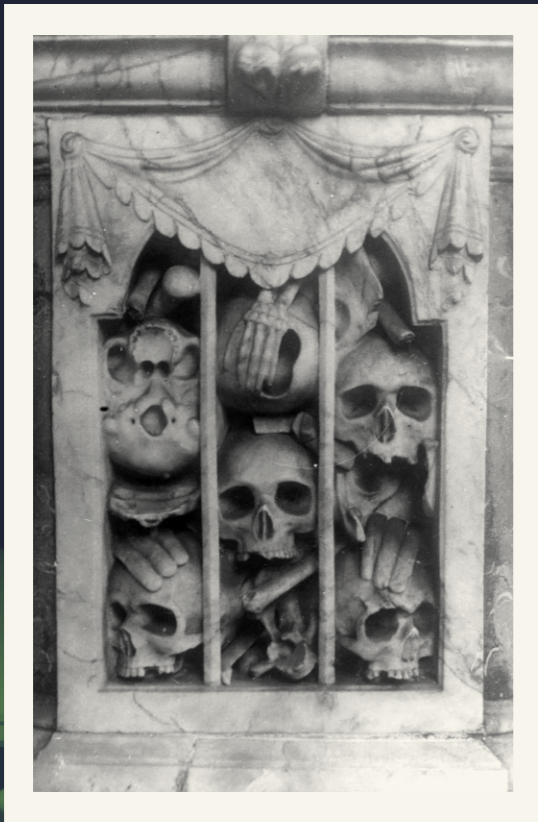




# Plants and Prayers

Health and healing before 1700



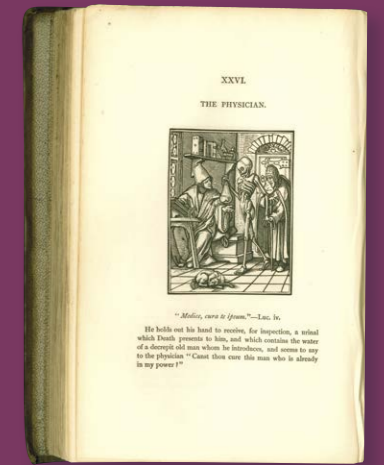
Photograph of the base panel of the monument erected by Sir Gervase Clifton in memory of his first three wives in St Mary's Chapel, Clifton, Nottinghamshire (c.1620). Collection of views of Clifton, MS 196/5

# Soul Health: Getting to the heart of things

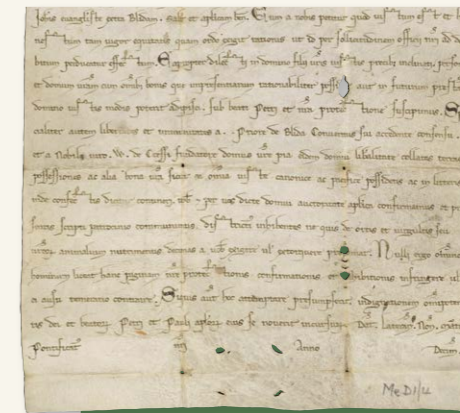
**I**n medieval times it was not enough to be healthy in body, it was far more important to look after the health of the soul. This could also become afflicted, for example, by cardinal sins, such as excessive eating (gluttony). The soul would survive the mortal body and feel pain in the afterlife.

In the same way as medical remedies cure physical ailments, soul health had its own set of healing tools. First among these are prayers and penance for misdeeds, but also listening to 'good' stories about good people, such as saints. These stories could also address ailments which were dangerous for mental wellbeing, for example grief and excessive feelings like anger. Prayers could be offered by the patient, but also by religious figures and through the intercession of saints. Physicians attending to the physical body required a fee, and religious actions also came with a price tag: donations to shrines could pay for extra prayers by monks and nuns, or saints themselves.

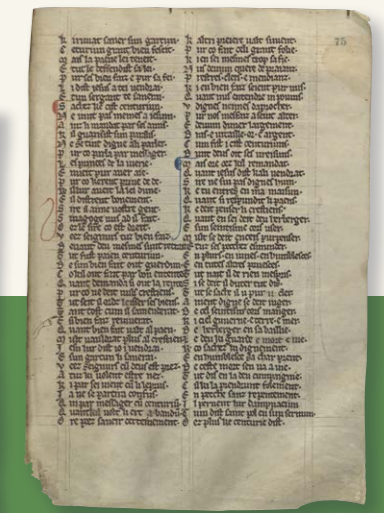
Aside from the palliative effects of charms, prayers, or the presence of a religious authority at a patient's bedside, prayers were also used as timekeeping devices. In a period without watches, medical practitioners could use the common knowledge of prayers, such as the paternoster or Psalms, to measure the time it takes to make or apply a remedy. The feelings of wellbeing and comfort derived from the visitation of a religious authority or application of a prayer (even if just for timing purposes) cannot be discounted from the believing patient's experience.



The Physician from Hans Holbein's *Dance of Death* (1858), originally engraved in the 1520s. Doctors often diagnosed patients from the colour, smell, or taste of their urine. Here, Death hands the Physician the urine sample of the elderly man. Central Store 2 N7720.H6



Letter of Grace of Pope Honorius III, addressed to the Rector and Brothers of the Hospital of St. John the Evangelist, near Blyth; 7 March 1226. Founded in the reign of King John (d.1216), the hospital housed – and effectively segregated from society – people with leprosy. Papers of the Mellish Family of Hodsock, Nottinghamshire, Me D 1 / 4



A page from 'Mirur', written in Anglo-Norman French by Robert of Gretham (in Rutland) in about 1250. The book is a 'spiritual mirror' and encourages morality and religious observance. The manicule, or pointing hand, is one of two indicating passages stressing how good deeds can help bring sinners to repentance and so back into grace, using the Biblical stories of a leper who seeks a priest, and the paralysed servant of a centurion as examples. Wollaton Library Collection, WLC LM 4