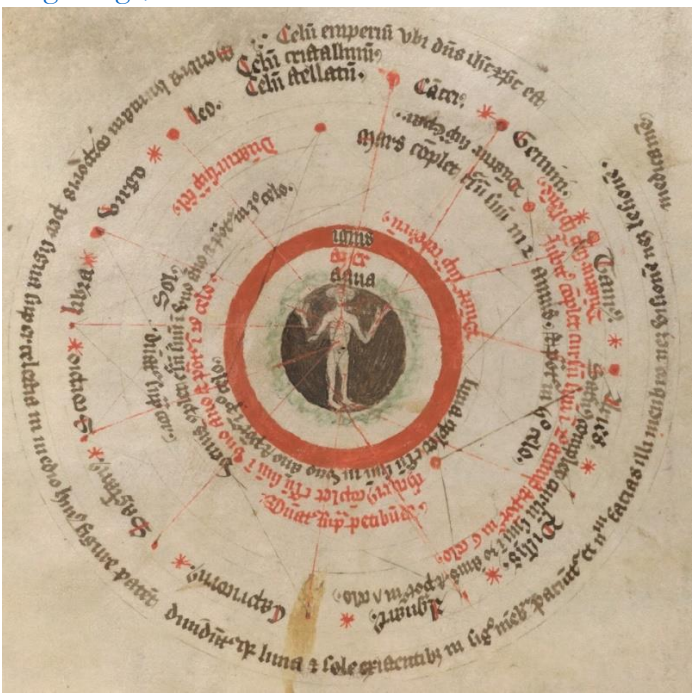
ABSTRACTS

Medicine in the Medieval North Atlantic World

Maynooth University, 13–15 May 2021

https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/early-irish-sean-ghaeilge/medicine-medieval-north-atlantic-world



British Library, Sloane MS 282, f. 18

PLENARIES

Thursday: Debby Banham (University of Cambridge): 'The beginnings of English medicine: editing the oldest medical compendium from England'

Friday: Guy Geltner (Monash University): 'Public health and the environment in Galenic practice'

Saturday: Charlotte Roberts (Durham University): 'Palaeopathology: what can it tell us about the history of disease and medicine?'

PAPERS

Medieval Irish medical texts and the vocabulary of sex and reproduction

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The vocabulary of sex and reproduction represents a particular blind spot in our understanding of the lexicon of medieval Irish. This is owing partly to the propensity of text-editors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries either to omit entirely passages dealing with bodily matters or to omit to translate such passages. The Dictionary of the Irish Language is also of limited use in identifying and construing words and phrases pertaining to sexual activity, for the original lexicographers often did not collect terminology of this type and sometimes supplied opaque and unhelpful definitions for the lexemes which were listed. To some extent, the vague definitions offered in the dictionary may be the result of genuine uncertainty as to what was being described, as medieval Irish narratives generally do not provide much context for the references in question. Later medical texts, however, contain more detailed information

and not only help to elucidate previously obscure terms but also add new items of vocabulary relevant to this subject-matter. This paper will discuss several terms which have either come to light or had their meanings clarified through fresh readings of a selection of medical texts.

Were they all pigs? From individual to public health care in medieval Trondheim, Norway

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How did health and welfare become a public responsibility? Why?And when? What was behind this process, so fundamental to western societies social systems. Carole Rawcliffe, amongst others, has pointed to the fact that late medieval rulers of English towns spent much resources and efforts in creating well functioning sanitary systems and devices in the urban landscape. Her and others' research finds that the Victorian historians have grossly underestimated the Middle Ages´ knowledge of sanitation and ant the town authorities practise of cleanliness, and so have exaggerated the importance of the Victorian period glorious achievements in this field. This call upon an clarification of *how sicness and health care in general developed from an individual to a public responsibility*. In Trondheim, Norway, a town in the periphery of medieval Europe, public health care did not appear until around 1670ties. What was the driving forces which led up to this fundamental social, political and mental change in attitudes towards body and health? Based on archaeological evidences from Trondheim, this paper will briefly discuss what might have affected health conditions in the town during the period of AD1000-

1600, which have influenced on the idea(s) of health from beeing an individual to becoming a public responsibility. It will be alleged that the emergence of a public health management derived from a number of changing practices (like waste and water supply practices), which can be proven have been taken place in the urban landscape, *either directly or incidentally* prevented diseases and debility caused by the particular physical environment that constituted the medieval urbanscape and its daily life.

