Medieval Disability Sourcebook

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Examining for Leprosy in the Fifteenth Century
(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 “a 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, belummert) 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.

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Medicinalia Nr. 1

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Unser willige fruntliche dinste zuvor furs- sichtigen Ersamen und wysen lieben herren als ir uns eynen brieff habt lassen horen den uwerner Ersamket Maderus Henne von Ursel uns antreffende geschrieben hat elgandwe wie wir yn der Ußsetzikeit gesundigt sullen han / Deshalb er dorh die uwerner gedrongen sy Das er sich zu Colhe habe lassen bsehen da er davon ledig gesaget zy // als sin brieff mit mee worten inhielt han wir verhort und lassen uwere fursichtikeit wissen das wir den vorgenanten henchen vor unse besehunge nichts gesundigt han Dan nach dem wir von uwerner Gesamkeit dartzugeordent und gesass sin soliche personen zu besehen und hennechin vorgenannt als der under syme angesicht fast ungestalt mit der krangheit belumut und von den luden gemyden wart / Ist er eigener bewegunge zu uns kommen uns oitmuderlich und dinslich gebeden yn uff das nehste zu besehen und zu ersuchen / Also angesehen sin innige bete han wir yn vor uns genommen yne besehen und versucht nach unser gewonheit und als sich geburet und han yn befunden das er die zijt mit der Ußsetzkeite angefängen und etlicher masse damyde belecket was das wir gesaget han nach unßn besten synnen und verstreutennis und als wir darzu gelobt und gesworn han und han yn sonst davor von uns selbs nichts geschuldigt / noch / nach yme gesant dan so vil wir umb einer bede willen getan han und wissen im auch nichts deshalb schuldig oder

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 / Duche aber hennechin vorgenant das wir yme deßhalb nichts plichtig weren / 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 begerr vor uwerer 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 behalde und zustedingen das wallen wir mit willen allerzijt gerne verdienen Geben under myn hennen ulm ingesigel des wir andern uns myd Henen gebruchen uff mitwochen nach dionisii anno domini lviii [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 liehen 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 abeschrieff eyns briefs 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 ußsetzigkeit behumet und von den luden gemeden si i in eyner bewegunge zu yen komen sie otmutiglichen und dynstlichen gebeden mich uff das nehit zubesesehen und zuversuchen angesehen myn modige bede und mich vergenomen 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 schriefft mit etwe viel me worten 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 entourage, 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 Lord 1458.

Heinricus Lose, licensed doctor of medicine

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 council decided not to answer it

Honorable and wise good lords, I offer you my service. As I wrote to you concerning 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 almost 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 letter 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-
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 Master 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

Medicinalia Nr. 170

Den ersamen und wisen burgermeister und rat der stadt frankfurt mynen guden frunden

Mynen fruntlichen dinst zuvor irsamen lieben Herrn also als ich uwer Irsamkeit vormals me geschrieben han als von meyster Henrick den stede arzt und Henchin Augspurger und Meyster Hans Scherer under den portin wegen als dan uwer Irsamkeit wolte verstanden hat was myner forderung an sye ist Irsamen lieben herren uff den uwern Irsamkeit ye versten moge d en ich sehr gerne thun wolde was uch und den uwern lieb were also wil ich eins thun den der obgenannten person zwene uz dem rade Losin und ich zwene was uns dy in fruntlichkeit entschei din nach ergangen sachen sal myn wolle und wie thun und uns dar comin gutlichen dag beschidet und biden uch in dar yn gutliche bescheidlich Antwort zugeben mich dannach wyse zu richten und wolt mer soliche uwer antworte schicken gein punkten in anyus [sic; Anthis] es laßhent hat geben und In-
Medicinalia Nr. 171

