Examining for Leprosy in the Fifteenth Century1
(ca. 1430–1500)

Contributed by Lucy Barnhouse

Introduction

The following are letters to and from the council of Frankfurt, and in some cases, from the examining doctors themselves, concerning the late medieval inspection for leprosy, a process known as a *Lepraschau*, literally “looking for leprosy.” Those who availed themselves of the inspection hailed from a radius of over 100 kilometers. While leper hospitals are known to have existed in Europe from the twelfth century onwards, the *Lepraschau* came into existence much later. As cities gained economic and political power, they took over the responsibility for such examinations from hospital communities and members of the clergy. Studies of late medieval medicine have sometimes represented medical professionalization and the practice of medicine as a charitable work as models of thought in competition with each other. These fifteenth-century letters, however, present a view of medicine as simultaneously professional and charitable. In translating the letters, I have kept much of the formal and often involved phrasing used by petitioners, using multiple complimentary adjectives to address the officials by whom their health would be evaluated and certified. Departures from this formality can depend on both the petitioners’ relationship to the council and doctors of Frankfurt, and on their responses to the ways in which they experience leprosy as a social disability. I have also attempted to stay very close to the original in describing leprosy itself. Multiple terms are used for the disease, and for how it affected those diagnosed with it; they might be “burdened” (*beladen, belumm*) or, more literally, “spotted” (*befleckt*) with it.

The letters reveal a standardized medical procedure, and a variety of communal responses to the disease. The standard examination for leprosy involved an inspection of every inch of the patient’s skin, not only for distinctive visual signs of disease, but for sensitivity to pain, since nerve damage was a known consequence of leprosy. The doctors would also evaluate their petitioners’ breath and voice, for a smell of corruption and a hoarseness associated with leprosy, respectively. Several of the letters refer to other processes of examination, by local officials or by certified medical professionals, like barbers. In such cases, Frankfurt’s doctors were appealed to for their greater medical expertise; as one letter from the doctors demonstrates, this included access to a considerable medical library. Most of the surviving records are petitions, meaning that the outcome of diagnosis is almost always unknown. The doctors might diagnose petitioners as “clean” from leprosy, “unclean” with leprosy, or “half clean,” a diagnosis meaning that the petitioner would be obliged to return for a follow-up examination to see whether their symptoms had improved or deteriorated. The medically cautious diagnosis of “half clean” might be a source of distress to the examinees.

Two letters were sent to the committee by secular lords, and one by a religious community. Of the rest, a dozen come from private individuals, and eleven from civic authorities. Six of the private letters came from
one disgruntled individual, Henne Maderus. Living just up the Rhine from Frankfurt, he went for a second opinion to the still more renowned examination board in Cologne, which had one of medieval Germany’s oldest and most prosperous leper hospitals. Civic-issued letters typically emphasize the seriousness of the undertaking, and the respect in which the physicians are held. Several such letters specify that the putative lepers have been suspected of having the disease for a long time, or by many; some explicitly request instructions on what steps should be taken if the person in question is leprous. A letter from Aschaffenburg indicates that lepers who were not prosperous might be treated in similar ways to other sick and poor people. The town officials of Weilburg demonstrate concern for the potential threat to public health posed by a woman’s putative leprosy, and also for her well-being. Three letters from the committee to their petitioners do survive, alongside one form letter for such responses, and one list of instructions for the diagnosed leper. The latter reflects the medical view that fire could help to purify air, and prescribes foods believed to be beneficial for both the symptoms and causes of the disease.

Responses to a diagnosis of leprosy were dependent on numerous social variables, including but not limited to the concerned individual’s social status. Following a medical diagnosis of leprosy, the men or women so diagnosed had multiple options open to them, determined by the severity of their symptoms, by their citizenship, and by the resources of their community. While there was a widespread expectation that a diagnosis of leprosy would have social ramifications, those seeking such diagnosis appear to have depended on the doctors for individualized recommendations for how best to manage the disease and accommodate those affected by it. The standardized list of dos and don’ts for diagnosed lepers, presumably sent from the commissioned doctors to the council, contains a definition of “specially set apart” that includes the injunction “not to frequent public kitchens or bathhouses.” This calls into question assumptions about the social meanings of separation for medieval lepers.

Hospital rules and business agreements from the region make clear that lepers might beg in the fields, live together in informal communities, or enter into hospitals. All those entering hospital life gave up their legal rights over property on doing so, as did all others undertaking life in religious institutions. Hospital residence also, however, offered the privileges of community, stability, and support. For those lepers who lived outside hospitals, the question of whether they were met with avoidance or accommodation appears to have been determined more by their existing social relationships than by their disease. Many petitioners to the council and doctors of Frankfurt include requests for instructions on how to help or accommodate those diagnosed with leprosy. The petitions show that men and women believing themselves to have leprosy might suffer significant distress; whether this was a consequence of their medical symptoms, or of fear of the social consequences of diagnosis, is rarely explicit. Petitions to Frankfurt’s committee, as well as the reports and advice of the physicians, show that while diagnosis had significant effects on the ways in which lepers interacted with their communities, it did not put an end to such interaction.