Afflictions of the head in the *Acallam na Senórach*

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The late twelfth or early thirteenth-century Irish literary text *Acallam na Senórach* ('the conversation of the old men') contains a number of characters who suffer from afflictions of the head, ranging from headaches to leaking brains. In this presentation, I will examine some of these medical conditions, and will attempt to connect them with broader European medical tradition. This paper forms part of a wider investigation into the extent of the medical knowledge present in Ireland during the time prior to the appearance of the earliest medical manuscripts.

Old English cures from the Ireland of Solinus and Bede

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Bede, drawing upon Solinus' *De mirabilibus mundi* described Ireland as an island rich in milk and honey, and noted that Irish vegetation was efficacious in treating the wounds of

serpents, since the land itself is poisonous to snakes. It is unsurprising then, that Old English medical compilations make occasional reference to *materia medica* from Ireland in the treatment of injuries from venomous animals. What is more surprising is that two separate Old English medical compilations preserve a prayer identified in the Old English as Irish, but which has thus far resisted interpretation as a legitimate Old Irish inscription in part due to the fact that it seems to have been transcribed into Old English orthography which does not well represent the Old Irish language. I will consider the occurrence of this Old Irish prayer as congruent with the perceived efficacy in late antique and patristic natural history of anything that comes from Ireland in the treatment of certain kinds of injury while also positing that information regarding the form of the Irish prayer (it is names as a litany in the Old English) may potentially yield a means of interpretation despite the unusual orthography of the text by comparison with the corpus of Old Irish metrical litanies.

The impact of lead on health in medieval Britain: Did they know it was poisonous?

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Lead is a toxic heavy metal which accumulates in the human body causing severe health implications ranging from memory-loss through to death. As one of the oldest known occupational and environmental toxins, it has been mined and utilised for 6,000 years being especially popular in the Roman and Industrial periods. Lead poisoning is still an issue for our society being responsible for 0.6% of the world's disease burden. Despite this and extensive research, no known lead exposure level that is safe and little is known about its use and effects in the medieval period. My thesis examines the impact of lead in medieval Britain (1100-1500 AD) through analysis of the material culture, textual evidence and human remains

to determine the potential sources and impact of Pb on different regional populations and strata of medieval society. Most importantly, it uses these sources to assess whether it was known in the medieval period if lead was poisonous and how it impacted their health. This poster summarises how lead impacts the body and the current records of medical and textual evidence from the medieval period.

Medical vocabulary in early mediaeval Celtic Latinity

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The Celtic countries provide no surviving works, whether in Latin or the vernacular, explicitly concerning medical practice from before 1200; nor are there surviving manuscripts of texts from the European tradition. Consequently, most of what we know is gleaned from mentions in other areas, especially legal and ecclesiastical sources and literature. Lexicography can provide another tool. In the digital Archive of Celtic Latin Literature from which the Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic sources draws its citation, approximately 50 words from the letter range A-H have been identified as used in technically medical senses; additional words can be drawn from our on-going unpublished work. Of the vocabulary in circulation, approximately ¾ is attested in Late-Antique literature. This paper will explore the extent to which the medical vocabulary attested in Celtic Latinity falls within the European mainstream, and will attempt to identify possible sources whence this vocabulary may have been drawn.