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

Medicinalia Nr. 154

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
meistere in uch in Franckefurd haben / die sich des virstene und die selben siechen auch wole versuchen und besehen können / Davon so bieten wir euch diinstlichen freundlichen und ernstlichen nach den selben meistern zu schicken vor uch zu kommen und Yen mit ernste zu sagen und sie zu heißen den bobgenannte Henne Kauffman wole zuuntersuchen wie sich das dann geburt ob er solch Krankheit an ime habe oder nit und wollen uwer Ratffrunde auch daz by schicken solches helfen zuversorgen / Und wie iß dar umb gelegen ist das wollent uns mit Heyme offen versiegelten Briefe by diesen unseren bitten wissen lassen uns dar nach zu richten und wollent uns dieß bede nit virsagen und uch gunstlich und fruntlichen her inne bewysen das wollen wir in Metern machen um uch und die uwern verdienen wo wir morgen geben unter unseres Dorfes und Gerichts Ingiesiegel uff Sonntag vor unser lieben frauwen dag Naivität anno iv xxxiiij

Schultheiß und Scheffener des Gerichts zu Nerstein

Unser fr dinst zuvor lieben besunderen freunde als se uns Geschrieben hat wie daz Henne Kauffman bij euch zu Niester verlumen sy daz er mit der Krankheit der ußsetzikeit befleckt sy und unsere Meinung ist nach dem unser zuschenken und in zusagen und sie zuhissen den og. Hennen Kauffman wole zuversuchen wie sich daz gelobt ob er solch Krankheit an Ime habe od. nit. und wie es darum gelegen sy daz wir uch daz sullen in unserem wissen lassen darnach zurichten des lassen wir euch wissen daz wir umb uwer willen de unsere de solche lude by uns pflegen zu besehen und zuversuchen vir uns virbede han und in die sache befohlen nach den sie dan darum gelobt und gesehen han. Die wieder vur uns kommen sy und han in solcher maße gesagt und erkannt daz sie in also besehen und versucht haben / und erfunden in zudiß ziert der sache halber reyne Krankheiten [ohne] alle Arglist und gevere fra. Tertia. aux Datum Nativitatem bte. Marie vg. close. Anno xiii iii

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

Our friendly service to our very dear friends, as they have written to us how Henne Kaufmann, with you in Nierstein, was reputed to be spotted with the sickness of leprosy, and wished us to send for our [experts] and to tell and command them that they should thoroughly and well [examine] the above Henne Kaufmann, according to their oaths, and to say whether he has that sickness or not, and what his condition is. And this we should let you know, so that you might respond accordingly. So, we hereby inform you that, in accordance with your request, we have given commands regarding this matter to those who are accustomed to perform such examinations, and they have taken their oaths and looked [at him] accordingly. And they in turn came to us and reported in the following manner: that they have examined and inspected him, and find that regarding the matter at this present time, he is half free of sickness, without any deception or malice.
Wir der Rats zu Frankfurt verrichten und tun kund öffentlich mit diesem brief das Gudrus und Peter Scherer unser Bürger vor uns kommen sij und mit In yner der sich genant hat Contze Lantgrave von hoenlagen in Hessen gelegen und erzalten de ob. Gudrus und Peter wie das izunt kurzlichen zu In kommen sy der og. Contze Landgrave in habe erzalt und verbracht dass er virlument sy von der uzsetzigkeit und feltsuchte wegen, das er darwyde beladen und befleckt mit Reyn sy sulle Des han de og. Gudrus und Peter vor uns besagit und gesprochen uff ire Eide de sie uns darüber gelobt und gesprochen han daz sie den og. Contzen besehen versucht und dazu getan haben als sich gehort und habn in zudiß zijd so der sache halb Ryne erfunden uzschedien alle Arglist und gewehrte Und han wir des zubekentniß der og. unser stede Ingesiegel an diesen brief tun drucken Da-tum anno domini M CCCC tricesimo quarto feria Quarta ante diem sancti Michahelis archangelis

