

*Acts of Care: Recovering Women in Late Medieval Health.* Sara Ritchey. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021. xvi + 310 pp. \$45.

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Women's bodywork on the ill and injured remains fundamental to health care, as does the underestimation and undervaluation of this work. Historically, such women often had something distinct to offer their patients: a special kind of knowledge and healing powers. *Acts of Care* investigates women's roles in the medieval health economy, taking religious women in the Southern Low Countries as a case study. Sara Ritchey aims to recover the "therapeutic epistemologies" (3) that animated religious women's health practices. Framing actions and objects as "therapeutic tools" unleashing "salutary transformations" exemplifies how Ritchey uses a new vocabulary to forge bridges between the histories of medicine and religion. She states that health-giving abilities linked to holiness are seldom integrated into or even recognized as part of medical history. Indeed, male medical authorities erased from the written record unofficial and—in their eyes—uneducated female healers and the religious therapeutics they administered.

This book offers an important historiographic revision, relevant to historians of medicine, religion, and gender. It is primarily based on a methodological intervention, because Ritchey looks for traces of medical care in a variety of religious sources. Her approach is also inspired by techniques of retrieving voices used by medical anthropologists. The inclusion of hagiographical and other religious texts in the study of health care reveals a female world inside institutions. Traces of therapeutic activities are accessible through saints' lives, yet the expression in strictly religious terms also obscures their medical function. Central is the so-called *liégeois corpus*, in which male clerical authorities described the deeds of nearly thirty local holy (yet uncanonized) women, often living in or near urban centers. These women, and the many unnamed others doing similar work, assumed caregiving roles as a group identity.

The book consists of five chapters, divided (a little awkwardly) into three thematic parts: therapeutic narratives, knowledge, and practices. Chapter 1 deals with the lives and healing miracles, which helped to construct the therapeutic authority of religious women and local veneration. These accounts attest to the oral circulation among a healing community: a group shaped by the exchange of such stories and who believed them to work. Chapter 2 shifts to religious women's caregiving behaviors, including in hospitals, by combining hagiographic with administrative sources.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that the entanglement of medicine and religion is reflected in a shared view of the body as ensouled, and the passions of the soul as a Galenic non-natural: a factor influencing physical health. Hope (and virtue) were key to cure. The salubrious work of prayer, the healthful joy of meditations—or confession as a form of vomiting—were not merely metaphors but essential to regain physical health.

The final two chapters are an impressive reconstruction of the function and adaptation of several psalters from the Meuse region that were used within communities of

religious women. Ritchey shows the internal coherence in the codex of psalms, lives, calendars of health, vernacular poems, blessings, and charms as collectively forming a therapeutic technology. Its healing power could be invoked by speaking, reading, meditating on, or performing the text, at times in combination with other tools such as relics. More broadly, there was a striking variety in possible access to the healing power of holy women, such as by reading their lives, visiting tombs, touching relics, or joining rituals.

*Acts of Care* is a rich book that opens new avenues of research and further questions. One such question is that of access: the beneficiaries in healing stories reflect a rather restricted healing community of people within or in direct contact to the monasteries. However, the significance of religious women for the health of late medieval society is made more convincing by discussions of the circulation of healing stories beyond the convent, the connections with hospitals and leprosaria, and assistance in mortuary practices and childbirth. At the same time, the dynamics and coherence of healing communities remain vague: how did they form and dissolve, or what agency (68) did they have as an entity? Finally, although Ritchey only hints at (negative) long-term developments such as further exclusion and erasure (disciplining of beguines, accusations of sorcery), her work does imply that more research into these topics is necessary, and that religious reform potentially profoundly affected healthcare practices.

Janna Coomans, *Utrecht University*  
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*Loath to Print: The Reluctant Scientific Author, 1500–1750*. Nicole Howard. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2022. x + 218 pp. \$55.

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Historians of science have noticed connections between the printing press and early modern science. Mentions of the printing press as a driving force in the transformation of mathematics, natural philosophy, and medicine have appeared since the early twentieth-century histories of the Scientific Revolution. Recent scholarship on the history of the book and the history of science have provided additional elements to revisit the relationship between the production of knowledge and the material, social, and intellectual dimensions associated with the technology of the printing press.

In *Loath to Print*, Howard explores a previously unattended aspect of this fruitful relationship: authors' reluctance to print. While several studies emphasize how early modern authors enthusiastically submitted their manuscripts to printers for the benefit of reaching wider audiences, Howard opens the door to a different aspect of the rise of early modern science: the hesitation that scientific authors expressed over publishing. By focusing on aversion rather than sympathy, Howard masterfully shows that the uses of this new technology presented significant challenges to early modern authors.