Female book production and medical texts in the eighth century

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While there are several references to women receiving or producing manuscripts from early medieval England, there are extremely few examples of manuscripts known specifically to have been owned or produced by female monastic houses. Michelle Brown has suggested that several members of the early Insular prayerbooks may have been produced in female houses or for a female audience (Brown, 2001); among these is British Library MS Royal 2.A.XX (the *Royal Prayerbook*), copied in the late eighth or early ninth century, which contains several charms related to staunching blood. The most complex of these texts is closely related to a charm found in a series of additional entries added following the main text in Basel MS OUB MS F III 15a. This manuscript, dating to the middle of the eighth century, was copied in Frankia in the area of the Anglo-Saxon mission, and its main text was likely copied from an Anglo-Saxon exemplar. Given the close relationship with the Royal charm, it is likely that the blood charm in the Basel manuscript also had an ultimately Insular source. Felice Lifshitz has argued that these additional entries were copied from a manuscript belonging to the female monastic community of Kitzingen (Lifshitz, 2014). If this is the case, these texts perhaps provide evidence for a network between female religious houses in England and on the Continent. The *Royal Prayerbook* and the additional entries in the Basel manuscript also contain independent evidence of the knowledge of Latin medical texts. This paper will examine this evidence and suggest that eighth-century women's monastic communities were interested in medicine and likely played a role in the transmission of medical texts in this period.

Locating the mind with monsters in early English medicine

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Monsters lurk within the pages of the *Leechbooks*, the *Lacnunga*, the Old English *Herbarium*, and the Old English *Medicina de Quadrupedipus*. As incongruous as they may appear from a modern medical standpoint, however, these elves, maran, and nihtgengan, among others, are fully integrated within the pathologies and remedies of the early English medical corpus that they populate. Nevertheless, their appearances do follow certain patterns: certain supernatural or monstrous beings tend to find themselves within groupings of ailments that affect the brain and head areas, while others are associated primarily with fevers. This paper will use the intersection of monsters, mental health, and medicine in order to test the theory most prominently put forth by Leslie Lockett regarding the so-called 'hydraulic model' of early English mental and emotional activity. Can we follow monsters to the mind? Or do they lead us somewhere else in the body entirely?

Early Irish literature and the embodied mind

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The work of the mind has puzzled people throughout history. One of the most common ways to express our conceptualisation of mental phenomena is through the metaphorical language of embodiment. That we understand intangible concepts (such as thought) by mapping our physical experiences onto them is one of the fundamental assumptions of cognitive linguistics. Since the experience of

human body is universal, this methodology can be applied to texts in any language from any historical period.

This paper will explore the evidence for embodied cognition in early Irish literature (ca. 750–1200) in relation to the topic of mental activity. It will analyse linguistic means used to describe the functioning of the mind. The first part of the paper will briefly consider two poems, in Old and Middle Irish, that focus specifically on the work of the mind. With their explicit metaphorical language, these will provide a frame of reference for the embodied understanding of the mind. The second part of the paper will analyse conventional language in texts where the work of the mind is not the main focus and which use metaphorically encoded paradigms of cognition in an unmarked, conventional way. By turning to the methodological insights of cognitive linguistics this study will shed new light on medieval Irish conceptions of the mind and its workings.

Singing to sanity

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In recent years the study of medieval literature and medicine have moved closer, but there is still an emphasis on either 'what did they suffer from?' or 'is this a metaphor for x? which are valid and interesting approaches. Scholars such as Antonia Harbus and Stefanie Künzel have used conceptual metaphor theories to identify the language which is used to characterise disease and pathology in Old English texts, and Deborah Hayden has shown the significance of versification in Irish medical texts. My paper will extend this work and consider the relevance of literary themes and ideas in the performance of healing rituals. Recently Karen Jolly and James Paz have delivered important contributions to the understanding of

'science' in an early medieval context. My paper will build on this work and examine a range of different texts, including some of the more 'challenging' charms and poems and consider the ways in which literary themes are used in medical contexts.