Bibliography


Bergman, Fred. “Hoping against Hope? A Marital Dispute about the Medical Treatment of Leprosy in the Fifteenth-Century Hanseatic Town of Kampen.” The Task of Healing: Medicine, Religion, and Gender in England and the Netherlands, 1450–1800,
Medicinalia Nr. 1

I, Conrad Sachsenhausen, doctor of medicine, acknowledge openly with this letter that it has been brought to my attention that N. is burdened with leprosy, or rumored to be so. Therefore So I have examined the same N. on this day today that this letter was made, examined in the manner and form that is customary and usual for such people, and have found him at this time to be clean and innocent [of leprosy.] And in testimony and acknowledgment of this I have placed my seal.

Medicinalia Nr. 167

Our willing and friendly service to the cautious, honorable, and wise men of the council. As you have let us hear a letter that Henne Maderus of Ursel wrote you regarding us, complaining and claiming that we falsely accused him of having leprosy, wherefore he was oppressed by you, and that he had himself examined in Cologne, where he was pronounced free of leprosy. We have heard his letter—that contained still more words—and let your honors know that we accused the above-named Henne of nothing before our examination. For we were set and ordered by you, collectively, to examine such persons, and the above-named Henne was almost disfigured with the symptoms of disease, and was avoided by people. So he came to us of his own accord, and humbly and earnestly begged us to most closely examine and test him. Therefore, in view of his earnest request, we took him before us, examined and tested him according to our custom, in a fitting manner. And we found in him: that he is at this time in the beginning stages of leprosy, and is to a certain degree marked with it. This we said, according to our best understanding, and according to our professional oath, and have accused him of nothing else on our own account—nor did we send for him! What we have done, we did according to his request and will, and are aware of no obligation or guilt in his regard. If, however, the above-named Henne thinks that we
plichtig zu sin / Duchte aber hennechin vor-
genent das wir yme deßhalb nichtes plichtig
eren / So wonen wir hie by des heiligen
Rijchs gerichte sunder geleide So wollen wir
ime oder syme machtbotten von sinen wegen
rechtes gehorsam sin oder obe er begert vor
uwer Ersamkeit dem Rade und biden uwer
Ersamkeit diese unse antwort laß zum steen
dann wir geschrieben konnen uns auch darauf
zum antworten by glyche und rechte zu be-
halde und zustedingen das wallen wir mit
willen alletzijt gerne verdienen Geben under
myn hennen ulm ingesigel des wir andern uns
myd Henen gebuchen uff mitwochen nach
dionisiis anno domini lvi [edge of paper is
torn/damaged]

Heinricus lose licenciatus in medicinis
henne ulm gnt Augspurg und hans harpe

Medicinalia Nr. 169

Den Ersamen Wysen Burgermeystern und
Radt der Stadt Ffranckfurt meynen guten
frunden

Madrus Henne bey Ursel und darauff der
Rad nit wulde antworten

Ersamen wysen lieben herren Ich enbieten
uch mynen dynst zu för / So als ich von den
uwern wegen geschrieben han / also hant yr
mir widder geschrieben und eyn abeschrieft
eyns brieffs in uwer schriefft geschicket dar
Inn die uwern meldent / wie das sie mich
von yr besehunge nit geschuldiget haben /
und nach dem sie von uwer ersamkeyt wegen
geordent und gesatzt sint etlich personen zu
besehen und ich under mynen angesicht fast
ungestalt und mit der ußsettzigkeit behamet
und von den luden gemeden si i in eynch-
er bewegunge zu yen kommen si oitmundig-
lichen und dynstlichen gebeden mich uff das
nehist zubessehen und zuversuchen angese-
hen myn mutige bede und mich vergeben
besehen und versucht nach yr gewonheit und
sich geburt und haben mich befunden das ich
die zijt der ußsetzigkeit beflecket sij gewest
und meynt mir deßhalben vor uch zurecht
zustene wie dann dieselbe schrieft mit etwe
viel me woroten inhelt / Han ich verstanden
und die mynen guten frunde laßen horen er-
owe him something on this account: we live
here, by the imperial court, without entou-
rage, and we are ready to abide by the law
in anything that he or his proxy may request
of us or your honors of the council. And we
ask your honors to let this our answer stand,
that we have written as testimony that we
will abide by the law and uphold equity. This
is our earnest, obedient desire at all times.
Given under my (Henne Ulm’s) seal, that we
others use with him, on the Wednesday after
the feast of St. Dionysius, in the Year of Our

Heinricus Lose, licensed doctor of medi-
cine

Henne Ulm, known as Augsburg
Hans Harpe

Medicinalia Nr. 169

To the honorable and wise mayor and
council of the city of Frankfurt, my good
friends