Unser fruntliche willige dynst Ewer weyßheit mit allem vermögen zuvor an bereit / fürsichtigen Ersamen und weisen besonderlich lieben Herren und guten fründe / Wir senden urch zeiger dis brifs samt synem eelichen gemahlen / die von uns und der ganzen gemeyn mit der Krankheit der ußsetzikeyt berüchtigt ist derhalber Sie hiebevor auch hie by den Jhenen so von Ewer weysheit solch krank lude zu besuchten verordnet gewest und zu disser zeit widder bescheiden und volenden danach an Ewer weisheit unser freundlich bit ir wollt uch um unserem Willem solch bemühen und an den verordneten verschaffen das sie fleß ankeren und die Wahrheit ganzlich erfahren // Damit so sie flecket wer kein weyther unrade darzu kommen Dann wir mochten Ir wohl vergunden das sie ryn er-fündig würde uch herrin gutwillig ertzeigen

Given on the third day after the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary 1434.

Unser fruntliche willige dynst Ewer weyßheit mit allem vermögen zuvor an bereit / fürsichtigen Ersamen und weisen besonderlich lieben Herren und guten fründe / Wir senden urch zeiger dis brifs samt synem eelichen gemahlen / die von uns und der ganzen gemeyn mit der Krankheit der ußsetzikeyt berüchtigt ist derhalber Sie hiebevor auch hie by den Jhenen so von Ewer weysheit solch krank lude zu besuchten verordnet gewest und zu disser zeit widder bescheiden und volenden danach an Ewer weisheit unser freundlich bit ir wollt uch um unserem Willem solch bemühen und an den verordneten verschaffen das sie fleß ankeren und die Wahrheit ganzlich erfahren // Damit so sie flecket wer kein weyther unrade darzu kommen Dann wir mochten Ir wohl vergunden das sie ryn er-fündig würde uch herrin gutwillig ertzeigen

Given on the third day after the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary 1434.

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
Medicina Nr. 157

Unsern freundlichen dins euer Ersamen lieben wissen und besonderen guden fründe wir bidden uch wissen daz iser bewißer dißes briefes genant Henne Baddebenfer unser midde burger beruchtigtiget ist, und wir selber besorget, daz er beladen sy mit der malerzzen sucht. Des han wir vernommen wij das by euch etliche lude syn soliden die sich verstehen soll uff dy obegenanten maleczkeit und dy lude besehen konne und probemen und des biden wir uch umb unseres lieben gnedigen herren von Menzen und uns disen ebengannten Henne tzu wissen und bringen an dy jenen dy en besehen und proben konnen von der ognt. malerzheit und das ir uns des egelich eyn beschrieben Antwort geben wollen wy eß um den ogn. menschen gelegen sy und uch dy jenen bescheiden dy solichs besehen 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 under unseren Secret Datum anno domini M CCCC xxxix in die blasii episcopi

Bürgermeister und Rad zu Wylburg

Medicina Nr. 158

Wir Otto Probste, Katherina Eprissin, Katherina priorissin, und die samenunge gemeynlichen des Closter zu Blangkenauwe empbben unsirs inges gebede / dem Erbern Rad zu Frankfort unseren besonderen guden freundn . und biden uwer Erberkeit wissen, und klagen uch das wir ein ingeseyte Jungffrauen unsir kuchemeide eine iztunt lange zii undir uns geweste ist und die ist swache / das wir besorgen sines die sy nich 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]

Medicina 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-
/ das uns danne gar eyn swere sache were un-
der uns zu wonen / des sint wir underricht worden / und sine des selben Jungfrauen here geschigket hane / dazu sie moge besehen werde Biden wir uwer Errsamkeit flelichen, daz ir umme godis willen, und umme einer ganzen samenunge willen disen geinwerti-
gen unsern Bruder mit Namen hans genant beholfen wollt sine den wir indruwen und glauben usgeschigket hane / das hier mit der Jungfrauen zu den Meistern kume, das sie be-
sesehen werde, und eure Ehrsamkeit mogen genissen, das uns ware werde zugesayt, und ir auch gnädig sei abir icht gebore dem Meister zu geben was sie arme ist und ir freunde Elende und keine zuleigung von nymans haid. So ist unser Closter seer notdürftig und hane manniche elende arme Jungfrauen under uns ist die keine zuleigung haben, was alleine der gemeyne almose der sy siche gebruchen hir umb bidden wir uwer Ersamkeit und tu-
gent das ir allis euer bestes zu disen sache wollet thune als wir uch geinzlichen gedru-
wen und glauben / das wollen wir mit einer ganzen samenunge geine gode mit unserem gebode flisslichen umb euer Ehrsamkeit ver-
dienen zu tage und zu nacht Gegeben undir unsir probestes Ingesigel / des wir uns Geme-
ylichen gebruchen zu disen sachern.