How to identify fools: Instructions from a Middle Irish legal commentary

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This paper will focus on a remarkable yet little-known legal commentary that is found in 16th-century Trinity College Dublin MS 1336/1 and that explains how to recognise whether someone is of unsound mind. I will offer a translation of the commentary and a discussion of its date. By identifying the sources (both native and non-native) from which some of the citations were drawn, I will show how this text reflects the state of medical learning in 15th- and 16th-century Irish legal centres.

The *Materia Medica* of Gaelic physician Tadhg Ó Cuinn (1415): at the interface of theory and practice.

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The *Materia Medica* of Tadhg Ó Cuinn belongs to a corpus of medical literature in Irish, mostly translations or adaptations of Latin works, composed by Gaelic physicians in the late medieval period. Medical texts survive in almost 100 medieval manuscripts held in collections in Ireland, and reflect the mainstream of contemporary European medical theory and

practice, itself informed by older Graeco-Arabic works. The wide-ranging subject matter treated in the Irish manuscripts supported a high quality medical training for students in the schools maintained by Gaelic physicians.

Micheál Ó Conchubhair completed a translation of the *Materia Medica* in 1991. His translation, based on the copy in TCD MS 1343 held in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, is now accessible online at http://celt.ucc.ie. It is openly available, in English, to a wider readership than ever in its lifetime.

A compendium of the 'materials of medicine', 238 of the 292 chapters of the *Materia Medica* are based on plants or plant-derived substances or products. It is a landmark work in the history of plant-based medicine in Ireland, standing at the interface of the practice and theory of medicine.

To illustrate this interface, the paper will focus on two species of *Plantago*, each the subject of a chapter in the *Materia Medica*: *P. major* (cruach Pádraig) and *P. lanceolata* (slánlus). Both have a long and widespread history of use, and remain in the repertoire of herbalists today. The paper will look at Ó Cuinn's indications for these plants, and the resonances of these indications in other traditions and other times. It will look at the way in which use of the plant is validated by reference to Galenic theory, the bedrock underpinning medical practice in medieval Europe.

Old Norse concept of health in the perspective of body-soul relation

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Old Norse adjective *heill* means both healthy and whole, intact and cheerful, and the word holy (*heilagr*) is derived from it.

Health, from the point of view of this root, appears to be an integrity of man, with psychological, physical and spiritual realms not being strictly distinguished. From this point of view, I would like to examine the hypothesis that emotions were perceived as bodily phenomena in Old Norse environment.

I would like to analyse examples- taken from different sagas genres and Eddic lays - of involuntary physical manifestations of emotions as swelling, dyeing and exhaustion without any physical reason. Especially grief seems to be there a force that physically paralyses as inability to move is one of main manifestations of this estate. In my paper, I would argue that this specific form of expressing in our view mental estate (e.g. grief) as a sickness reflects an interconnection between body and soul. Physical state was thus at same time expression of a mental state as the psycho-physical connections were obvious for readers or listeners of that time.

Therefore, in this context, it is not possible to lead a dividing line between disease and emotion, i.e. to distinguish if the pain is physical or mental. Dealing with the Old Norse literature, we have thus the opportunity to imagine that illness is not a consequence of a psychic state but is identical with it.

Medieval environmental responsibility. Public initiatives in Trondheim in the late middle ages

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Recently, scholars of various disciplines have challenged the modernistic view that medieval people were indifferent to their environments. The term "healthscaping" has been used to denote the physical, social, legal, administrative, and political process of providing urban environments with the means to promote resident's health, safety and wellbeing.

Trondheim, Norway, 1000–1600 CE has been chosen as the case for a study within the international, interdisciplinary research project "Medieval Urban Health – From Individual to Public Responsibility": https://www.ntnu.edu/museum/medieval-urban-health-from-individual-to-public-responsibility-ad-1000-1600-medheal600- The project include archaeologists, biologists and historians.

