



“A Leetle ded frog in a thin cloth set upon the body to stave the our’flowing of termes in wom-ann.”

During my first full day in the archive I explored 'Liber Magister Cooke,' a manuscript of various remedies organized by ingredient. Accompanying this text was another handwritten manuscript: a full transcription by by Mary Phillips. Phillips’s four notebooks, dating from 1987, were meticulously detailed and expertly done.

As a researcher with some

paleography training, I know how painstaking transcription can be. Deciphering early modern handwriting, particularly secretary hand, is an intimate process. Each author has their own short hand, spellings, and ways of forming letters. It is fair to say then that Phillips’s work on this manuscript that broached 100 pages was no small scholarly feat. Despite my attempts, I cannot find if Phillips was a visiting researcher, volunteer, or curator, however, her work deserves digitization at the very least and publication if possible. Her semi-diplomatic transcription was accompanied by footnotes and contemporary names for the elements used in 'Liber Magister Cooke,' speaking to her expertise with early modern medicinal texts.

I was drawn to the verso leaf pictured here because of how odd it was compared to the previous layout of this manuscript. As you can tell from the recto leaf, every inch (except the gutter margin) is covered with text. The verso, however, is more luxuriously spaced as if the author (who remains anonymous) intended to add another entry at the bottom. A second feature of this unusual page is the content of the entry. Up until this leaf of 'Liber Magister Cooke,' each entry was driven by a particular medicinal ingredient. For example, the author listed Oil of Cinnamon and then its variety of uses including curing melancholy, quieting foot pain, and easing post-pregnancy symptoms: “you must give but one drop of this oil to woman with child when they are not bound in their womb.” This page, however, is not associated with any particular chemical and instead seems to be more interested in non-penetrative, ritualistic healing. Of course, when we think of dead frogs being put to use, we might recall the witches of *Macbeth* and their demonic cauldron:

Fillet of a fenny snake,
 In the cauldron boil and bake;
 Eye of newt and toe of frog,

Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and owlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble. (4.1 12-9)

Frogs and toads occupied a liminal space between poison, witchcraft, and medicine throughout the early modern period. As Lucinda Cole points out in her book, “Rats and mice, then, shared with other imperfect creatures— frogs, toads, worms, and scorpions among them— a suspicious origin in putrefying matter and ambiguous modes of reproduction.”¹ Their connection to reproduction perhaps then clarifies why “A Leettle ded froog” laid on top of a woman could have the potential to cure her, especially when the source of most female disease in the early modern period was believed to be the womb.² The variation of methodology within this text offers a glimpse into early seventeenth century medicine as it melded chemical remedies with supernatural knowledge.

¹ Cole, Lucinda. “Rats, Witches, Miasma, and Early Modern Theories of Contagion.” *Imperfect Creatures: Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2016. pp 29.

² Peterson, Kaara L. *Popular Medicine, Hysterical Disease, and Social Controversy in Shakespeare's England*. Ashgate, 2010.