Henne Maderus, of Ursel—and the coun-
cil decided not to answer it

Honorable and wise good lords, I offer
you my service. As I wrote to you concern-
ing your [doctors,] you wrote back to me and
sent to me a copy of a letter in your writing
in which your [doctors] say that they have not
blamed me in their examination, and how
they are ordered and set by your honors to
examine many persons. [They said] I was al-
most disfigured in my face, and spotted with
leprosy, and avoided by people; that I came to
them in considerable agitation, and humbly
begged them to closely examine me, and that
in view of my earnest prayer, they heard me
and examined me as is customary and seemly.
They said that I was found to be spotted with
leprosy at that time, and that they sent me
to stand openly before you…. and their let-
ter had many more words in it. I understood
this, and let my close friends hear it as well.
Honorable good friends, your [doctors] may
write what they like about their conduct with
me. I don’t doubt that you received and have
well understood my letter that I got concern-
samen guden frunde die uwern mogent von mir schryben was yen fuget aber nach dem sie mit mir umgangen sint / So zwyfelt mir doch nit yr habent myn schriefft der ußsetzigkeit halber die ich zu Coelen erlanget han und an dem ende do sich eyn iglicher ußsetziger uuff dem Rynestromen geburt zu besehen wole verstanden / das mir die uwern villicht durch haß ungentlichen gethan und nit mit warheit mit mir umgangen sint / Und dar umb so finden mich nit in rade myner guten frunde vor uch zu rechten oder thedigen und getruwen uwer Ersamkeyt wole / yr sollent myn geboit und ußdrag uff myns gnedigen herren des Pfaltzgraven Ampfluden uffnehmen und der nit verslagen In maßen ich uch in myner ersten schriefft geboiten uch und den uwern bekommen moge / Geben under des festen Jungher Anthis Kuchen Ingesiegel uff ffrytag nach sant Lucas tag des heyligen ewangelisten /Anno MCCCC LVIII

Medicinalia Nr. 170

To the honorable and wise mayor and council of the city of Frankfurt, my good friends.

My friendly service to the wise and beloved men [of the council]. When I wrote to Your Honors previously, that is to Master Heinrich, the city doctor, and Hennekin Augsburger and Meyster Hans Scherer under the gateway, Your Honors well understood what my demand of you was. My dear good lords: I wish that your honors may understand that I am very willing to do what is desired by you and your [experts], and undertake to do the following. Let the above-named persons choose two persons from the council, and I will choose two, who may then represent us and decide equitably between us, concerning what has passed between us. This is my desire, and shall be my conduct. I want a definite answer on a day of judgment, and pray you to give a favorable and decisive answer, and that you may send me an answer with specific points, as Anthis has given his
To the honorable and wise mayor and council of the city of Frankfurt, our dear lords.

Maderus, Henne: with a complaint arising from the fact that a decision of leprosy was declared to him, but that he now appears to be clean, and asks what he ought to do under this judgment, if he be not clean.

Our obligation and service to the honorable, wise, and beloved councilmen. As Henne Maderus, of Ursel, has sent a request to us regarding examination, as we have examined him for leprosy. And he desires to have us hold a day of arbitration, where two from the council may come on our side, and he wants to send two representatives as well, to make a decision in light of the display of his letter of diagnosis, herein enclosed. So, we humbly ask that we may know from you, what your honors may advisedly command, and what you wish us to do, that right may be done by Hench [Madern] and by us, after request and answer. And we are perfectly willing to approach him again, and will abide by your decision in all points and in every detail. Given the fourth day after Easter, the feast of Leo the martyr [April 11], under the seal of Herr Heinrich Loser, civic physician, which we’re using for our business this time.

Heinrich Loser seal

Oped, the physician’s brother

Johan Augsburg

Johan Harp, your apprentice inspector

---

Our friendly service, and all that which our love may do, to our honorable and wise and very good friends. We hereby let you know that this present Henne Kaufmann came to us in Nierstein, as he might be spotted with the sickness of leprosy. And we have understood that you have masters by you in favor to, and confirmed with his seal that I am using at this time, here on the Wednesday within Christmastide.

Henne Maderus of Ursel
Frankfurt, who are knowledgeable in such matters, and can well inspect and examine such sick persons. Therefore we pray you, humbly, warmly, and earnestly, to send for the said masters, that they may come before you. And we pray that you may seriously charge them to well examine the said Henne Kaufmann, as it is fitting, to say whether or not he has this sickness, and to send some of your council-members to assist as well. And however it may be, we pray you to send us word with a public letter, under seal, via this our messenger. We pray that you may not deny this plea, and show yourselves favorable and friendly to us in this matter, and pledge to repay you and your [experts.] We have given this in the morning under the seal of our village and court, on the Sunday before the Nativity of Our Lady, 1434.