We will present three fields of particular interest:

- The scarcity of documentary sources represents a challenge. One of the few that applies for Trondheim, King Håkon V's decree from 1313 that prohibited throwing waste, rocks and bark into the river, can be read as an environmentally prophylactic measure. Resorting to relevant analogies, e.g., in Copenhagen, several decrees were issued from the 15th century onwards that indicate attention to waste, manure and impurities as harmful to the city's inhabitants. Interestingly, a few of the Danish decrees identified the connection between uncleanliness and dangerous illnesses. A plausible reading may be that the authorities' attention was not primarily directed towards environmental issues, but rather to the Galenic concept of "miasma" – foul smells that were the direct cause of disease. Thus, care and epistemological awareness is required in interpreting such measures.

- Plague represented a watershed regarding health conditions. The plague bacterium *Y. pestis* has been discovered in two burials dated to around the 16th century. However, the impact of plague in urban societies is poorly understood. A working hypothesis is that the Black Death perhaps did not have the violent long-term effect in the city that has been ascribed to it. We question whether the population of Trondheim in fact decreased considerably during the Late Medieval period.
- Several archaeological investigations have concluded that the cultural layers within the city centre became considerably thinner during the late middle ages. This has been interpreted as a result of a heavily decreasing population due to plague mortality. An alternative explanation may be that miasmatic perceptions of disease led to greater awareness of the need to dispose litter, waste, decay, and uncleanliness outside the city boundaries – not primarily as means for improving environmental conditions, but to prevent the dissemination of contagious diseases.

Nordic landscapes as agents of pharmaceutical possibility

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This paper examines the role of landscape in perceptions of pharmaceutical potential at Nordic royal courts between the mid-thirteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries, especially the effects of two movements: increased royal efforts from the thirteenth century to emulate non-Nordic courts, and an augmented flow of *materia medica* and medical texts from

elsewhere in Europe to Norway and Sweden throughout this period. Together, these two forces challenged established understandings of the value and capability of north Atlantic landscapes, but also influenced Nordic perceptions of pharmaceutical possibilities in Europe more broadly.

This paper begins by examining how changing Nordic perceptions of 'exotic' intersected with ideas about medicinal ingredients' origins. It proposes a re-evaluation of geographical texts and ideas about herbs in circulation at the Norwegian royal court in the mid-thirteenth century, focusing on Haakon IV's *Konungs skuggsjá*, especially the chapter on Ireland. Portrayals of the Irish landscape's potential for producing medicinal substances are compared to descriptions of medicinal plants in Nordic geographies found in sagas and law codes, which are in turn put into the context of new ideas about local natural potential. This was amplified by Haakon IV's diplomatic overtures that capitalized on Nordic 'exotica', exploiting natural resources such as gyrfalcons and white bears to bolster his European image. These efforts in turn impacted the perceived fertility of Nordic landscapes for other uses, including pharmaceutical possibilities.

Finally, this paper explores the effect of these changes on subsequent royal Nordic valuations of 'exotic' and of imported substances through analysis of Nordic adaptations of foreign medical recipes. It focuses on reductions in the number of ingredients, the creation of new plant equivalencies, and the exclusion of preparatory instructions. These alterations are considered together with Nordic ideas for the potential of the 'domestic exotic' as well as with broader medieval ideas about plants' universality.

Medical knowledge in two Middle English manuscripts: their use and users

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My research aims at analyzing the collections of Middle English medical recipes transmitted by two fifteenth century manuscripts: Naples, National Library, MS XIII.B.29 (hereafter N) and Cambridge, Trinity College Library, MS R.14.32 (TCC). N is a miscellany dating back to 1457 and written in the Dorset dialect. It contains medical recipes, two romances, a hagiography and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* – a selection of texts that suggests it was possibly compiled for a woman. TCC, to which little scholarly attention has been paid so far, is datable approximately to the second half of the 15th century and linguistic scrutiny provided by the *LALME* classifies its dialect as East Anglian. The manuscript contains only medical and scientific texts, which has made me assume that it belonged to a medical practitioner.