Medicinalia Nr. 164

Wir Heinricus Loße Stedearzt hen harp Johan Augspurg thun kunt ynen iglichen menschen daß wir von befelenis wegen der ersamen wisen unseren liben herren der rade von Frankfurrd han besehen uff die maledye / die vornonfftige konne Hans Fransberger - widdewe des harnesmethir na gelaßen und han erkannt und bekennen daß disße vor-
genannte widdewe hait an der nasen und an den lippen ird byndon eyn gestockelte maledie dy man nennet die kanker von eynen floß de heuptis na dem also Avicenna spric-
chet in den verdenbuche von der ußsetzzekeit / Et cum cancer qui est lepra unius membri und hait dißer kanker eyn eygenschaff mit der rechten gemeyn maledie / und disße wid-
dewe haet nit dye maledie dy da usprunglich clean. And thus, it might be a difficult thing for her to live among us; we have been in-
formed of this. And so we have sent the said young woman there, that she may be exam-
ined. 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. There-
fore 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 re-
pay this with the earnest prayers of our whole community for you, day and night. Given un-
der our provost's seal, which we collectively use in these [business] matters.
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
Medicinalia Nr. 175

Denn Ersamen fürsichtigem und wissenn Bürgermeistere Scheffene und Raitd zu frankfurt mynenn liebenn Herren

Heinrich Wixhuser von siner besehunge
Myennen undtelligen und willigen
dinst Zuvor Ersamen und wissn lieben her-
en. Hans Offsteyner myne Swager hat als der ihene der mir gewant ist und glymppiger
dann andere den das Amps halber gevore
zuwegenn bringen konne / durch befelhe
myer Herren der Bürgermeistere von uwer
wyßheit wegen fruntlich und swegerlich an-
braicht \ wie wer wyßheit der Raitd gemey-
nlichen überkommen sy mich die gesworne
besehen und examinieren zulassen / dan des
Rades fründe und andere den by mir zusitzen
gevore und zuhandeln schwens und naus-
ien haben / In maißen als ob ich mir der
krangheit der maledy beladen und verlumont
stülle syn ich / Uff solichs myns Swagers an-
brengen Ich yne und Arnolt Swarzinberger
mynen lyden wieder zu uwer wyßheit gefer-
tiger / Sie an myn herren des Rades fründe
werben damit gutlichen virten lassen hain
ire werbunge furter an uwer wyßheit den
Raitd zubringern das auch zugutem von mir
zuversteern und offtzunemen / das mich nit
wenig befremde / derwyle und ich itzt viel
jare und tziit by uch gesessen der und
derglichen verlumung von uwer wyßheit / inge-
meynende oder Insündereht nye affter uzunt / 
sich leyder von gottes des herren zuschick-
unge / mit mancherley anderer zufelligen
libes krangheit und bekommernisse myne
selbst und auch myner lieben husfrauen
Georgen myns swagers Ires Bruders halber
angedocht werden und beladen byn
vernomen hin / also stumpff und stlingen ers-
sucht worden sülte syn / Byn des getruwens
das ich und myner Hausfrauen altern sonnder-
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 1458.
The major, sheriff, and council of Giessen.

Medicinalia Nr. 175

To the honorable, perceptive, and wise
Mayor, officials, and council of Frankfurt,
my dear lords.