The sheriff and lay judges of the court in Nierstein.
Medicinalia Nr. 155

We the council of Frankfurt make known publicly by this letter that Gudrus and Peter Scherer, our citizens, came before us together with one identifying himself as Contze, Landgrave of Hohenlagen in Hessen, and the aforesaid Gudrus and Peter explained how, a short time before this, the aforesaid Landgrave Contze came to them and told them that there were rumors about him regarding leprosy, that he was supposedly unclean burdened and spotted with it. Regarding this, the aforesaid Gudrus and Peter testified before us, and swore on their oath—that they had taken in our presence—that they examined Contze and behaved as is seemly in such matters, and have at this time, in this case, [Contze] is found half-clean, without any malice or deceit. And in acknowledgment of this aforesaid matter, we have had our city seal pressed onto this letter. Given in the Year of Our Lord 1434, four days before the feast of St. Michael the Archangel.

Medicinalia Nr. 156

Our friendly and willing service to your honors, ready to do anything within our power for you from now on. Careful, honorable, and wise men [of the council], dear and good friends: we send to you the bearer of this letter, together with his wedded wife, who is thought—by us and by the whole community—to have the sickness of leprosy. So she has been examined here already by those who are commissioned to examine such sick persons, as are your honors. And at this time, we send our friendly request to your honors, that you might make a decisive and final judgment in this matter. Please, for our sakes, undertake this and make it clear to the appointed doctors that they should apply themselves diligently to this and find out the whole truth, so that, if she is so spotted, no further misfortune should come of it. For we

Given on the third day after the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary 1434.
das wollen wir in dem oder in eyn merern gegen ewer Waisheit wederumb verdynen Datum unter unser stadt gemeyn Ingesigel uff Montag nach dem heiligen Osterntag anno M/ xxviii

Bürgermeister Rat und gantz gemeyn zu Wylburg

Medicinalia Nr. 157

Unsern freundlichen dinst euer Ersamen lieben wissen und besonderen guden fründe wir bidden uch wissen daz iser bewißer dißes briefes genant Henne Baddebender unser midde burger beruchtigtet ist, und wir selber besorger, daz er beladen sy mit der maletzen sucht. Des han wir vernommen wij das by euch etliche lude syn solden die sich verstehen soll uff dy obegenanten maleczkeit und dy lude besehen konne und probennen und des bidden wir uch umb unseres lieben gn- edigen herren von Menzen und uns disen ebgenannten Henne tzu wissen und bringen an dy jenen dy en besehen und proben konnen von der ognt. malerzheit und das ir uns des eglichen eyn beschrieben Antwort geben wollen wy eß um den ogn. menschen gelegen sy und uch dy jenen bescheiden dy solicho berschen dut her yn daz beste uff das uns und uns ern nachgeburen nicht forter schade da von entstehen möge daz woln wir allezyt gut verdienen unter unseren Secret Datum anno domini M CCCC xxxix in die blasti episcopi

Bürgermeister und Rad zu Dhuneburg

Medicinalia Nr. 158

Wir Otto Probste, Katherina Eptissin, Katherina priorissin, und die samenunge gemeynlichen des Clostres zu Blangkenauwe embyden unsirs inges gebede / dem Erbern Rad zu Frangkfort unseren besonderen guden freunden . und biden uwer Erberkeit wissen, und klagen uch das wir ein ingeseyte Jungfrauen unsir kuchemeide eine irzunt lange zii undir uns geweste ist und die ist swache / das wir besorger sine das sie nicht reine sye wish, indeed, that you may report that she is found clean, and would show yourselves favorable [to us] in this matter, and we would deserve this from your honors in this or in other matters. Given under the shared seal of our city, on Monday after the holy day of Easter, [14]28.

The mayor, council, and entire community of Weilburg [an der Lahn]

Medicinalia Nr. 157

Our friendly service to your honors, dear, wise, and very good friends. We pray you know that the bearer of this letter, Henne Baddebender, our fellow-citizen, is rumored to be burdened the sickness of leprosy, and we ourselves are concerned about this. Regarding this, we've heard that there are supposedly a number of people by you who have understanding of the aforesaid sickness, who can examine and test people for it. And we pray you, for the sake of our gracious lord [the archbishop] of Mainz and our own, to acknowledge this said Henne and bring him to those who can examine and test concerning the aforesaid leprosy and that you can indeed give us a written answer concerning how it is with the above-named man and also that those chosen to examine such persons may do their best, in order that no more harm may come of this, to us and our neighbors. And we will always endeavor to deserve this of you. Given under our seal, in the Year of Our Lord 1439 on the day of St. Blaise the bishop.

The mayor and council of Duneburg.

