topics in medieval ecclesiastical history.

Finally, because of these larger implications, and because Dr Rawcliffe's discussion is animated by numerous comparisons with hospitals elsewhere in England and continental Europe, this is not just the total history of one institution; it comes close to being a general survey of later medieval and early modern English hospitals. To echo President Nixon on the Great Wall of China, St Giles was, in its quiet way, a great hospital; and now, almost three centuries after Kirkpatrick, it has found a more than worthy historian.

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**Monica H Green,** *Women's healthcare in the medieval west: texts and contexts*, Variorum Collected Studies Series CS680, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2000, pp. 412, illus., £59.50 (hardback 0-86078-826-1).

Over the last fifteen years, Monica Green has established an international reputation for work on medieval women's health care which effortlessly combines meticulous scholarship with stimulating ideas. She has brought medical texts to the attention of those working in medieval studies—in the process, deftly correcting a number of often-repeated but unfounded assumptions about the content and use of medical manuscripts—while translating the complexities of the medieval world to medical historians. It is therefore very

valuable to have a number of her most important essays on the recovery and interpretation of medieval medicine available in one volume.

This rich collection brings together seven separate pieces, arranged under the section titles 'Historical questions and methodologies', 'Identifying the texts' and 'Exploring the contexts'. It includes Green's important 1996 essay, 'The development of the *Trotula*', an analysis of the Latin and vernacular versions of the *Trotula* manuscripts which forms a prolegomenon to her forthcoming monograph. This is followed by Green's study of the omission of "Trotula" from Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la cité des dames*, a work which also condemns books on "the secrets of women" as "lies". The juxtaposition of Christine and Trotula enables Green to shed new light on Christine's attitude to the female body as well as raising questions about the use of medical texts in fourteenth- and early-fifteenth-century France. The final essay, on the gendering of medical literacy and book ownership, is previously unpublished, as is a useful appendix listing all the western European gynaecological texts written between the fourth and fifteenth centuries.

In the Introduction, Green presents her own work as "clearing the land". Critical editions exist of few medical texts from her period, while many texts are not only anonymous but also undated. However, as she points out, the work of recovering forgotten manuscripts and establishing the "original" text is not enough. Texts are "moving targets", being copied and altered by historical individuals. Green never stops at the philological level, but uses the materials she has uncovered to develop a methodology better able to extract information from the specific types of sources available to the medieval historian. In the process she challenges assumptions about the sexual division of medical labour—that "women's health was women's business"—and about the divisions between lay and professional, Latin and vernacular,

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biological and cultural. She sees clearly how the medieval world has been used by later writers, from the Renaissance onwards, with their own agendas for reform and their own reasons for writing the medieval world in particular ways. Thanks to Green's work, the medieval medical world is a far more clear, but also more varied, landscape than it was before; medical, social, and gender historians will find her a reliable and always stimulating guide.

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**Jane Sharp,** *The midwives book or the whole art of midwifry discovered*, edited by Elaine Hobby, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. xliii, 323, illus., £30.00 (hardback 0-19-508652-X).

Around the time that the first female-authored midwifery text was published in English in 1671, "the management of childbirth in early-modern Britain was almost entirely in the hands of women: midwifery manuals, by contrast, were almost all written by men", remarks Elaine Hobby. As Hobby demonstrates in her superb introduction to this modern edition, the midwife Jane Sharp was by no means deterred. Leaving aside any discussion of Jane Sharp's identity, Hobby lets the text speak for itself. Concerned to promote the role of the traditional midwife and to reconcile the age-old conflict between experience and expertise, Jane Sharp stressed the need for both "speculative and practical" knowledge in midwifery. She attacked ignorance in general whether in a man or a woman, addressed her colleagues as "sisters" and noted the individuality of her female patients. She steadfastly refused to accept the Aristotelian inferiority of woman, arguing that, "we women have no more cause to be angry or be ashamed of what Nature has given us than men have

... a woman is not so perfect as a man ... , but the man can do nothing without the woman to beget children." The uniqueness of *The midwives book* also lies in its subversion of literary convention, and Hobby's careful annotation and detailed introduction painstakingly reconstruct this process. Whilst following the traditions of inter-textuality in early-modern midwifery manuals and borrowing from ancient Greek medicine, Jane Sharp also greatly re-worked her sources. Her text covers the traditional range of midwifery topics from the generative parts, the process of conception to sterility and delivery, giving them her own individual and often witty treatment.

*The midwives book* forms part of a series designed to promote forgotten works by "Women Writers in English". The vulgarization of midwifery texts marked a movement to increase the circulation of medical knowledge. In a similar spirit, Hobby's extensive glossary, footnotes and comprehensive explanation of the humoral theory make the seventeenth-century medical terminology more accessible to modern readers, both students of the history of medicine and non-specialists. The "secrets" of early-modern midwifery, for the modern-day historian, are thus shown to extend beyond the woman's private parts and the mysteries of generation to the plasticity and evolution of the terminology used to describe them over the centuries. Two excellent examples of the problems posed by seventeenth-century language are found in the terms "yard" (rendered as penis) and the more familiar "womb", neither of which translate perfectly into modern-day English. Having noted the need to avoid distorting history by projecting modern knowledge onto the past, Hobby cites the remarkably persistent stereotype of the midwife-witch and positivist "scientific" interpretations of the history of childbirth, which concentrate on the rise of the male midwife, as examples of this. Given such attention to seventeenth-century understandings of midwifery and the body,