Heinrich Wixhuser concerning his exami-
nation

My humble and willing service to the
honorable and wise men, my good lords.
Hans Offsteyner, my brother-in-law, has—as
someone who is related to me—brought my
case before you, “in a friendly and brotherly
manner,” more earnestly than for the sake of
office, through command of the mayor on
your behalf. Now, the wise and unanimous
decision of the council was to have me seen
and examined by the sworn [doctors,] since
my friends on the council, and others who
often sit with me and do business with me
have experienced nausea and disgust as if I
were burdened with the sickness of leprosy,
or rumored to be so. And with this presen-
tation of my brother-in-law, I and Arnold
Swarzinberger, against him, have prepared
another account of my suffering for your
honors, and entreat that you bring it to my
lords and friends of the council, and weigh
it worthily. I pray also that your wisdom will
take this into account in my favor, and accept
it. I am not a little astonished—as I have sat
among you for such a long time, for so many
years—that this and similar rumors have
been given credence by your honors, whether
some of you or all of you, now or at any time.
So, with whatever sickness or sicknesses I
may be, alas, afflicted by the will of God, and
for the sake of which I and my dear wife have
been attacked and accused by my brother-in-
law (her brother) Georg, let me be tested for
it, and examined concerning the numbness
[of skin] and the sound [of my voice.] You
know the trust that I and my wife (setting
side [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 vursichtigen und wyßenn Burgemeistere Scheffen und Rathe zu Franckfurt myne lleben herren

Nicolaus Wynneck Glockener ab Gemanet

Ersamen vursichtigen und wisenn besunden 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 halber wie ich armer hab begert mich abermals lassen besehen und myr daz verzogen ist worden beiß post Martini So bitten uwer wißheit ich lutterlich umb gottes willen so oitmudigs ich mag uwer wißheit wulle den selben uweren doctoribus den Erctzen beshen iren hohen uns in dem besehen anzukeren und mich abermals besehen und weß sie an mir befynnden uwer wißheit und mich furter wissen lassen want wo ich unbeflecket were und gemeynschaft der menschen entsatzt syn solle mag wenig versteen waß ich daran haben mag Erfindet sich aber daz ich mit der feltsiehen 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 zyn hymeleich dar durch zuwerben und uwer wißheit wulle sich gegen mir armen gostlich bewisenn und die wercke der barmhertzekeyt erzeygen gepurt mir inne myn gebeth und byn schudlig solichs umb uch Zu aller jizt gegen got zuu dienen und weßher inne uwer wille syn wirdet wulet mich durch des hoffes furmundere uwer Kat frund wissen lassen mich darnach mogen Richter Datum uff Mitwochen vor Nicolae Anno Mis lxxprimo

Nicolaus wynneck ettwan gluckener zu Pharre uwer williger

Medicinalia Nr. 177

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]

Medicinalia Nr. 178

To the honorable and wise [...] of the city of Frankfurt, our good [...] Mayor of Aschaffenburgh requests that they may inspect a poor [man without any money] who is suspected of having leprosy.
…germeister zu Aschaffenburg bitten eynen armen…mogen mit der ußsetzikeit ver-
dacht umb gottes…zu besichtigen laßen

Unser Fruntlich dinst zuvor Besondern gutenn frunden unser mitburger Peter
Spengeler zeyger diesis briefifs ist by uns be-
lumet wie er mit dem ufsatz beladen sy Bit-
ten 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
hait sich erlich und fromlich gehalten und
ist gantz arme wollet wir in den sachen be-
hilfflich und geraten sin uch auch gutwillig
bewysen als wir zu uch vertrrewuens haben
das sin wir ti Zu sampt der billichkeit in der
glichen und merern zuverdienen willig Da-
tum mitwochen nach visitationis beate marie
virginis Anno miv lxxxxmo

Vonn uns den Burger meistern zu Aschaf-
fenburg

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 un-
ser 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 besichti-
gen lassen und was sich an ime erfindet uns
schriftlich zuerkennen geben dannach wie
uns rechten 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 lep-
rosy, 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 super-
script]

Wilhelm, by God’s grace Landgrave of
Hessen, Count of Katzenellenbogen, of Di-
etz, 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 accord-
ingly 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 Rates (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 Leprachau 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.”