Medicinalia Nr. 158

We, Otto the provost, Katherina the abbess, Katherina the prioress, and the entire assembly of the convent of Blankenau offer our most earnest prayers to the honorable council of Frankfurt, our very good friends. We pray that Your Honors may know—and lament to you!—that one of the virgins of our community, our kitchen maid, who has been among us for a long time now, is so weak that we are worried that she might be un-
Medicinalia Nr. 164

Wir Heinricus Loße Stedearzt hen harp Johan Augspurg thun kunt ynen iglichen menschen daß wir von befelesi wegen der ersamen wisen unseren liben herren der rade von Frankfurde han besehen uff die maledye / die vornonffige konne Hans Fransberger - widdem des harnesmether na gelaßen und han erkannt und bekennen daß disše vorgenannte widdewa hait an der nasen und an den lippen ies mundes eyn gestockelte maildei dy man nenet die kanker von eynen floß de heuptis na dem also Avicenna sprichet in den verdenbuch von der ußsetzzekeit / Et cum cancer qui est lepra unius membra und hait disser kanker eyn eygenschaff mit der rechten gemeyn maildei / und disše widdewa haet nit dye maildei dy da usprunglich clean. And thus, it might be a difficult thing for her to live among us; we have been informed of this. And so we have sent the said young woman there, that she may be examined. And we earnestly pray Your Honors—for God’s sake and for the sake of our whole community—that you may use the help of our Brother Hans, whom we have sent out in good faith to accompany the young woman to the masters for inspection. Your honors may truly judge that we are honest, and beg you to be merciful, and pay what is owed to the masters. For she is poor, and her friends are poorer, and she has no help from anyone. Our cloister, too, is impoverished, and has several poor young women who do not have any other means of support; our common alms are used exclusively by the sick. Therefore we beg your honors, that you will do all of your best in this matter, since we place our entire faith and trust in you. And we will repay this with the earnest prayers of our whole community for you, day and night. Given under our provost’s seal, which we collectively use in these [business] matters.

Medicinalia Nr. 164

We, Heinricus Loße, civic doctor, Henne Harp, and Johann Augsburg inform anyone reading this that we, as commanded by the honorable and wise council members of Frankfurt, our dear lords, have undertaken an inspection for leprosy. We admitted the prudent relative of Hans Fransberger, widow of the harness-maker, and have seen and testify that this above-named widow has on her nose and on the lips of her mouth the putrid sickness that is known as “the cancer,” from a flow from the head, of which also Avicenna speaks in the book of causes of leprosy: And concerning the cancer that is a leprosy of the whole body...and this cancer has shared characteristics with the true, common leprosy. This widow does not have the
kommet von swächtigkeit oder lebbir dy man nennet in sich selbys madeunge oder lepra universals oder dy gemeyn maledie da d argantzen lip beflecken mag / da dorch die lude vilth zu scheiden sint / und also dan disße widdewe dy disße vorbenannte gestorkelte maledie hait an der nasen by den munde mit alsolicher schigung zu dem ußfallen also daß davon den atham entzuntlich und scheddelich wirt machen da von schadden kommen mag dar umb sint wir mit redelichen sachen und bedechtelich beweget vilth disße vorg. widdewe von dy lude zu scheiden mit wißen laube und orlaup unseren liben vorgenannten herren und mag sich gebruchen der friheheit und der almusen alsolicher apgescheiden luden / und daß in alsolicher maße han gethan wante disße sache hait in swere und eyn sunderliche ußrichtunge Datum anno domini MCCCCLVII die veneris quarra martii sub sigilli mei Henrici superscripti opidi Frankfurdi phsici jurati ad instanciam et petitionem doctorum hen harp Johan Augspurg huic carte imp(ressum)

Medicinalia Nr. 165

Unser willige dinste zuvor / unde was wir gudes vermogen Ersamen wisen guten freund-de disse gezwertigen dierz Koch unde Gelichen eliche lute unser midde Burger hand uns gebeten uch zuschreiben Nach dem die ertzunzengnante Gelichen beruchtigt ist biz here etliche Jare das sie beladen sye mid der krankhede der ußsetzkeyde abe von daz also sye oder nicht / wollen wir eyn wißen han / weren no yemands bisch uch in uwer Stadt der da von eyn wißen hette und daruber gesatzt were Begeren wir von uch und bidten uch rechte freundlichen das ir uns zuwillen den selben vorgnt damidde fürderlichen sin wullet und bestellen das en soliche gedien möge das die vorgnt Gele proberd werde wie es umb sie gelegen sye und uns des schyn und warheid brenge wie wir uns dar inne halden sullen wullet uch he inne als gudwillig bewisen als wir uch des unde alles guten besinde gentzlich gluiben und zugetruwen wollen wir leprosy that comes originally from weakness or from the liver, that is called “malady” or “universal leprosy” or “common leprosy” that can mark the whole body, through which many people are to be separated [from others]. Since this widow has this above-named sickness on the nose and near the mouth, so that the diseased skin has the tendency to fall off, and so that the breath becomes damaging and contagious from it, so that harm might come of it, therefore we are—after mature consideration—seriously inclined to direct that this widow should be separated from the healthy, with the wise permission of our dear lords, above-named, and she may have such freedoms and such alms as are customary for such people. And we have behaved in this matter as was seemly in the situation, and have given a weighty and special judgment. Given in the Year of Our Lord 1457, on the fourth Friday in March, under the seal of me, Heinrich the above-signed, sworn physician of Frankfurt, at the request and insistence of the doctors Henne Harp and Johan Augsburg. Thus was this page made.