My study wants to illustrate that some of the remedies described in both manuscripts are almost identical. On the basis of such evidence, I intend to pursue a dual aim: (1) the presence of the same recipes in two codices from different areas of Britain confirms the widespread assumption that medical knowledge in the Late Middle Ages constituted a common heritage shared by a vast community made of both specialists and lay people; (2) a close analysis of the recipes reveals a number of incongruities of different nature – be they the ingredients required or different degrees of complexity in the procedure. As a result, this paper aims at reconsidering the use made of both manuscripts; besides, it also wants to shed some new light on how the competence of their users might have influenced the form of the recipes therein.

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"And bathis are goode to be vsid in tyme of colde": Therapeutic baths in medieval English medicine

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The purpose of this study is to analyse the development of bathing practices in medieval England through examination of a group of medical texts. Starting from the analysis of some of the most popular medical manuscripts of the Old English period, such as BL Royal MS 12 D XVII, BL Harley MS 585, BL MS Harley 6258B, and moving on to texts of the Middle English epoch, such as the vernacular versions of *Secreta*

Secretorum and the translation of *De Re Rustic*a by Palladius, *The boke of nurture* by John Russell and other medical treatises transmitted in codices as, for example, Glasgow, University Library MS Hunter 307 and Cambridge, Trinity College Library MS R.14.52, the study will explore different aspects of therapeutic baths. It will show how in the Old English period scattered references to baths are found only in relation to other medical remedies, such as potions and diets, while, in the Middle English period, thanks to the influence of the so-called Salernitan School, bathing started playing a vital role in medical practice, so that sections of medical treatises were devoted to remedies involving also baths and their therapeutic virtues. The medical and scientific properties of baths and their role in achieving the patient's psycho-physical wellbeing will then be examined also in relation to other remedies, including potions, diet and exercise. Finally, particular relevance will be given to the material aspects of bathing practices, with reference to objects used for the cleansing process or to enhance the qualities of waters, such as medicinal herbs, flowers, stones, spices, oils, and sponges among others.

The Old Irish healing charms in the Stowe Missal and the protective spell in the Karlsruhe book cover

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The three charms on the last page of the Stowe Missal (Royal Irish Academy MS D ii 3; *c.* 800) and the protective spell on a fragmentary manuscript page, once used as a cover for another manuscript (Karlsruhe Badische Landesbibliothek Aug. Fr. 18; first third 9th cent.) comprise together four of the altogether seven Old Irish charms surviving in contemporary manuscripts. In both cases, the context in which the spells are found is not medical, but liturgical. In the light of this, form,

function and possible purpose of these four brief texts will be discussed.

Lexical pairs in the Old West Norse medical manuscript tradition

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Lexical pairs of the type "loanword/foreign word : native word" are a widespread phenomenon in Old Norse-Icelandic prosa texts. They have been found to appear in the texts according to four different dynamics (simple loanword/native word alternation, intrastemmatic variation, synonymic dittologies, explicative insertions). A great concentration of such lexical pairs is strictly related to textual typologies involved with the transmission of foreign knowledge and the translation and adaptation thereof in the vernacular (Tarsi 2020).

The aim of the present paper is twofold: 1) to give an exhaustive overview and characterization of the lexical pairs elicited from the extant medical literature in Old Norse-Icelandic (MSS AM 655 xxx 4to, AM 194 8vo, AM 434a 12mo, AM 696 i 4to, AM 673a ii 4to and RIA 23 D 43, cf. Schwabe 2011), with special reference to phytonyms and medical terminology, and 2) to provide an analysis of philologically notable cases together with an overview of the phenomenon under discussion for the literary typology comprising the analyzed texts, i.e. "Treatises".

