10-15-2015

And We're Off!

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Keywords
transcription

View on Penn Manuscript Collective Blog
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And we’re off!

On Wednesday, September 16th the Penn Manuscript Collective met for the first meeting of this school year. Our goal for this meeting, as for all our work, was to make working with special collections fun for new and old students. The meeting began with an introduction to the club, gave some tips for reading manuscripts, and then dived into some transcription.

What is a manuscript?

Manuscript + script
Latin for “hand” Latin for “written”

Tips for Medieval Manuscripts

• Minims

animal
We studied a manuscript of the genealogies of the Earls of Leicester and Chester to practice reading medieval manuscripts, enjoyed the illustrations in a late 18th century book of astrology, but the centerpiece of our work together was a transcription of a recipe book from 18th century England. Included in this recipe book was the following cure for the "Bite of a Mad Dog":

An infallible Cure for the Bite of Mad Dog

Brought from Tonquin by Sir Geo Cobb Bart.

Take twenty four grains of

Native Cinnabar Twenty four grains of

Fictitious cinnabar, sixteen grains of

Musk Grind all these together into an

Exceeding fine Power & put into a small

Tea Cupp of Arrack, Rum or Brandy let it

Be well mixed & give it to the Person as
Be well mixed & give it to the Person as

Soon as Possible after the Bite a second

Doce of [the] same must be Repeated thirty

Days after and a third may be taken

In thirty Days more ; but if the symptoms

Of madness appear on the Persons they

Must take one of the Doses Immediately

And a second in an hour after & if wanted

A third must be given a few hours after wards

The above receipt is Calculated for full

Grown Persons, but must be given them Children

In Small Quantities in proportion to their

Age this medicine has been given to

Hundreds of people & Dr George Cobb himself

Cured many who had the symtoms of madness

Upon them

This recipe for the cure of madness, or the "Tonquin Cure," as is it called by Vincent DiMarco in his book The Bearer of Crazed and Venomous Fangs: Popular Myths and Learned Delusions regarding the Bite of the Mad Dog, circulated widely in Europe in the mid and late 18th century. DiMarco cites a 1738 article in the Gentleman’s Magazine as the first printed occurrence of this recipe. The above manuscript we studied dates from the late 18th-century, so it is possible that the recipe was copied out of a magazine or journal. Cobb's remedy came from Tonquin, a region of Southeast Asia that is today in the north of Vietnam.
Dr. Cobb’s death in 1762 occasioned several mentions in London magazines, including the *London magazine or Gentleman’s monthly intelligencer* and the *British Magazine, Or, Monthly Repository for Gentlemen & Ladies*. What seemed an absurd and entertaining recipe to our group was, in the late 18th century, a well-traveled and well-known “cure.”

Our next meeting will be Wednesday, October 21st at 4pm. Nicole, fresh of a summer at the Folger Shakespeare Library, will conduct a tutorial on secretary hand. Until next time!