Medicinalia Nr. 165

Our willing service and all that we may do of good to our honorable and wise good friends. These present, Dietze and Geliche Koch, a married couple, our fellow-citizens, have entreated us to write to you, because the above-named Geliche has been rumored for many years now to be burdened with the sickness of leprosy. So, we would like to know whether she is or not, if now there are those by you in your city who have knowledge about such things and are appointed to judge concerning it. We desire of you, and ask you most warmly that you may further the above-named woman’s cause in this, and give orders that, as it is seemly, the above-named Gele may be tested to see how it is with her, and bring us the truth, and the writing about how we should behave accordingly. Please show yourselves favorable in this matter, as we are favorable to you in all things, and trust and believe you entirely, and will diligently
study to deserve well of you. Please give your written answer. Under our seal of the city of Giessen, on the Friday before Jocunditatis Sunday, in the Year of Our Lord [14]58.

The major, sheriff, and council of Giessen.

Medicinalia Nr. 175

denn Ersamen fursiechtigenn und wysenn Burgermeistere Scheffene und Raidt zu frankfurt mynenn liebenn Herren

Heinrich Wixhuser von siner besehunge

Myennen undertenigen und willigen
dinst Zuvor Ersamen und wysen lieben herren. Hans Offsteyner myne Swager hat als
der ihene der mir gewant ist und glymppiger
dann andere den das Amps halber gevore
zuweggenn bringen konne / durch befelhe
meyner Herren der Bürgermeistere von uwer wyssheit wegen fruntlich und swegerlich an-
braight \ wie wer wyßheit der Raidt gemeyn-
lchnlichen überkommen sy mich die gesworne
besehen und examinieren zulassen / dan des
Rades fründe und andere den by mir zusitin
gvore und zuhandeln schuwens und nauss-
hen haben / In maissen als obe ich mir der
krangheit der maledy beladen und verlümont
ställe syn ich / Uff solichs myns Swagers an-
brengen Ich yne und Arnolt Swarzinberger
mynen lyden wieder zu uwer wyßheit gefertiget / Sie an myn herren des Rades fründe
werben damit gutlichen virten lassen hain
ire werbunge furter an uwer wyßheit den
Raidt zubringern das auch zugutern von mir
zuversteet und offzunemen / das mich nit
wenig befremde / derwyle und ich itzt viel
jare und tziit by uch gesessen der und der-
glichen verlumung von uwer wyßheit / ingemgynde oder Insünderheit nye affer uzunt / so ich leyder von gottes des herren zuschick-
unge / mit mancherley anderer zuffellen
libes krangheit und bekommernisse myne
selft und auch myner lieben husfrauwen
Georgen myns swagers fers Bruders halber
angefochten werden und beladen byn ver-
nomen hin / also stumpff und slingen ers-
sucht worden sülte syn / Byn des getrwnens
das ich und myner Hausfrauen altern sonnder-
Aside [the testimony of] my dear, deceased brother-in-law, to whom God be gracious!

have deserved of you of old. Regarding this, it is your wisdom’s intention to examine me in a week’s time, and to wait and see if I have recovered enough strength to undergo such an examination. And in this matter you say it is your wish to do so because, on the advice of others, you do not think this evil should be suffered any longer. Now, it’s obvious that a sick person like myself can expect only slight improvement or strengthening in a week’s time—but I have entrusted this matter to God! So my earnest request to you—made now, and it will be unchanging—is that you may examine me in the same way that you do all others, specially and generally, among the rich and powerful and among the poor, of whatever place or city they be, searching and examining most earnestly, and treating all—rich, powerful, or poor—with the same measure. So let it be, that such a rumor may not damage me and my friends; let your findings be thoroughly justified. So, let it be on whatever day that your honors will undertake my examination, and not deprive me of it, so I am ready to endure anything in accordance with God’s will, and to do as is seemly for me, as the consequences of this are the same for rich and for poor, as is most fitting. May your honors favorably understand this writing from me, and take no offense at it, as I desire all good towards you in this and all matters, and I only am concerned because of the short time of preparation for this inspection and examination in order to reach a judgment concerning me and my family in my old age. And my dear wife and I are both much afflicted with sickness, though we have neglected nothing that ought to be done in such matters. We hope that all hereafter may fall out favorably. Given under my seal on Thursday after the Sunday “Oculi” [18 March], 1479.
Medicinalia Nr. 177

Den Ersamen vursichtigern und wyßenn Burgemeistere Scheffen und Rathe zu Franckfurt myne lleben herren