The analysis carried out here sheds light on the modality of transfer of knowledge in the Middle Ages and provides an insight into the provenance of the possible sources of the Old Norse-Icelandic medical texts.

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We know things through defining them: collections of scientific definitions in Gaelic medical manuscripts from Scotland

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The advent of scholastic medicine in the Gaelic world during the later Middle Ages saw literary Gaelic's re-employment as a medium for expressing the innovative philosophical and technical concepts of the medical curriculum. As a result, Gaelic medical writing from the period shows a marked interest in defining and explaining terminology. This interest takes on its most formal expression in curated collections of definitions of terms from medicine and related subjects. In this paper, two such collections are considered and compared. The manuscripts are Edinburgh, NLS Adv. MS 72.1.2 (section 4) and Edinburgh, NLS Adv. MS. 72.1.4. Both collections are included in the corpus of manuscript transcriptions that is under preparation for Faclair na Gàidhlig, the first ever dictionary of Scottish Gaelic produced on historical principles.

First, network analysis of lexical data from the corpus is used to contextualise these collections, as well as medical writing as a genre, within the overall corpus and to show that medical writing does indeed employ a particular, specialised terminology. It is then demonstrated that both collections are thematically curated not only to give an overview of major subject-areas in medicine and associated disciplines but also, in places, to put forward developed lines of argument. Indeed, comparing the collections to other medieval Gaelic medical texts raises further problems of defining collections of definitions as a genre, as definitions of key terms can also occur in more general collections of aphorisms and as a structural device in what are regarded as continuous tracts and treatises. Far from being a discrete genre, therefore, definition of terms emerges as a crucial and adaptable aspect of medieval Gaelic medical writing generally.

The Veronica and female healing authority in medieval England

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As early as the ninth century, the biblical Veronica appears in Medieval English manuscripts associated with healing; her name is invoked in charms, amulets and incantations calling upon her healing powers for a variety of diseases and conditions. This Veronica is the *Haemorrhoisa*, the woman in the miracle recounted in three of the four gospels (Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34, Luke 8:43-48) who was 'troubled' with the 'issue of blood' for twelve years and healed when she touched the hem of Christ's robes. Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-c. 340) writes in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* of a statue of Veronica in Caesarea Philippi, kneeling at the feet of Christ whose robe is entwined with a plant purported to have

miraculous healing powers. It may be pure coincidence that these three images—Christ, plant-based healing, and Veronica—are prominent in medieval English medicine, but it bears examination, nevertheless. The name Veronica first appears in the *Royal Prayerbook* (London, British Library, Royal 2. A. xx), an early ninth-century manuscript produced in Mercia. The *Royal Prayerbook* is a purposeful creation for a woman who appears to have been suffering from extreme menorrhagia, a condition not unlike the *Haemorrhoisa*/Veronica herself. Despite the earliest appearance of Veronica being connected to menstrual bleeding and female infertility, her name is also invoked in later medical manuscripts to help heal the sick and as a ward against evil that may cause diseases. Her name is also invoked against two unknown diseases: the so-called spring disease (*lenctenadl*) and elf disease (*ælfadl*). Could the invocation of a female divine in these instances tell us something about the diseases themselves? In this paper, I will examine the role Veronica played in early Medieval English medicine, the contexts in which her name appears, and address why an infertile, impure woman achieved healing authority in early medieval England.

The placebo effect in medieval Ireland

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The placebo effect is a complicated medical phenomenon which cannot be reduced to one simple formula. However, the efficacy of the placebo is believed to be connected with the expectations of the patient receiving the treatment. The effect points to the importance of perception and faith and the brain's role in physical health. Despite some detractors, placebos are still used to effect across different medical approaches, including conventional and CAM

(complementary and alternative medicine) and in medical testing. This paper will examine whether the principles underlying the placebo effect can account for the reported miracles of healing in Medieval Irish texts. The use of saintly relics in the 'treatment' of specific medical complaints, in particular, will be explored.