

contaminated with sand and other inorganic abrasive particles, either introduced accidentally during the production of flour, or used as a grinding agent. In some populations, particularly during the New Kingdom (1567–1085 BC), relentless attrition / abrasion wore away even the secondary dentine and allowed an ingress of bacteria into the pulp chamber. The loss of supporting bone caused by periodontal disease, and periapical destruction resulting from pulp death due to attrition, made teeth so mobile that, in some specimens, they could have been removed with the fingers. In fact, they were not removed – the cause of dental pain was considered to be a ‘tooth worm’ rather than the tooth itself.

This book is an important contribution to the history of dental health of the Ancient Egyptians over 4,000 years, and shows that despite an apparently healthy diet, a significant proportion of the population would have been debilitated by dental disease.

Carole Reeves,

The Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of
Medicine at UCL

Joshua R. Eyer (ed.), *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. xii + 235, £55.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-7546-6822-0.

This study of disability, concerning the mentalities surrounding disability from social, economic, religious and literary, but few medical aspects of mediaeval culture, will be welcomed for the scope and multidisciplinary breadth of its collection, although the bias does tend to weigh in favour of literary criticism. The premise of the collection, as the editor states in his cogent and reflective introduction, is ‘that Medieval Studies and Disability Studies have much to say to each other.’ Hence, all the contributions, in one way or another, commence with a critique, analysis or exposition of these two disciplines in relation to the specific topic of each essay.

In the first part, ‘Reconsiderations’, the authors engage with mediaeval sources, where a significant proportion of the essays concern blindness. The essay on rediscovering the working lives of blind inmates of a Parisian hospital demonstrates that there is a person with an individual identity, shaped amongst other by social and professional status, behind the simple label of ‘blind’. There thus emerges the intriguing observation that persons working in textile production would potentially be prone to industrial accidents causing loss of vision. Blindness is also the theme of essays on St Francis, whose ‘weakening of the eyes’ appears to have been ‘discreetly marginalized’ by subsequent reception of his hagiography, and on blind poet-composers in the fourteenth century, who were believed to possess an enhanced sense of hearing in compensation for their loss of sight, leading not so much to disability but different ability, as one author argues. A similar tension exists in the miracles of Louis IX where disability, on the one hand, figures as testimony for Louis’ saintliness, while on the other hand, valorises the suffering body.

Deafness is explored through a literary lens in the character of the Wife of Bath in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, and the same writer’s *Merchant’s Tale* is enlisted for a portrayal of the pregnant body, reflecting stereotypes of considerable antiquity that treat the female body *per se* as disabled, in that female is deemed an inversion of the male norm. Social aspects of disability are addressed by both literary and historical approaches, namely through the connection between poverty and disability in their portrayal in Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, and through the ‘legal controversies’ of madness in French jurisprudence. Two essays look at specific figures marked by disabilities, one treating royal impairments in Anglo-Saxon literature, while another investigates the disabled Fisher King of Arthurian legend. ‘Markers of difference’, that is, names suggesting disability in Icelandic sagas, are employed to explore the opposition between individual experience and social context.

In the second part, 'Reverberations', contributors explore the legacy of mediaeval texts and how they shaped post-mediaeval representations of disability. We encounter Chaucer again in a re-working by the Scottish poet Robert Henryson; Shakespeare's Richard III as a construct of early modern narrative; and the afterlife of mediaeval ideas concerning the relationship between the aged female body and disability.

Despite the caveat that the lack of medical topics may disappoint readers of this journal, this volume offers a fresh perspective on the rapidly emerging topic of disability in the Middle Ages. The different approaches employed by literary and historical scholars emerge as one of the stronger points of this collection, in that the tendency of literary criticism to treat disability as a narrative prosthesis is counterbalanced by rigorous historical analysis of sources that uncover the physical bodies of mediaeval persons, making for an interesting, challenging and thought-provoking amalgam of discourse analysis and philological reconstruction. One is, however, left wondering how far the many variant definitions of 'disabled' proposed by the individual contributors reflect more of the specific authors' concepts of disability than attempt an emic understanding of mediaeval notions concerning the consequences of physical or mental difference.

Irina Metzler,
University of Swansea

Thomas F. Baskett (ed. with commentary), *Caesarean Birth: The Work of François Rousset in Renaissance France: A New Treatise on Hysterotomokotie or Caesarian Childbirth*, Ronald M. Cyr (trans.), (London: Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Press, 2010), pp. xiii + 130, £25.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-1-906985-34-9.

When the French surgeon François Rousset published his treatise on Caesarean birth on living women in 1581, he was not hailed as the

great innovator he hoped to be but was criticised by some of his colleagues, such as Ambroise Paré, for, among other things, not taking seriously enough the danger of a fatal haemorrhage. The Parisian master surgeon Jacques Marchant vilified Rousset as the creator of a plague that was sweeping Europe: Caesarean birth that, Marchant claimed, should have been named after Tarquinius, and not one of the Caesars, because Tarquinius delighted in the blood and death of women. What was Rousset's crime? Describing and advocating the performance of the surgical extraction of a living foetus from a living woman. Ronald M. Cyr and Thomas F. Baskett, both of them members of departments of obstetrics and gynaecology, do a real service to medical historians and practitioners by translating, annotating, and contextualising this important and controversial treatise. The illustrations depict title pages of some of the early editions as well as images of surgeons performing the operation. Before Rousset, Caesarean birth had been treated in surgical texts and religious contexts, such as Church Councils, with the assumption that it was strictly a *post-mortem* procedure, to be attempted in order to save the foetus if the mother died during the birth. Rousset wanted to change both the practice and the theoretical thinking about the operation with his treatise. He published it in French (though there was also a German version, published by Bernard Jobin in 1583, and a Latin translation, published in 1586 by Caspar Bauhin) so that practitioners could profit from his advice. Cyr and Baskett offer a very readable translation of the treatise, complemented by a concise introduction and a few historical appendices on Rousset's patrons and the historical situation in sixteenth-century France. There are also ample notes of both an historical and medical nature that allow the reader to juxtapose Rousset's ideas, not only to those of his contemporaries but also to modern medical practice. Of the 228 pages of Rousset's original treatise, only eighteen are devoted to case histories of successful Caesareans, and sixteen to a 'clinical guide'. The bulk of the