Nicolaus Wynneck Glockener ab Gemanet

Ersamen vursichtigen unnd wisenn besundern lieben Herren uwer wißheit sy myn iniges gebet mit bereitem willenn zuvor Ersamen herren uwer wißheit wol weiß durch anbrengung der burgemeister und auch schrift afhalter wie ich armer hab begert mich abermals lassen besehen und myr daz verzego ist worden beiß post Martini So bitten uwer wißheit ich lutterlich umb gottes willen so oitmudigs ich mag uwer wißheit wulle den selben uwernten doctoribus den Ercztzen besenen iben hohen uns in dem besehen anzukeren und mich abermals besenen und weß sie an mir befynden uwer wißheit und mich furter wissen lassen want wo ich unbeflecket were und gemeynschaft der menschen entsatzt syn solle mag wenigli versteen waß ich daran haben mag Erfindet sich aber daz ich mit der feltsiechen krangheit beladen byn und so ich des ungezwiffelt berichtiget werde So byn ich mich des gemudes mich Inne gedulte zu setzen und williglichen gottes gabe zu lyden in hoffnung das hymeleich dar durch zuerwerben und uwer wißheit wulle sich gegen mir armen gostlich bewisenn und die wercke der barmhertzkeyet erzeugen gepurt mir inne myn gebeth und byn schuldig solichs umb uch Zu aller zjett gegen got zzu dienen und weßher inne uwer wille syn wirdet wullet mich durch des hoffes furmundere uwer Rat fruud lassen mich darnach mogen Richter Datum uff Mitwochen vor Nicolae Anno Miv lxxprimo

Nicolaus wynneck ettwan gluckener zu Pharre uwer williger

Medicinalia Nr. 178

To the honorable, cautious, and wise [men] the mayor, sheriff, and council of Frankfurt, my dear lords.

Nicolaus Wynneck, bell-ringer, as advised

Honorable, cautious, wise, and especially beloved lords: May your wisdoms receive my earnest prayer with a ready will before your honors. Your wisdoms know well, through the representation of the mayor and also through writing, how I, a poor man, have requested to undergo examination again, and that that was delayed for me until after the Feast of St. Martin [November 11.] So I pray your wisdoms clearly, as humbly as I can, for God's sake, that your wisdoms may see to it that the same learned men your medical doctors have turned to us in the inspection, and further let me know if I am unspotted, or if I must be put aside from the fellowship of others, and that I may at least know what I do have. And if it's discovered that I do have the sickness of leprosy, and if I am informed unambiguously of this, so I am of the disposition to take this patiently, and to willingly suffer the gift of God, in hopes of thereby winning Heaven. I hope that your wisdoms will show yourselves favorable to me, show me the works of mercy, in a manner befitting my prayer. I will be eternally obliged to you, to pray to God for you. I pray that you will let me know whatever your will is concerning me by the court representative, the friend of your council, and I shall dispose myself in accordance with it. Given on Wednesday before the Feast of St. Nicholas [December 6], 1481.

Nicolaus Wynneck, former bell-ringer of Pharre, your willing [servant]
...germeister zu Aschaffenburg bitten eynen armen...mogen mit der ußzetikeit verdacht umb gottes...zu besichtigen laßen

Unser Fruntlich dinst zuvor Besondern gutenn frunden unser mitburger Peter Spengeler zeyger diesis brieffis is by uns belumet wie er mit dem ufsatz beladen sy Bitten wir uch mit besunderm vlys he wollet die ihenen by uch die sich der dinge zu besehen verstene vermogen den zu probiren umb gots willen abe er mit der kranckheit beladen sy oder nicht Ist er damit beladen wollet uns das schriftlich zu wissen thun wollen wir den understene zuversehen Ist er aber nit da mit beladen wollet uns auch zu wissen thun wollen wir ime auch helfen mit unserem almüsen als anderen armen luten dann dieser gegenwertig ein zietlangk by uns Gewonet Halt sich erlich und formlich gehalten und ist gantz arme wollet wir in den sachen behilflifie und geraten sin uch auch gutwillig bewysen als wir zu uch vertrrewuens haben das sin wir tzu sampt der billichkeit in der glichen und mererm zuverdienen willig Datum mitwochen nach visitationis beate marie virginis Anno miv lxxxmo

Vonn uns den Burger meistern zu Aschaffenburg

Medicinalia Nr. 183

Den Ersamen unsern besondern gutenn frunden dem Raite zu Frangfurt.... hant Rein erfunden

Wilhelm vonn gottes gnadenn Landgraeve zu Hessen Grave von Katzenelenbogen zu Dietz Zu Igregenhorn und zu Nidde

Unser gunstig gesinnung zuvor Ersamen besondern guten frunde Geinwertiger unser Kelner Jorge ist in gerucht das er mit der ussetzikeit beladen sij darum haben wir im zu uch gefertigt gutlich bettende ir wullet im durch uwer ertzte und dar zu verordnete nach nettneste [sic] probieren und besichtiggen lassen und was sich an ime erfindet uns schriftlich zuerkennen geben dannach wie uns rechtigen mogen und dar im gutwillig sin das wullin wir in besonderen gnaden gegen uch erkennen Dadtum Alffelt mitwoch nach

Our friendly service to our good friends. Our fellow-citizen Peter Spengeler, bearer of this letter, is reputed among us to have leprosy. And so we most diligently beseech you that those among you who understand examination of such things may investigate him, for God's sake, [to find out] whether he be burdened with the disease or not. If he is so burdened, please let us know in writing, so that we may be prepared to take care of him. If, however, he is not burdened with leprosy, please likewise let us know. We desire to help him with our alms as we do other poor people, since he has lived with us for some time, has behaved honorably and piously, and is very poor. We wish to act advisedly and helpfully in this matter, and pray that you show yourselves favorable in this matter. You have our trust in this: we have unanimously so agreed, and declare ourselves ready to deserve this at your hands as is most fitting. Given on the Wednesday after the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1490.

From us, the mayor of Aschaffenburg.

Medicinalia Nr. 183

To the honorable members of the council of Frankfurt, our good friends...have found clean. [parchment damaged; the note on the verdict was made after the original superscript]

Wilhelm, by God's grace Landgrave of Hessen, Count of Katzenellenbogen, of Dietz, of Igregenhorn and of Nidde

Our good favor to our honorable and dear friends. Our cellarer, Jorge, here present, is rumored to be burdened with leprosy, and therefore we have sent him to you, warmly requesting that you would have him most closely examined and tested through your doctors and those commissioned to do so. Please then give us a written report on what his condition is, so that we may act accordingly and be favorable to him in this matter.
This is our wish, sent with testimony of our special grace towards you. Given at Alfeld, on Wednesday after Misericordia Sunday, in the Year of Our Lord 1497.

**Medicinalia 179**

With friendly service

Item: Who has this illness should be specially set apart from people, not going to public kitchens or bathhouses. Item: in the future, they should eat more duck, vinegar, and nuts. Item: those who attend them should not be shy to come into their presence. Their rooms can be kept quite warm, and a window can be opened. Item: the safest is to take a little candle, and with it to kindle four or five wax tapers in front of oneself. Item: they should avoid brandy. Item: they should avoid rotten fruit. Item: who has a chimney in their chamber should furthermore light a fire in it. Item: the apothecaries should be free of all leprosy.
Endnotes

1 All transcriptions and translations have been made using the holdings of the Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt, Sanitätsamt: Akten des Rats (Medicinalia). Individual record numbers are indicated within the text. When possible, I have compared my own transcriptions with those in Karl Sudhoff, “Dokumente zur Ausübung der Lepraschau in Frankfurt am Main im XV. Jahrhundert,” Lepra: Bibliotheca Internationalis, vol. 13, 1913, pp. 141–70.

2 This first surviving record of Frankfurt’s commission appears to have been created at its inception, as a template for the examining physicians to follow. Conrad Sachsenhausen (d. 1450) was active in the second quarter of the fifteenth century.

3 Henne appears to be distressed particularly by the visible symptoms on his face. The letter sent to him by the committee, containing “very many more words” than the contents he summarizes here, is sadly not extant. This letter was presumably a response to the preceding record, Medicinalia Nr. 168, yet another complaint from Henne.

4 In a different hand than the original superscription, presumably an addition by the committee scribe.

5 The letter to the Frankfurt commission is neatly written out with little abbreviation; the one created following the leprosy examination is heavily abbreviated with several interlinear corrections. The letters show a remarkably rapid turnaround time—less than a week!

6 This letter testifies to the considerable social power vested in the hands of the committee. A member of the nobility personally seeks out medical judgment concerning the question of whether or not he is leprous. The surname “Scherer” indicates that Gudrus and Peter were professionally certified barbers, possessing medical knowledge.

7 This letter is somewhat unusual in its reliance on the authority of academic medicine; Avicenna, or Ibn Sina (987–1037), was one of the most influential Islamic scholars of the Middle Ages. The fact that the physicians leave a phrase defining canker in Latin suggests that they are citing a text directly. I have not found this description of leprosy in Latin translations of Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine directly, but frequently as a summing-up of his conclusions in late medieval medical miscellanies, and in the academic medical texts written by Guglielmo da Saliceto (1210–77) and the influential French surgeon Henri de Mondeville (c. 1260–1316.) Frankfurt’s physicians may have wanted to demonstrate their learned expertise to fend off possible criticisms of their severe judgement. The physicians advise that the woman should enter a leper hospital (“be separated from healthy people”), noting that such formal separation is both unusual and less than absolute.

8 The verso is damaged, but conveys that the mayor of Aschaffenburg asks the committee to receive a poor man suspected of having leprosy, and to examine him “for the sake of God,” that is, without charge.

9 One of the counts of Hessen, whose seat lay on the Rhine, approximately 50 miles from Frankfurt. The condition of his cellarer would have been particularly a matter of concern because of the man’s role in supervising the count’s foodstuffs.

10 Vinegar was thought to react with leprous blood, and is now known to function as a mycobacterial disinfectant. Nuts can also kill certain types of bacteria.

11 Sic, for “mehr.”